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Alonzo Williams, who has worked 24 years in Metro's Call Center, received recognition for his performance in the Call Center Service Challenge. *Photo by Ned Racine.*

Williams Wins Award for Talking a Good Game

24-Year Metro veteran wins accolade at first APTA call center competition

By NED RACINE, Editor

(April 9, 2008) When Alonzo Williams sat on a stage in Orlando, Florida, in February and answered questions from three someones behind a black curtain, his work typified his 24 years as a professional listener.

Williams, communications manager for Customer Relations/Metro Information, was competing in the American Public Transportation Association's (APTA's) first Call Center Customer Service Challenge. This was an APTA effort to recognize behind-the-scenes transit employees for their service to the public.

"It was definitely an honor," said Williams, who was worked in Metro's Call Center for 24 years. He was one of eight contestants selected from 70 applications and the only male. "I was the last contestant to go on, so that was a little nerve wracking."

The judges did not award Williams first place—although they later told him he came very close to winning. In fact, two other agencies offered Williams a job in their call centers, and several attendees asked him how Metro handles customer calls.

Most of all he was gratified that APTA recognized the work of transit agency call centers. "Call centers are highly underrated as to their usefulness to the agency, and this was a great way to showcase the call center talent around the country."



Alonzo Williams (left), communications manager, competed in APTA's first Call Center Service Challenge in Orlando, Florida.

The call center competition was part of APTA's 2008 Marketing and Communications Workshop, Feb. 24 to 27 in Orlando, Florida.

During the competition, Williams was presented with three scenarios; he described them as "Customer Service 101. "They just wanted the [contestants] to go through resolving the various issues. There were marketing experts around the country who served as judges."

Williams found the first two scenarios very basic: "How do you get from point A to point B at a certain time. The second one involved a young lady who was a little bit difficult; she just talked on and on." The third scenario involved a woman who had left a child on a bus. "I've had that actually happen live here at Metro, so it was fairly easy to deal with."

Now Williams is eager for other competitions, not only APTA-sponsored events, but local competitions. He believes they would illuminate the importance of transit call centers. "Besides the bus operators, the call centers talk to more people on a daily basis than any other entity in the agency," he explained.

"[At the competition] I learned that all call centers have the same problems; they have the same issues, and they deal with them fairly similarly," he said. "That was a little bit surprising."