



NEWS

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THE HUMAN FACE OF THE MTA, PART II

Last October, the MTA released the first of a series of bus posters that profiled one of its most important transit resources—its people. In putting the spotlight on drivers and other front line employees, the MTA honored the men and women who make the transit system work.

The MTA this week is unveiling the second series of posters, featuring, once again, the ordinary, yet extraordinary employees who serve more than one million Angelenos every day.

“These art posters give an added dimension to the people of the MTA who serve our riding public,” said Linda Bohlinger, MTA interim CEO. “These are people who are insightful, involved in their communities, and have fascinating life stories. We, and the citizens of Los Angeles who use our services, are lucky to have them work for us.”

Vicky Lindsey, a bus driver who serves South Central Los Angeles, lost a son to gang violence. One way of dealing with the pain of her loss was to write a poem of tribute, “To Lionel with Love”. It’s part of a body of work based on life as she has experienced it behind the wheel of a bus.

She provides emotional support to fellow survivors of street violence, most recently to the mother of Corrie Williams, the high school senior shot and killed while riding a bus. In her 15 years experience at the MTA, Lindsey has accumulated a lot of material for her writing.

Forest “Lucky” Churchill, a bus driver out of the Sun Valley Division, enlisted in the Navy on his 17th birthday.

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Even if it hadn't been his birthday, he'd have no trouble remembering the day – December 7, 1941. He came by his nickname more honestly than most people. One night during the war while he was reading, a sniper's bullet grazed the top of his head. After a long transit career that began with streetcars, he retired in 1991, only to return to work again. "I have a lot of compassion for people who have no other way of getting around than on the bus," he says.

Michael Ortiz, a scheduler in bus operations, dedicates his spare time to tutoring at risk students in math as part of a drop-out prevention program. He remembers that as an eight year old boy, a neighborhood priest took the time to tutor *him* in math. "I used to think it's what you know or who you know that matters, but it's *who you help* that makes the real difference," he says.

Arthur Winston has been recognized by the MTA before, when he marked 60 years of service in 1994, and again when he celebrated his 90th birthday last March. Nevertheless, his work ethic and vitality (people 30 years younger would envy his energy) are compelling.

A service attendant at MTA's South Central division, Winston was cited last November by First Lady Hillary Rodham Clinton as "Employee of the Century". Retirement isn't part of his plan. "Just got to keep moving," he says. "Work doesn't hurt me. I get the job done!"

Linda Sardinha wanted to be a truck driver, but was told she was too short. So she drove a bus instead, and has been at it for 10 years with the MTA. She's a keen observer of people, and enjoys the personal interaction with her passengers.

To unwind after driving her Long Beach route, she enjoys country dancing. Her poster will tell her riders that at 5 feet, ½ inch, Sardinha "stands tall in her cowboy boots."

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Boxing brought boundaries and discipline to Roy de la Fuente as a youth growing up in Los Angeles' 7th Street barrio. He became a Golden Gloves champion in 1959, relying on a philosophy of "Hit and don't get hit, that's the de la Fuente style."

A bus service attendant with the downtown division, he spends his spare time training young boxers, looking to give them the same boundaries and discipline that benefited him. The "de la Fuente style" must still work; he trained the first female Golden Gloves champion in Los Angeles.

These posters will be displayed aboard the entire Metro fleet of 2,000 buses for the next three to four months. Then they will give way to a new group of transit heroes, the everyman and everywoman who are the pride of the MTA.

The posters are one of the MTA's public art projects, and feature the work of writer Marisela Norte and photographer Willie Garcia.

Norte is a self-taught writer dubbed the "Muse on the Bus" by Buzz Magazine and listed among their "100 Coolest People in L.A." Garcia teaches at the Los Angeles Photography Center and has had more than 20 local shows and exhibitions.

Metro Art involves artists in a variety of permanent and temporary projects throughout the Metro System with the objective of making transit more friendly to commuters and neighborhoods. Artists are selected by panels which include art professionals and community members. To date, more than 130 artists have been commissioned by the MTA for projects at Metro Rail and Metrolink stations, the Gateway Transit Center, and the Metro Bus System.

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