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The newly expanded bike room of the Metro Customer Center where an average of 10-12 lost bikes are turned in daily.



Photos by Jori Stern

## Have You Seen My Jawbone? Tales of Metro's Lost and Found

By JORI STERN

(Dec. 20, 2006) Accidents happen. I have left my keys multiple places and I've made losing my cell phone an art form. But, how could Metro system riders leave possessions on buses and trains without reclaiming them? By the way – anyone missing a jawbone?

Lorna Riley, a customer service agent at Metro's Customer Center at Wilshire Boulevard and La Brea Avenue, recently guided me through boxes and shelves of unclaimed items being held for 45 days.

Eyeglasses, nail clippers, computers, stuffed animals and umbrellas are routinely left on the Metro System – even an oxygen tank. I didn't, however, expect riders to leave their dentures behind.

Dentures? Yes, false teeth frequently



make their way to the lost and found. So does the occasional power tool and musical instrument.

Anybody lose their power drill? Check with Customer Service Agent Lorna Riley.

Are bicycles left on the Metro system? You have no idea.

The Customer Center's bike room recently reached its capacity of approximately 90 bicycles, even though the bike room expanded only two months ago. This is not surprising, given the fact that the Customer Center receives get about 10-12 bikes each day.

### **'Truly frightening things'**

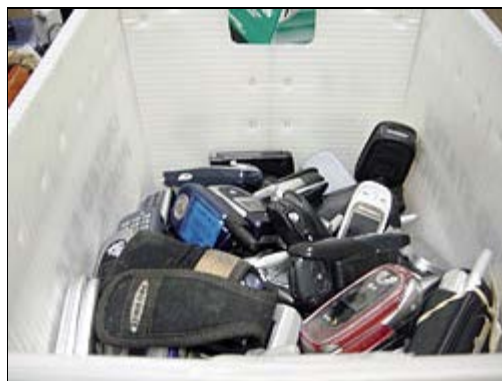
So, what is the strangest item Riley has come across? Cremated remains. "The truly frightening things," she says, "are the most personal."

Those truly frightening things include files on high security computer chips from the Los Angeles County District Attorney's office, as well as children's documents such as birth certificates and Social Security cards.

In this world of instant communication, cell phones have become essential. They are a part of one's livelihood. Yet in the last 45 days, at least 60 cell phones have been left at the Customer Center, waiting patiently for their owners. Another 50 to 60 cell phones, having waited more than 45 days, will be shipped to the United States troops overseas.

What happens if someone loses an item? If the item carries its owner's contact information, the Customer Center notifies the owner by mail. The owner has 45 days from the date the item is found to claim it.

Unclaimed personal items, such as clothing and books, are donated to the Midnight Mission in downtown Los Angeles. Electronic items are picked up by an El Monte company, then sold on a nationwide auction.



Abandoned umbrellas wait for another rainy day. At left, some of the 50 to 60 cell phones waiting at the Customer Center for their rightful owners to return.

### **Bigfoot perhaps?**

Consider the scientist who boarded the bus only to realize he left a body part behind: his jawbone. Okay, maybe not his jawbone, but the jawbone he was transporting. Was it human? Animal? Perhaps Bigfoot?

I guess we'll never know.

For the customer service agent who collects lost or stolen items, the real "fun" is to go digging in a purse that has been left on the train or bus for days at a time.

One day Lorna Riley received a purse that had been left on the bus or train for three days. It was labeled "special handling."

Inside the purse was food. What kind of food? No one knows for sure. She does remember the purse was home to a collection of unappetizing creatures.

### **An item of great importance**

A few months ago, a gentleman walked into the Customer Center looking for an item that was of great importance to him.

He said he was missing his artificial leg. Before he had fallen asleep on the bus, he had removed the prosthesis so he could sleep more comfortably. When he awoke he discovered his leg missing.

The Customer Center called all the Metro divisions, but even with 3,300 items in lost and found, the leg could not be located and to this day remains missing.

if the person who took this gentleman's leg is out there, have a heart, call the Customer Center. It's the holidays, after all.

If you feel you forgot something on the Metro system, inquire with Customer Service immediately. Chances are your possession is boxed away somewhere in lost and found.

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