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Championship Bus Team takes victory lap at Metro Headquarters



So noted: Introducing the team members to the Board of Directors and the entire room, CEO Art Leahy seem pleased that not only did the Metro team emerge as the champions of the APTA International Bus Rodeo competition, they also edged out the tough competitors from Orange County. "I'm pleased to announce that the Metro team ranked higher than OCTA," said CEO Leahy. From left: CEO Art Leahy, Top Operator Juan Navarro, Master Mechanics and International Champions for the second time - Frank Forde, Rommel Vargas, and Andrew Warren - and Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa.

(June 9, 2009) In the APTA International winner's circle for the second time in three years, the championship Metro Bus team was awarded the coveted Grand Champion Award in Seattle May 5. The award recognizes the bus operator and maintenance team that has the highest combined score carved from the grueling obstacle course for operators and the mind-boggling tests of mechanical skills that matches mechanics against the clock to find and fix mechanical defects.

In this article, *myMetro* catches up with the 2009 APTA Internationals Grand Champions on their way from a rousing reception at the Metro Board Meeting May 28 to a photo session on the balcony at Metro Headquarters with the Creative Services photographers. Look for their smiling championship faces on bus cards, which will be installed on Metro Buses for six months starting in July.



Team Metro: From left, Sr. Equipment Maintenance Manager Steve Mullaly, North Los Angeles Division 3 Transportation Manager Dan Frawley, Chief Operating Officer Carolyn Flowers, Mechanics Andrew Warren, Rommel Vargas, Frank Forde, Operator Juan Navarro, South Bay GM Dana Coffey, Operations Asst. Instruction Manager Frank Cecere, San Fernando Valley GM Richard Hunt, Arthur Winston Division Maintenance Manager Alex DiNuzzo, UTU Vice Local Chairperson for Local 1607 Ernie Martinez, and Arthur Winston Division Transportation Manager Curley Little.
Photos by Luis Inzunza

Metro Bus Operator: It's the first international competition for 10-year Metro operator, who ranked first or second in four of six timed technical events, accumulating enough points to beat out scores of competitors from transit agencies across the country and Canada.

It was the first time in International Competition for North Los Angeles Division 3 Operator Juan Navarro. He returned home a champion and a media draw: With his smiling face peering through a shiny clean Metro Bus window on the pages of La Opinion, he was featured in a major article in the May 17 edition. [Read article](#) (PDF)

Top Operator Juan Navarro: It was fun! I drove a regular 40-ft bus that was just a little different from the ones I'm used to. Once I went around and practiced and got my adjustments going, I took it from there. It's like driving out in the street but everything's tight and on the clock.

Master Mechanics: The mechanics team from Arthur Winston Division 5 has won the Metro Roadeo five times: [2003](#), [2005](#), [2006](#), [2007](#) and [2008](#). They won intermittent [Southern California Regional Roadeo](#) twice. They are have won the Grand Championship title at the APTA Internationals twice, in [2007](#) and [2009](#).

Mechanic Andrew Warren: It takes hard work. Dedication. Lots of practice and study study. Even if you think you know everything, you still need to go over the facts. Keep everything fresh. You just can't know enough because there is no way of knowing what you're going to see. We don't train all year long but we work all year long, so that helps. It's what we do for a living.

Mechanic Frank Forde: It's a commitment to what we wanted to achieve. The goal was to win the (Metro) Roadeo and once we started doing that, we said we'd like to try and win the Nationals and we did! It's been an honor and privilege to be able to attend it and achieve what we did. The hard work paid off. It's a very enlightening experience. We meet other mechanics from around the nation, get to discuss different problems they may see with different coaches. Information changes hands, and you get some real good friends out of the opportunity to attend the Roadeo. It's also a great morale booster for mechanics!

Mechanic Rommel Vargas: Competition is just a little bit more intense. We've been the

defending champs for a while, so we have to work extra hard. We keep on top of all the new technology and keep track of the old one. When we compete, we kick it all up in high gear, go over everything that we go through all year and bring it all together at the event.

Mechanic Andrew Warren: It's not just like going to work every day. All the events are timed – even though we know what we're doing, we have to be able to do it quickly. The process has to be faster, trouble-shooting skills have to be that much sharper. We don't have a lot of time to waste trying to figure out what the problem is – got to have something in mind we want to check and go for that. The clock is always ticking.

The Coaches: Instructors Frank Cecere and Steve Mullaly take the team through the operations and mechanic hoops every year.

Operations Asst. Instruction Manager Frank Cecere: Operator Juan Navarro was amazing – he was able to mentally work the track prior to actually driving it. He visualized driving the whole course, all 11 events.

Sr. Equipment Maintenance Manager Steve Mullaly: It's fantastic for L.A. Metro to be the grand champions twice in three years. Metro is known as the team to beat!

Division managers play a significant role in the development of a championship team.

Arthur Winston Division Maintenance Manager Alex DiNuzzo: They're talented. They have the skills. All three are Master Mechanics. They practice, they're dedicated, they're hungry for it. Master Mechanic is the highest level mechanic that Metro has. They have to go through an eight-hour examination, hands on, written test, everything. They have to have the skills and training to even qualify to take that test. They're qualified to work on any bus system. Like they said at APTA when they announced the winner: The Best of the Best.

North Los Angeles Division 3 Transportation Manager Dan Frawley: As of June 1, Juan Navarro is now officially a 10-year veteran of Metro. He's on Line 751 every working day. It's his first international competition, finishing second place among all the bus operators at the event. It is also the best finish of all the Metro Bus operators in any of the competitions. The best thing about Juan Navarro is his personality. I call him a kid – he's just the best kid I know! He got along really well with the maintenance team and we had fun. (Frawley treated baseball fan Navarro to a Mariners baseball game.) In the Metro Roadeos, Navarro took two second-place finishes, one third-place finish, finished fifth twice and finished sixth once. He's always getting better. Now he's on the top and that's where he's going to stay.

--from Gayle Anderson