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MTA'S MOST SENIOR BUS OPERATOR STILL GOING STRONG AFTER 43 YEARS ON THE JOB; SPENDS OFF HOURS READING ABOUT PHYSICS

Donald Dube only expected to work at the MTA for six months. Forty-three years later, he's still operating buses and has no plans to retire any time soon.

Dube, 66, originally from Nashua, NH, and now a Long Beach resident, came to Los Angeles in 1954 out of curiosity — he had heard a lot about California and wanted to see what it was like.

Soon after arriving in Southern California, Dube joined the Army and was stationed in Germany. Except for a few tense moments during unrest in nearby Hungary, he enjoyed his time in Europe and liked the country.

When he came back, Dube went to college with the goal of becoming an aeronautical engineer. Unfortunately, he ran out of money before he could complete his degree.

In November 1958, he applied for a job as a Metropolitan Transit Authority (precursor agency to Southern California Rapid Transit District, then Metropolitan Transportation Authority), operator expecting that he would return to school in six months. He's been here ever since, working first in Arthur Winston Division 5, then in the now-closed Long Beach Division 12, before finally settling in at South Bay Division 18 in Carson.

Dube says driving a bus today hasn't changed much from when he started. "Traffic was just as bad then as it is now," he says. Most of the changes have been for the better. MORE...

Page 2 of 2 Senior Operator

For instance, when he started, the MTA was only beginning to phase in buses with power brakes and almost no buses had power steering. "You just had to muscle the wheel around," he says.

The best change he's seen was the switch from open fare boxes to the current system, which occurred around 1975. This meant less work for operators, since they no longer had to deal with money and making change for passengers. More importantly to Dube, who was once held up at gunpoint, was that the closed fare boxes removed temptation from would-be robbers.

For Dube, what keeps the job interesting after all this time is the personal contact with bus riders. He says, "I'd be bored driving a truck around all day." He knows his regular customers on his Line 444 route from Palos Verdes to Los Angeles, and he greets every passenger with a friendly smile.

When he's not driving, Dube likes to walk and read. Right now, he's reading about physics and other scientific matters, since he says he prefers to "read about real things."

South Bay Division 18 Manager Dana Coffey says that despite his claim that there's nothing special about him, Donald Dube really does embody the division's motto of "Safety, Service, Courtesy."

"He takes a lot of pride in his work," she says.

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