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Retiring LAFD Battalion Chief John L. Quintanar

LAFD Battalion Chief Leaves Metro Fire-Life-Safety Post

Announcement of appointment of Battalion Chief Michael Thomas to Rail Safety Coordinator is eminent

(Feb. 16, 2010) John L. Quintanar, Battalion Chief of the Los Angeles City Fire Department assigned to Metro for the last five and a half years, has retired after serving 35 years with the fire department.

Fire Marshal Chief Deputy Jimmy Hill is expected to announce the appointment of Battalion Chief Michael Thomas to the Metro post. A 30-year veteran of the fire department, Thomas most recently served as Battalion 7 Chief overseeing the Lincoln Heights, El Sereno and Boyle Heights communities.

The Battalion Chief assigned to the fire-life safety post at Metro reports to Corporate Safety and provides support to the agency for both construction projects and Bus and Rail Operations.

Quintanar, officially a rail coordinator for Metro, oversees compliance with rail safety codes and standards and has helped initiate safety improvements in the installation and maintenance of fire alarm systems that keep the Metro system safe for the public and employees.

Quintanar was among the first responders in the devastating Metrolink train crash on Sept. 12, 2008.

Because of Quintanar's rail experience, the Los Angeles City Fire Department's unified commander asked Quintanar to maintain communication between Union Pacific and Metrolink.

In that capacity, he also helped coordinate moving two derailed Union Pacific locomotives and one Metrolink locomotive away from the point of impact without impeding the rescue efforts.

"Overall, I think we did an outstanding job," Quintanar said. "I've never been more proud of my city," he said of the multi-agency response. "Egos were left behind in the effort to rescue people."

The next day, he was among the more than 50 experts assigned to the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB), the federal agency charged with investigating train crashes, for the next four days.

The list of experiences and accomplishments in his role as Battalion Chief reflect the role Metro plays as a national leader in fire and life safety on the rails.

Quintanar's Best of Times:

- Relished the opening of the Metro Gold Line Extension – under budget and on time.
- Learned how to operate the Metro heavy rail subway train.
- Disappointed he won't be on the job for the opening of the Exposition Line to Culver City.
- Selected by the California National Guard (9th Civil Support Team) to be the Incident Command of Tunnel exercise in West Virginia – a two-day operation for hazmat release in underground tunnel.
- Arranged to include 18 Metro personnel in a group of 60 first responders selected for Incident Command Training in Oxnard, a integral effort sponsored by the City of Los Angeles, the Metro team were able to inform the response to a subway incident that was included as part of the exercise.
- Worked with Metro Corporate Safety Systems Manager Abdul Zohbi to document all the safety features along the Metro Red Line alignment in a DVD for first responders.

"I have many to thank for a great working relationship with the Metro team," said Quintanar. "Metro should be proud of having so many talented people on the staff and in the field."

Retirement won't be all play and no work for the longtime firefighter, who includes volunteer work, possible future employment and consulting along with more pastoral pursuits, such as traveling and spending precious time with his grand kids.

Chief Quintanar resides in Whittier with wife Anita. The couple have a son and daughter and two grandchildren.

--from Gayle Anderson