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General Manager of Rail Operations Mike Cannell congratulates new class of graduates who have completed the intensive training sessions required of Metro train operators.

Rail Operations Graduates Ramp Up for New Lines, More Service

By Laura Kloth
Staff Writer

Thirteen proved to be a lucky number for four Metro Rail instructors who started out with 13 students and graduated the same March 12.

"We started with 13 and we're going to end up with 13 on this class. And that hasn't happened very often," said Rail Division Transportation Manager Bruce Shelburne.



Graduates Victoria Winge, above, and Terrance Gore were among those receiving certificates from Rail GM Mike Cannell.

This time around, the class was made up of operators who have been with Metro for less than four years. That is also unusual but not a big surprise to Shelburne because Metro is conducting three rail classes this year instead of two to ramp up for the Metro Gold Line Eastside Extension and the Expo Line.

General Manager of Rail Operations Mike Cannell congratulated the class, encouraging them with what has become his traditional pep talk about "moving the world with a smile." Cannell shared an experience of riding a rail car



manned by employee Ruben "Running Wolf" Hernandez, who greets his passengers with a smile.

"If you're smiling, the passengers are smiling," Cannell said after sharing a poster he helped create depicting a rail car carrying the world.

Graduate Terrance Gore was among those who shook Cannell's hand, after switching careers as a chef to become a rail operator. Gore accepted his certificate and thanked instructor Arnold Johnson.

"Arnold was a little tough on us," Gore said. "He was tough when it was needed. I really appreciate it. He helped push me to a level where I needed to challenge myself."

Gore's wife, Ave Maria Gore, said her husband has had an interesting path to Metro which included, working as a chef for a large traveling circus, cooking with Wolfgang Puck, and later, working as an executive chef at the Union Rescue Mission.

Another graduate, Juan P. Guzman, thanked instructor Gerald Harper, saying, "We had our ups and downs" but everything turned out for the best.

Cannell said it was Metro's good fortune to have jobs available despite the climbing unemployment rates around the country. "What a unique time in this economy. We're hiring and we're employing and we're moving more people than ever," he said.



It's a family affair: Rail GM Mike Cannell congratulates the entire family of graduate Jorge Garcia, who took the long hours and study sessions in stride in order to achieve his goals.

"Any clue how many people you affect by your operations? A lot more than

the biggest churches, more than the biggest football stadium,” Cannell said, pointing out that 275,000 passengers ride Metro Rail daily, which amounts to 20 percent of the total ridership. He lauded the efforts by instructors Arnold Johnson, Gerald Harper, Willard Johnson and Hector Gutierrez and said he has enjoyed working with the “best of the best” that produce operators who hold a 99.8 percent on-time performance rate.

“Now that’s pretty doggone good. It takes people like yourselves to keep it going that way,” he said.

Before the ceremony, some of the graduates were slightly disappointed after learning they would have to wait a few weeks to get a rail assignment. Shelburne told the graduates some would return to bus operator duties and be placed on the “extra” list until a rail assignment opened up.

“We’re going to allow the semiannual bid to shake out this next week. There may be more openings. These operators are integrated into the list and there are already people on the list,” he explained afterward.



Class of 03.09: Instructors and students line up for graduation ceremonies. Rail graduates are Kathy L. Magee, Juan P. Guzman, Majid A. SK, Pedro Lopez, Jesse Valadez, Alfred W. Johnson, Prudencia D. Lambey, Jorge Garcia, David S. Fernandez, Alberto Mejia, Terrance L. Gore and Victoria Winge. Not pictured: Benjamin Penaranda.

Graduate Victoria Winge, who became the classroom mom, said she was especially excited because when she started, she not only set out to graduate, she also had a mission. “I really prayed that we’d start with 13 and finish 13.”