



NEWS

November 24, 1997

CONTACT: GARY WOSK/JIM SMART
MTA MEDIA RELATIONS
(213) 922-2712/922-2700
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

THANKSGIVING IS EVERYDAY FOR THE THOUSANDS OF STRANDED LOS ANGELES MOTORISTS HELPED BY 'FREEWAY ANGELS'

Martin Burns' heroic rescue last March of a 2-year-old girl whose mother had just been killed in a traffic accident is just one example of a Metro Freeway Service Patrol tow truck operator going way beyond the call of duty.

Throwing caution to the wind, Burns darted out into oncoming traffic and scooped up the toddler as she began crawling across the freeway lanes.

The law enforcement officials who oversee the MTA and Caltrans funded Metro Freeway Service Patrol (FSP) agree that Burns and over 300 other tow truck operators who patrol 430 miles of Los Angeles County freeways and help an average of 1,500 drivers each day are truly freeway angels.

Despite the numerous roadway hazards to be contended with while coming to the aid of motorists, the opportunity to be a Good Samaritan eight hours a day is what separates FSP tow truck operators from the rest of the tow truck pack, says the California Highway Patrol.

"You can tell they like their jobs and like to assist people," says CHP Officer Mike Miscione, one of eight officers who supervise the FSP tow truck operators. "Our guys really care about the motoring public."

Since it was founded in 1991 to help ease congestion, MTA policy has stated that the tow trucks, easily identifiable by the MTA and FSP logos and white paint scheme, may only tow disabled cars to designated zones and make minor repairs, including changing flat tires, jump start stalled vehicles, refill radiators or add a gallon of gas. Reality, however, is another matter for these

MORE...

Page 2 Freeway Angels

freeway angels.

Jesus Flores prevented a suicide from occurring when he grabbed a woman just as she was about to jump off the freeway and plunge 40 feet.

Albert Robles is among the denizens of the temporary immobile who appreciate the little things the freeway angels have done. The city of South Gate treasurer's motorcycle suddenly sputtered to a stop. To his rescue came Jeffrey Washington with one free gallon of gas. Within minutes Robles was on his way.

On the biggest day of his life, a flat tire nearly prevented Refugio Ocampo from becoming a United States citizen. To his rescue came Mikel Chavez.

"Without his help I wouldn't have made it to the INS," says Ocampo.

Exhausted after working all day at the liver transplant unit at UCLA, the last thing nurse Nancy Loar needed was a flat tire – she had a friend to pick up at LAX and the traffic was bad enough. To her rescue came Hector Miranda.

"I imagined a costly tow somewhere," says Loar. "Instead he said, 'I'll fix that for free.' I thought I must be dreaming. I've lived and worked and paid taxes in Los Angeles for 23 years and very little is free."

"We tell them not to endanger their lives...not to take that extra step beyond the call of duty...to call the CHP for assistance, but they do care. They do a lot more than what is expected to do in the program," says Miscione.

While the life and death situations cited do not constitute the typical day on the beat, FSP operators perform many other selfless acts.

And, according to Miscione, repairing or towing a disabled vehicle is not what's foremost on the minds of FSP operators when they first report to the scene of an out of commission vehicle.

"The first thing they do is make sure the motorist is out of harm's way. This usually involves asking the person to take a seat in the tow truck or to step on the other side of the guard rail. They're also very careful about their own

MORE...

Page 3 Freeway Angels

safety, never taking their eyes off traffic.”

The MTA, which shares oversight of the FSP program with the California Highway Patrol and Caltrans, has received hundreds of letters of thanks from motorists.

“Every month we receive stacks of mail from people who tell about how the FSP saved the day for them...about how a certain tow truck operator was their knight in shining armor,” Miscione says. “Personally I think they’re fantastic.”

Just what is it then that makes a FSP tow truck operator tick?

“Basically, they like people and that’s why they stay on the job for a long time. Our guys like their jobs or they wouldn’t be here,” says Miscione.

According to the University of California’s Transportation Center, motorists who’ve encountered the FSP say they feel “more comfortable on the road, enjoy a heightened sense of security” and are more accepting of gas taxes. The program is funded primarily by Proposition C and Caltrans State Highway Account funds.

In 1996, the FSP assisted 317,000 stranded motorists.

###