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Div. 2's Robert Rodriguez Honored for Decade of Volunteering

- Awards presented by government and union groups
- Former UP railroad executive is now a Metro bus operator

By JIMMY STROUP

(Sept. 9, 2007) Not one to brag, Crossroads Depot Division 2 Operator Robert Rodriguez didn't tell anyone from work about an award ceremony that honored him for the volunteer work he does.

City, county, state and union organizations presented Rodriguez with certificates of appreciation for his decade-long "labor of love" with volunteerism that has had him delivering food and gifts to the needy and packaging Easter baskets for sick and abused children.

"People say, 'I don't have the time.' But you do have the time, if you're driven to it," Rodriguez, 52, says. "I think you have to be driven to it to really enjoy it and love it, like I do."

Rodriguez started loving it about nine years ago, he says, when Metro teamed with the AFL-CIO and United Way for an Easter Drive through the Division Advisory Council (DAC).

"Metro did a drive with them and supplied a bus," he says. "We delivered – and I was shocked that we could fit this many on a bus – almost 4,000 Easter baskets to kids across the county. It was a sight."

Since then, Rodriguez has become hooked on volunteerism, lending his driving and managerial skills to whatever tasks need a driver or organizational ability.

Rodriguez's journey

Rodriguez returned to his native Southern California after a 20-year career with Union Pacific Railroad. He began as a switchman/brakeman, moving into management after only five years, and ended up at company headquarters in Omaha, Neb.

After becoming an assistant vice president at Union Pacific, Rodriguez felt



Crossroads Depot Division 2 Operator Robert Rodriguez holds just one of seven awards he received from various city, county, state and union organizations championing his volunteer work. The June 2 ceremony where he was honored was held in the clubhouse at Dodger Stadium.

like his work was taking away from his time with his daughter. Once he became eligible for retirement, Rodriguez submitted his papers and moved back home to be near his family.

He decided to take a position with Metro while he figured out what he wanted to do after Union Pacific.

"I found I loved driving the bus. I wasn't planning to stay driving; I'd even thought of going into management here," Rodriguez says. "But I like being out there, with the people."

Rodriguez finds operating a bus is easy on his disposition and gives him the opportunity to devote himself to volunteering in his off time, to union activities (he's the UTU shop steward and the state legislative representative for Local 1563) and to coaching high school football at his alma mater, Woodrow Wilson High.

At Wilson, as a student, Rodriguez played both football and baseball. He rode his baseball skills to a scholarship with the University of Texas at Austin, starting as a catcher and utility infielder in his last two years. After graduation he was drafted into the Milwaukee Brewers organization and played AA ball in Charleston, S.C.

"You have to come to terms that there are people who are way better than you, even when you're best at high school or even college level," Rodriguez says. "So I came to realize that and decided to move on."

He remains close to the game and roots for the Brewers, despite his family's traditional allegiance to the Dodgers.

Giving back to others

Rodriguez's rich experiences give him a feeling that he ought to "give back." His efforts do take a lot of his personal time, but he says his family takes pride in the work that he does to help others.

"My family understands and knows that I love to do these things: the volunteer work and the union work," he says.

Though he was in a union at Union Pacific, he didn't really get involved with union activity until he got to Metro. His previous management experience gives him a unique perspective on Metro's management in relation to union concerns.

"It makes me understand the thinking of Metro's management. I was doing what the managers here are doing when I was with Union Pacific," Rodriguez says. "It's easier for me, as union shop steward, to deal with local management because I understand what they have to do."

But it's the volunteer work that really makes a difference in Rodriguez's life. The majority of his charitable efforts are focused around children – especially the Easter Drive.

"The kids that we go see at these shelters are kids who have been taken away from their parents for whatever reason. We'll see the same kids for three or four years in a row, every time we go. When I see that one kid, and we give him an Easter basket, and he smiles – that makes my day," he says. "It makes my whole year."