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Proudly holding the torque wrenches that are symbols of their trade, newly certified Metro mechanics are from left, back row, Geoffery Springer, Traci Hillard, Dawn Diggs, Gary Breaux and Ralph Oliver, Jr. Front row, from left, are Lillian Meneses, Elder Villafuerte, Francisco Medina and Samuel Williams. Flanking the group are class instructors, left, Steve Mullaly and, right, Brian Markey. Not pictured are graduates Tyrone Macy, Lonnie Bolden and David Morin.



Photo by Bill Heard

## 12 New Mechanics Graduate from Tough 18-Month Program

- They'll be 'leaders of the trade,' says ATU President Neil Silver
- 'Some of the best people we hire,' says Metro's Richard Hunt

(Oct. 18, 2007) Nine former service attendants were welcomed into the ranks of certified mechanics by union and Metro officials, Thursday, during a graduation ceremony at the Maintenance Support Service Center.

The nine, and three others who were unable to attend the event, have just completed a demanding 18-month course of classroom study and on-the-job training to qualify for their new responsibilities.

Members of the graduating class are Lonnie Bolden, Gary Breaux, Dawn Diggs, Traci Hillard, Tyron Macy, Francisco Medina, Lillian Meneses, David Morin, Ralph Oliver, Jr., Geoffery Springer, Elder Villafuerte and Samuel Williams.

In addition to their graduation certificates, each received a shiny new torque wrench – an essential mechanic's tool – engraved with their name and badge number.

To be eligible for the training program, jointly sponsored by Metro and the Amalgamated Transit Union (ATU), service attendants must have three years of good work, attendance and driving records. They also must pass an exam, show an aptitude for learning and be willing to attend classes and complete assignments on their own time.

**‘Serious about their work’**

And, according to ATU Local 1277 President Neil Silver, “they have to be serious about their work. These people are the future mechanics, the backbone of the ATU on this property.”

They not only will be the future leaders of the union, he said, “but leaders of the trade, keeping the trade going at a high level where they will advance in skills, pay and benefits.”

Over the years, as Metro’s bus fleet evolved from diesel into CNG and computers played an ever more important role, the mechanics’ training program was lengthened from eight months to its present 18 months.

“Ultimately, we want people who can troubleshoot and diagnose problems as quickly and efficiently as possible,” said Richard Hunt, deputy executive officer for Vehicle Technology and San Fernando Valley Service Sector general manager.

“The foundation of our training is to teach them the fundamentals, to think, to troubleshoot,” he added, noting that Metro is one of very few transit agencies with its own mechanics’ training program. Most rely on graduates of local trade schools or community colleges.

“Every manager I’ve ever talked to swears by the quality of the mechanics who come out of this program,” said Hunt. “They really believe that, in the long run, they’re some of the best people we hire.”