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West Valley Division 15 Metro Bus Operatr Mimi Pereira welcomes another day on the road. Photo by Jori Stern.



In 23 Years on the Road, Metro Bus Operator Mimi Pereira Has Seen It All

- Driving a Metro bus has it's ups and downs, but her passengers are like family

By JORI STERN

(May 22, 2007) In the life of a Metro bus operator, many things come into play. A recent ride-along with West Valley Division 15 Operator Miriam "Mimi" Pereira illustrated what it's really like to drive a Metro bus, deal with passengers, schedules, and the stress that can accompany such a demanding job.

Pereira begins her route from Sherman Oaks at 5:39 a.m. She doesn't mind the early shift due to her 14-year-old son's school schedule. "I like getting here early and getting home early; he can't get into any mischief when he gets home from school if I'm there."

She continues through rush hour until about 9:30 a.m., which she calls her "butt kicker schedule" – this being the heaviest time for getting through traffic and for passengers taking the bus.

Pereira has been driving for 23 years, and she admits there have been some rough times. Her 24-year-old son, she believes, took the brunt of her schedule at the beginning. Due to shifts that started early in the morning and ended late at night "there were times when he saw more of my husband than he did of me."

After going to a full time-schedule, she has worked her way up from 339th in seniority at the division to 49th, which means that instead of taking the left-over assignments, she now has more choices and is able to be more flexible with her schedule.

A passenger first

Pereira first became acquainted with Metro as a passenger when she moved to California from New York in 1973. She remembers taking the Metro bus through junior high and high school.

Encouraged by an operator to take the agency's employment test, she passed. "I just found my niche."

"I think you have to have a special quality to be able to work with the public," Pereira said. "Some passengers tend to take things out on the drivers if they had a problem with the previous bus they've been on or the previous bus has left them at the station. If I can help them with their problem I'll try, but please don't take it out on the operators."

What does she define as a memorable passenger?

One particular young lady comes to mind: a special education student who used to ride the bus to and from school with her mom. The girl would always thank Pereira, and tell her to have a nice day. Sometimes she would even bring her flowers.



Metro Bus operator Mimi Pereira of Division 15 with special needs passenger Erika Marquet when the Burbank Chamber of Commerce recognized Operator Pereira for outstanding service to the community. Photo courtesy of Burbank Chamber of Commerce.

'Thank-you and a smile'

"You know, a thank-you and a smile, that's what does it for me, that's what makes me happy," Pereira said.

At the other end of the spectrum, Pereira has had some passengers who made a different impression on her – people who became ill or used the bus as a bathroom, or who even engaged in old-fashioned honeymoon play.

"Not the whole act," she contends. "But just enough, where you're like, 'Guys, get a room!'"

Her "favorite" passengers are the surfers who go to the beach and change from their wetsuits into their birthday suits and then into street clothes while the bus is still in motion.

One woman who made an unfortunately memorable impression actually threw a soda in Pereira's face. As the woman got on the bus, Pereira realized she had some issues, especially after she bent down and whispered an expletive in Pereira's ear.

The woman kept berating Pereira and asked to be left off. Finally, Pereira had had enough and decided to call a supervisor, especially because she believed other passengers on board might be in jeopardy from the

woman's behavior.

Threw a soda

The woman threw a soda in Pereira's face. There was a scuffle. Some passengers called police. When the officers arrived, the passenger was given a citation for causing a public disturbance and released.

As Pereira says, "Everyday is a new adventure. When you think you have one kind of person, someone totally different comes along."

She has also had her share of emergency situations, such as when a man began choking on a doughnut on her bus a couple of weeks ago. Because eating is not allowed on Metro buses, he had foolishly shoved the doughnut in his mouth as he entered the bus.

About two minutes into the ride, the passenger began to signal to Pereira that he was choking. She pulled the bus over and whacked the man twice between the shoulder blades.

Last chance

When that failed, she realized that if the third time didn't work, she was going to have to administer the Heimlich maneuver.

Metro does not require operators to be trained in CPR or First Aid, but Pereira realized that, if it came down to it, "I would do what I had to do." Luckily, the third whack dislodged the doughnut from the man's throat.

Despite these ups and downs, passengers are like family to Pereira.

"I've had people invite me to funerals" she said. "One lady invited me and my family to go swimming with them. We do get close with people."

Many operators may sometimes feel they're not valued, Pereira says, but, "There is a person behind the wheel, and people should try to realize that. Or maybe just a hello in the morning would be just fine."