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Photos by Ned Racine

Alex Jauregui of Kaiser Permanente offers suggestions to Antonio Barajas, bus operator, on ways to incorporate fiber, fresh fruits and vegetables into his diet. For those who grab food on the run, Jauregui suggests healthy food choices available at fast-food restaurants.

## Wellness Makes Its Way to Gateway Division 10

- Metro and United Transportation Union partnership works to improve the health of employees.

By JIMMY STROUP

(April 17, 2008) A new partnership premiered at Gateway Division 10, April 16, part of the agency-wide effort to bring the new United Transportation Union/Metro wellness program to each bus and rail division.

The event – to be repeated every two weeks until every division has been visited – featured vendors, food and education for the operators and maintainers, as well as for management. The campaign isn't picky; if you want to get healthy, it wants to help you.

"It's a win-win with this program, honestly," said Lisa Arrendondo, UTU Local 1607 chairperson, who's running the program from the union side. "Better health means you get better employees. But the operators get the benefit of a healthy lifestyle and you can't put a price on that."

"I was an operator, I know how it goes. I ate badly. I ate quickly and all the wrong food," she continued. "There are healthy choices around but we need to instruct our people about what's bad and what's not. Believe it or not, not everything at Carl's Jr. is bad. Not everything at Taco Bell is bad. You just have to learn what's OK. We're teaching them in this program about that very thing."

Arrendondo was joined by the UTU General Chairman James Williams, who said the union will be out in "full force" to support the program he called "substantial" and "necessary."

"Over the years, various programs have come and gone, but this one is

going to work – it won't slip through the cracks," Williams said. "We're committed to making this work because we need to improve the health of our operators. It won't end up on someone's desk, forgotten. I can assure you that."



UTU General Chairman James Williams and Metro Chief Operations Officer Carolyn Flowers both attended the wellness event, April 16, to show their support. The event included group exercises and stretching, in which they participated.

### Supported all the way up to the top

Chief Operations Officer Carolyn Flowers was all clad in yellow – the official polo shirt of the wellness campaign – to show her support for improving the general health of Metro employees. She was especially positive on the future of the wellness program due to the strong cooperation between Metro and the UTU.

"We wouldn't be able to succeed without the partnership we have with the union," she said. "We both care and we both want to support this effort in every way we can."

The four-hour event ebbed and flowed as operators made their way in and out of the division, with many operators spending their split time learning about (and eating) healthy foods and getting their body mass index (BMI) measured.

The wellness program is especially concerned with four elements of health that can be easily measured: blood pressure or hypertension, cholesterol, BMI and glucose monitoring (for those at risk of developing diabetes).

Health care vendors Kaiser Permanente, PacifiCare, United Health Care, Dental Health Services, Blue Cross of California and HealthWorks all provided information. Those interested were given an instant measurement in several of the four key categories.

There was even a massage specialist who gave out free massages as part of the event. Massage Therapist Aaron Martino said that operators free from stress and pain are less prone to accidents and that massage therapy is a useful way to achieving that stress relief.



Cirila Collins, bus operator, takes the Jamar Grip Test while Mayra Zepeda of HealthWorks



encourages. The Jamar grip test is often a tool used during physical therapy.

Interest at Division 10 has been good said Rick Montes, a 22-year Metro veteran who's pulling double duty as his division's wellness ambassador. In the short time the program's been running, Montes has gotten more than 30 operators who want to participate in group exercise.

"I've been exercising for a while on my own, but I'm learning from the program, too," Montes said. "We took our first group walk last week and went a mile. It's a good start."

**A program for literally everyone**

Lisa Arredondo said the program has been designed to be flexible, understanding that not everyone is going to be able to start off at a certain level of exercise or be able to augment their diet right away.

"There's always something we can do. There's no excuse," she said. "For someone to say, 'I'm in my 50s, I'm tired...' we can work around that. Instead of a mile, let's just walk around the parking lot a few times. We're making it so there's no excuse."

Next stop for the wellness traveling show: Metro Red Line Division 20 on April 30.