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West Valley Division 8 Mechanic Marilyn Archie inspects the undercarriage of a Neoplan 4500 as part of a 6,000-mile inspection.



Metro's Marilyn Archie Repairs Buses and Promotes Metro in the Community

- Convincing people she's a mechanic is hard; appearing at schools is a pleasure

By NED RACINE

(Feb. 22, 2007) As a Division Ambassador Council (DAC) member since 1995, Metro's Marilyn Archie volunteers to communicate transit information and safety messages to the public. She especially enjoys attending school career days and describing her job, even when her finger nails get in the way.

Archie, 35, a Mechanic C for West Valley Division 8 meets considerable disbelief when people learn she's a mechanic. The former model and singer has no trouble drawing people to her. The skepticism appears—particularly among males—when they discover her occupation.

"They find out I'm a mechanic. And they say, 'You're what?' "

According to Archie, disbelieving males insist on seeing her hands and nails. "And I have French [manicured] nails now, so they say, 'No, you're not. You don't do that work. Your nails are too perfect.' "

Archie remembers one unconvinced man questioning her about the kind of

bus engines she works on. Even after her reply, the man asked her other bus questions. Archie named transmissions and brake systems before she could convince her skeptical questioner.

On a recent Thursday morning, because the inspection team was two mechanics short, Archie was performing a 6,000-mile inspection on bus 4574, a Neoplan 4500. She does not enjoy inspections as much as repair, but she takes the task seriously. "You definitely have to take your time because lives are in your hands when you send that bus out."

Quite a change

Checking the condition of CNG tanks is quite a change from Archie's first 15 years at Metro when she was a service attendant from 1990 until 2005.

*Photos by Ned Racine



Archie notes the status of items on her inspection list.

Eager to work at something else, Archie completed an auto mechanics class at Los Angeles Trade Tech in 1998. After pausing to have her son Tony, Archie resumed classes at Santa Monica City College in 2002, this time studying bus mechanics and finding she enjoyed it better than auto mechanics.

Archie, whose mother retired from Metro in 2000, after 23 years' service, believes her exposure to buses as a service attendant was

one reason she preferred bus mechanics over automobile mechanics. She also liked the larger bus parts.

"I wanted to do something that was a challenge for me," Archie said. "When I did the Santa Monica College class it was good to have the theory, but I still didn't have the hands on [knowledge]. So when this class for Metro became available, it was a great opportunity for me to jump on it and not only learn the theory but get all the practical work. I had no idea what to do with any of the tools."

Metro's mechanic's class, co-sponsored by Metro and the ATU, convinced Archie she could do the job, and it made her transition easier in another way. "A lot of the guys never worked on any car, any truck, anything. So you don't feel so left out when you realize half the class doesn't know what you don't know."

Hands-on training

Archie ended her six months of hands-on training in April 2006 and began her mechanic's career servicing the NABI articulated buses. Now she is learning to service the 4500s, such as the coach she is working on this day. She finds them a little easier to work on because the mechanical areas contain a little more space.

Especially helpful in her becoming a mechanic was Brian Markey, equipment maintenance instructor, and her instructor at Santa Monica City College. Also supportive were Michael Harnish, assistant maintenance manager, and Bruce Ramsey, equipment maintenance supervisor, both of West Hollywood Division 7.

Now troubleshooting a problem, fixing it, and sending the bus rolling on the street constitutes a good day for Archie.

"Even when I'm done—tidying everything up—I want to make it look as professional as possible, like I put the system in," Archie explained. "I want to make all the lines perfect, because that represents me."

Although Archie's long-term goals are to become a maintenance supervisor or a chairman on her ATU union board, she enjoys the variety of her job now. "It seems that every time you get a bus—even though it's the same part I may have done last week—it may be a different problem. So it feels different."



Archie checks the wiring on coach 4574's engine.

Represents Metro mechanics

Recently Archie's DAC member duties have taken her to events throughout Los Angeles County, particularly career days at junior high schools and elementary schools. She finds value in simply representing a Metro mechanic: "Letting little girls and boys know that the job exists, because a lot of kids just think: 'bus driver.' "

Archie thanks Patrick Orr, her maintenance manager, for allowing her to perform DAC duties during the school day.

And she encourages Metro employees to become DAC volunteers, in part to show the public how many professions Metro includes, although she cautions "You have to be ready to give your time and come with an open mind. You have to want to be a helping person."

Anyone interested in becoming a DAC member may call Archie at 818-701-3830.

Archie definitely believes more female Metro employees should consider being mechanics. "I think it would boost a lot of women's self-esteem, just to know that they can do what a man can do," she said. "They may not have the same strength of a man, but they might be able to think better than the next guy doing the same job."