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Just before 12:28 p.m. on March 12, Tim Elam entered the "Halt System" command to shut down the Harris SCADA system after 19 years of service. The Harris SCADA system computers weighed about 5,500 pounds. At right, Phyllis Arispe, Rail Transit operations supervisor, works against a background of the new AIM SCADA system.

Photos by Ned Racine

Nineteen-Year Metro Employee Retiree Turned Off at Farewell Celebration

By NED RACINE, Editor

(March 19, 2008) A bittersweet celebration on March 12 at the Rail Operation Control facility marked the retirement of a conscientious 19-year Metro employee. Two things made this celebration unique. First, the retiree ate no cake. Second, the retiree was turned off. Permanently.

The Harris SCADA system, which provided the remote supervision and control required for moving up to 80,000 Metro light rail passengers each day, was replaced by a newer system. The Harris SCADA's first day on the job, July 14, 1990, was the day the Metro Blue Line opened.

On Harris SCADA's (Light Rail Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition) last day on the job, there was no shortage of admiring tributes to the reliable system.

"It was a rock steady system," said Ray Schuck, a systems maintenance supervisor and one of the original Metro engineers responsible for maintaining the Harris SCADA system (Harris was the name of the manufacturer). "It was built like a military tank." Schuck traveled to Florida for four months to learn the system.

Turning off Harris SCADA was Tim Elam, who worked for Harris and spent 24 months onsite at Metro designing and implementing the system. "It was

a little hard to turn it off," Elam said. "After all that blood, sweat and tears, it was hard to come back and see it's obsolete."

The new AIM SCADA system has enhanced graphics, advanced train-tracking features and the ability to meet future rail expansion.

Elam noted that none of the systems created today have the same longevity—technology is moving too fast. As an example, each Harris SCADA mainframe had 10 megabytes of memory and 700 megabytes of disk space, a miniscule amount when eraser-sized flash drives have 4 gigabytes of disk space.

Making the system's success even more incredible, it was Metro's first SCADA system and the only transit system Harris ever developed. Elam and his team built the SCADA capability into a system typically used to monitor hydroelectric systems.

"It's a real pioneering job he did here," Shuck said of Elam, noting that Elam moved to Southern California to bring the Harris SCADA system to life.

"Every man loves an electric train and this is a full-size electric train," Elam said. "We had a blast."

Those attending the farewell who created the system and who worked with it praised its ease of use and its ability to work seven days a week and 24 hours a day.

Chuck Weissman, a supervising engineer in Transit Systems Engineering, said "I considered it an honor to work on a project like this."