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Crossroads Division 2 Bus Operator Brian Floyd joined Metro Director of Operations System Support Pat Astredo and Division 2 Bus Operator Vincent Owens to help clean up three houses in a Compton neighborhood just a half mile south of the Metro Blue Line. *Photo by Jimmy Stroup*

Metro Employees Help Take Disadvantaged Neighborhoods Back 'One House at a Time'

By JIMMY STROUP

(July 10, 2008) It's amazing what 100 people and \$2,000 can do on a Saturday morning.

Once every two months, a group of volunteers – Metro employees among them – takes as many people as it can round up, a little money and a little muscle, and transforms houses in need of some paint and yard work, as they did June 28.

"We take a house and clean it up: yard, trash, whatever," said Pat Astredo, Metro's director of Operations System Support. "Then we paint and do it all within four hours. Whatever we can do in four hours. Then we head back to the staging point and have something good to eat."

This particular campaign started at Emmanuel Reformed Church in Paramount, the church Astredo attends.

The effort began as a small idea – one house, a few volunteers. Two years later, the operation now counts nearly 800 volunteers each time it heads out to repair a home, in part because Emmanuel Reformed teamed up with Faith Inspirational Missionary Church in Compton.

"I started noticing as we'd do these [cleanups], especially after we teamed

with Faith Inspirational, that we had a lot of Metro employees who came out to help," Astredo said.

Creating pride within the community

Vincent Owens, Crossroads Depot Division 2 bus operator, has been involved in the rehabilitation project early on. His brother Rafer is the pastor of Faith Inspirational. Vincent attends with his wife, Division 1 Transportation Manager Sonja Owens.

"It's all free, just to help the community," Owens said. "We want to get the church out in the neighborhoods to let people know that we're here and that we want to help out if we can.

"Compton has a bad name . . . drugs, violence, all that. But we can turn it around with little things like this," he said.

The rehabilitation program isn't picky choosing the houses it helps: If you're having some trouble and you could use a fresh coat of paint or the junk hauled from your yard, they'll gladly assist you.

"We try to hone in on people with needs," Astredo said. "Single parents, older folks, people with disabilities or illnesses."

Astredo said the program works to help people on various levels. They get their place cleaned and painted, but also it improves the appeal of the home to the owners and the neighbors, creating a feeling of positive ownership.

'Inch by inch'

"We find out about a lot of the properties we fix up through the Sheriff's [Department]," Owens said. "A house that's in bad shape because it was a drug house or something like that."

Local mail carriers also mention potential clean-up projects. "They're in the neighborhood every day, walking around," Astredo said. "They know which houses need . . . help the most."

Although the program is now large enough to require Astredo to coordinate schedules and volunteers, the purpose of the work remains small.

"It helps the community altogether," Division 2 Bus Operator Brian Floyd said. "You've got to start somewhere. Somebody said once, 'Inch by inch, anything's a cinch.' Well, if you start small, anything's possible.

"This is the beginning of a dream to take the City of Compton back. We're supposed to be helping those less fortunate than we are," Floyd concluded. "I'm only trying to do what I can to help it along."