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Professor Ron Drewes, bus operators Ingrid Alvarez, Gilda Garcia, Manvir Sohal and Erik Cuchilla; Division Steno Darlene Blake; Bus Operator Victor Nunez; TOS Ethel Fields, TOS M.D. Johnson

Innovative TOS Brings College-Level Classes to Division 15

By DARLENE BLAKE

(July 22, 2007) When M.D. Johnson noticed the time East Valley Division 15 bus operators spent between assignments, he imagined a more beneficial use of that time. So he brought college to Division 15.

On July 7, the division saw concrete results from Johnson's innovation and determination as 18 students completed a developmental communications course, which focused on reading comprehension, vocabulary, language, and study skills. This class was selected because it is a college level/entry level course that seemed appropriate for the majority of the students.

"He was the initiator of the program," said Gary Spivack, division transportation manager, of Johnson. "He put us in contact with people. I gave him the air of authority [but] he deserves the credit."

Johnson, a transit operations supervisor (TOS), also functioned as liaison between San Fernando Mission College, Professor Ronald Drewes and Metro.

Bringing a college level course to an outside facility was a first for Mission College and Division 15. To do so, new ideas and innovative procedures had to be implemented in order to accommodate employees who work tight, variable and extended schedules – and IT WORKED!!!

Johnson administered tests to students unable to attend class on test day, collected homework and accounted for lab materials.

Professor Drewes went to great lengths to coordinate the class schedules with the irregular work schedules of his students. Bus Operator Byron Thompson, one of those students, said "The teacher really worked with us. Professor Drewes made every effort to accommodate our schedules and still cover all the required material."

All classes were video taped to be viewed by students who missed all or any portion of any class.

Returning to a formal classroom setting after so many years away made some students apprehensive.

"Professor Drewes helped us make that transition," said Bus Operator Miriam Pereira. "He opened our minds to acceptance of our learning potential and taught us techniques to make the most effective use of our study time."

Other students praised the convenience of the class and their ability to attend without incurring additional gasoline costs.

Spivack appreciated Johnson's innovation because it fit with his own effort to change the way employees see Division 15. "I want people to want to work here and come to the division for other things than work."

Division 15 is now gearing up for the next class, beginning September 2. That class, English 22, is an introductory class focusing on grammar as it relates to writing and other communication skills.

English 22 classes will be held on Tuesdays and Thursdays, 10 to 11:30 a.m. For additional information contact Johnson at 818-394-2640.