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▶ [Safety](#)

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▶ [CEO Forum](#)

▶ [Employee Recognition](#)

▶ [Employee Activities](#)

▶ [Metro Projects](#)

▶ [Facts at a Glance](#) (web)

▶ [Archives](#)

▶ [Events Calendar](#)

▶ [Research Center/Library](#)

▶ [Metro Classifieds](#)

▶ [Bazaar](#)

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▶ [30/10 Initiative](#)

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▶ [Intranet Policy](#)

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Little Things Remind Division 7 Maintainers They're Appreciated

- Judy Ochoa tracks 135 birthdays and anniversaries

By JIMMY STROUP

(March 3, 2008) Judy Ochoa, West Hollywood Division 7 general clerk, tracks the birthdays and anniversaries of 135 members of her Metro family.

Then, once or twice a month, she makes and mails birthday and anniversary cards to each Division 7 maintenance employee.

"It's just a little recognition of their hard work," Ochoa said. "Just a 'thank you' for being here and working with us, part of the family atmosphere we're trying to create around here."

Ochoa designs and personalizes each card, then asks Maintenance Manager David Palm – who ordered "Operation Birthday Card" into existence – to sign them.

"I just told Judy to do it and it got done," Palm said. "I love it when things work like that."

The cards are a segment of Palm's plan to change the way maintainers at Division 7 interact with management. Ochoa said Palm's prior experience in the Marines had him trained to expect a certain kind of relationship in the workplace. He's bringing it to Metro with gusto.

"We used to give out the monthly certificates of appreciation, sure, but that was a piece of paper," Ochoa said. "[Palm] wants the employees to know that there's some feeling behind it when we tell the employees that they're doing good work."

Ochoa was in the Army for three years, so she and Palm see eye-to-eye on things like employee recognition and validation.

Making the employees feel welcome

Palm started giving restaurant gift certificates out with Employee of the Month accolades. He's also split the award into three awards, so each shift gets the recognition he thinks they deserve.

Ochoa said Division 7 maintenance now has a standing policy to



Photo: Jimmy Stroup

Judy Ochoa, the Division 7 maintenance general clerk, keeps track of maintenance workers' birthdays and anniversaries – 135 of them – so management can send cards to them on their special days. She makes the cards, too.

acknowledge work that's above and beyond the call of duty with personal recognition. Management takes the time to sit employees down and tell them, face-to-face, that they're an important component in Metro's machine.

"We're looking to institute things that will make the employees feel welcome and to let them know that the company management is aware that they work hard, that they're doing a good job," she said.

As a side benefit, making the cards gives Ochoa the chance to stretch her creative wings for a few hours on the agency's dime; she's currently working toward a bachelor's degree in creative design.

"It's fun. I find it relaxing, to be honest," she said. "It fits in with my interests, so making the cards gives me a chance to play while I'm at work."