



NEWS

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CONTACT: GARY WOSK/MARC LITTMAN
MTA MEDIA RELATIONS
(213) 922-2712/922-2700
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First in Seniority, First in Class

KING OF MTA MECHANICS CALLING IT A DAY AFTER 42 YEARS

The MTA's senior lead mechanic, known by most as just "Gatewood," and considers himself just "one of the guys," is hanging up his assorted power tools after 42 years in the shop.

James Gatewood, 60, who ranks number one in seniority among active MTA mechanics, has seen a lot of changes take place over the years, however, the first two that come to mind are today's reliance on sophisticated computers to pinpoint repair, and the *open* atmosphere.

"When I first started out," says Gatewood, employed at Division 5 in South Central Los Angeles since 1976, "the people in charge were much more stern. They would say 'here's the job, do the job, don't question me about it.' Today workers tend to express their opinion more often."

Gatewood, along with fellow retiring mechanics Eddie Fentroy, Steve Hearn and service attendant Roland Wirt, will be honored at a luncheon given tomorrow at Division 5. He was hired to clean buses in 1957 by Metropolitan Coach Lines, which served the San Fernando Valley, and assigned to Division 8 in Van Nuys. By 1971 he had worked his way up to mechanic.

The head of maintenance at Division 5 is still trying to convince the Lakeview Terrace resident to reconsider his decision and return as a supervisor.

"He's an outstanding employee, very conscientious," says Alex Dinuzzo, maintenance manager, who was born the same day Gatewood joined Metropolitan, May 7, 1957. "I know it's a cliché, but whoever replaces him has two big shoes to fill. He has the respect of all the employees. He's a great guy."

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Camaraderie and the challenges of working the graveyard shift — which he has done since 1976 — and making sure repaired buses roll out on time are what Gatewood says he will miss most about leaving the MTA.

“It’s all about the interaction with people, solving the problem and completing the assignments given to you on time,” sized up Gatewood.

Gatewood quickly puts to rest any talk of experiencing job withdrawal pains even though not being around the “the people that I work with” will require an adjustment period. He is looking forward to his retirement days which will include travels to Washington D.C., New York City and New Orleans, cities he has never been to before, working on those vintage automobiles he owns and spending more time with his grandchildren.

The Arkansas-born Gatewood, who credits his longevity to excellent health and the ability to get along with others, has some sound advice for the mechanics who worked under him.

“Take eight hours pay but give them eight hours of hard work and everything will work out fine. A sense of humor also gets you over a lot of rough spots and so will a smile on your face.”

The mechanics of Division 5 haven’t quite seen the last of Gatewood. Whenever he’s in the neighborhood, he plans to stop by to make sure “the young kids” he mentored are living up to the high standards he set.

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