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Metro Green Line Operator Jesse Ruiz at the controls of a P-2000 rail car.

Jesus Ruiz, 40 years at Metro but who's counting

By Laura Kloth

(Jan. 9, 2009) Some 40 years ago, Jesus "Jesse" Ruiz completed a stint in the Air Force, highlighted by a tour in Viet Nam. Back in the real world and newly married, Ruiz began applying for work.

"I was stressed out, didn't have a job and had a wife to support. I found a bus yard and went to the Southern California Rapid Transit District (SCRTD) office to apply." After taking the exam, Ruiz remembers feeling a sense of relief after learning he'd start work the next day.

Today, the 63-year-old the Metro Green Line operator and Huntington Beach resident said his job choice was a good one. The transportation job paid for a house, supported his wife Delores, and four grown children, and now provides savings for trips across the world.

Ruiz beams when he talks about his children -- a detective for the City of Lennox, a nuclear medical radiologist at St. Joseph Hospital, a housewife and an employee at the Ritz Carlton.

His wife remembers the early days when her husband worked long hours and talked a lot about his job.

"The first years were hard because he wasn't home," she said. Sometimes she'd ask why can't you get a job with 9-to-5 hours, but he'd say, 'My job is to take people to school and work, so that ties in the whole day.' "

Ruiz made the switch from bus operations to rail with the opening of the

Blue Line in 1990.

Over the years, Ruiz has assisted in rail startups, testing trains for the Blue, Red and Green lines, while his military experience with heavy equipment gave him the hands on training and confidence to work with Metro engineers pinpointing modifications to prepare trains for public use.



Train Operator Ruiz, an inaugural operator when the Blue Line opened in 1990, now navigates the Metro Green Line.

*Photos by
Gayle
Anderson*

Sitting in the cab of a P-2000 car on a recent morning, Ruiz chuckles as he pushes buttons and gives a mini-lesson on train operation. When he teaches new hires, he encourages them not only to learn about operations, but also to learn about the mechanics of the trains themselves.

His boss, Rail Division Manager Michael J. Moore, said Ruiz has become the division's "troubleshooter" and a tremendous asset. "He likes to be in charge. He likes to be the go-to operator when we have problems," Moore said.

Ruiz is known for his love of throwing impromptu chicken, pizza or taco parties for his co-workers, but his wife admits sometimes that can be a problem. "He loves to eat, but he's not suppose to have too much of that kind of food," she said.

Ruiz said his job gives him more than financial satisfaction. "This job is therapy for me," he said. "Being of service to the public is therapy."

The greatest changes, Ruiz said, has been Metro's growth, and management's constant focus on meeting the bottom line.

"You have to have heart in service, not in money," he notes. Recognition of individual dedication and achievement is important. "By nature, humans are social. We like to be recognized in a warm way," he said.

A couple of years away from retirement, Ruiz isn't thinking about hanging up his operator's uniform for the last time.

"Every year," he said, "I'm reminded of how grateful I am for having a job. Retirement will come when I can't walk anymore."