

Celebrate *Transit Driver Appreciation Day* on Friday, March 18; Thanks to MVTA Bus Operators of the Year

March 18 is celebrated as Transit Driver Appreciation Day across the country. And transit providers in the Twin Cities will be no exception.

Further, recognizing that bus operators are the eyes, ears and faces of the Minnesota Valley Transit Authority (MVTA), the MVTA presented its 16th Annual Bus Operator-of-the-Year Awards at a recognition dinner at Casper's Cherokee in Eagan, Feb. 24.

In presenting the 2015 awards, MVTA Board Chair Jon Ulrich (Scott County Commissioner) talked about how MVTA's bus operators are so much more than 'drivers.' He said, "It's about Customer Interaction, paying attention to a 'Sixth Sense,' maintaining a Professional Presence, handling 'norms' or Frequently Asked Questions, and Technology.

Connie Massengale, MVTA's Project Manager with Schmitty and Sons Transit said, "All of our bus operators here tonight are the reason I come to work every day and enjoy my job. They are all deserving of this recognition and I applaud the outstanding job they do everyday." Ulrich said the MVTA's Bus Operator of the Year dinner is the agency's way to let drivers know how much we appreciate them and the work they do.

The 2015 Bus Operator-of-the-Year recipients are:

Dave Hall, Schmitty and Sons Transit Full-time Driver; and

Joe Person, Schmitty and Sons Part-Time Driver.

In addition, a special award was presented to Service Technician **Dan Glazer**. The MVTA also honored two young recipients – **Jalena and Vivian Person** - who distribute MVTA promotional items and candy at parades in each MVTA city.

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MVTA Board members with the 2015 Drivers of the Year. Back row, from left: Chris Gerlach (Dakota County), Jon Ulrich (Scott County), Gary Hansen (Eagan), Bob Crawford (Elko New Market); Bill Droste (Rosemount), Mike McGuire (Prior Lake); Michael Luce (Shakopee); Jane Victorey (Savage); and Clint Hooppaw (Apple Valley). Front row, from left: Jalena Person, Joe Person, Dan Hall, Dan Glazer, Hector Espinoza and Vivian Person.

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Dave Hall serves as a substitute bus operator, which means he has to stay current in the details of all 29 MVTA routes. He has worked for Schmitt and Sons for a total of 10 years, first as a part-time driver and currently as a full-time bus operator. Dave and his wife, Ruby (married 42 years) have two sons, four grandchildren and one great grandchild. He lives in Apple Valley, MN.

Hall was a runner-up operator last year. He is a High School Graduate and "Comes from a 'truck-driving' family. He began driving at age 16 and has since driven tow trucks, bulk fuel trucks and semi-tractor trailers.

"Sub-driving gives me the opportunity to drive many different routes and to meet a variety of people," he said. "Covering routes as needed is an enjoyable part of my job." MVTA has a report from one rider who expressed appreciation for Dave's 'great Customer Service' because, after waiting as a new rider at a Bus Route 444 stop she accidentally boarded a Route 464 bus.

She said, "The Bus Operator made arrangements with dispatch to take me to my final destination after completing his Route 464 trip." She said she knew "This was out of the driver's way and at the end of his work day" but called MVTA customer service to express her appreciation.

Jason Francis, Operations Manager, stated, "Dave Hall is among the finest public transportation operators that Schmitt and Sons has ever seen." He added, "Dave's never ending commitment to professionalism has made him the 'go-to' guy at work. One might say Dave is 'The Michael Jordan' of transportation! Dave's diligence and skill both on and off the road are credit to

himself, his co-workers and to the Schmitt and Sons Team!"

The Part-time Bus Operator of the Year is **Joe Person**. He also serves as an afternoon sub bus operator and has been driving for Schmitt and Sons since 2002. He, his wife, Debbie, and their daughters, Jalena and Vivian, live in St. Paul.

A high school graduate, Joe reports he is a "Christian with strong faith." He also enjoys cooking school lunch for 150 students daily. When I was a boy and would go on bus trips," Joe said, "I wanted to be the driver. Now I am living my dream and enjoying driving. Every day is an adventure!"

Joe is also very involved in volunteer work for his church and his family. "Joe not only brings professional and safe operating skills to the road," said Operations Manager



Dave Hall prepares for his daily duty as a bus operator.

Allie McCullough, "but he comes to work every day with a great attitude and smile."

She added, "Joe continues to go above and beyond, helping out during the summer parades (making it a family affair with his children) and State Fair. We greatly appreciate Joe's commitment to safety, customer service, and his team at Schmitt and Sons."

Jalena and Vivian Person were also recognized for their "parade walking" year after year. They walk with the MVTA bus distributing promotional items and/or candy to those along the parade route in each MVTA city. They received Certificates of Appreciation as well as buckets filled with goodies.

Criteria in qualifying as a Bus Operator-of-the-Year include:

- The driver must have an excellent safety and attendance record.



From Left: Jalena Person, Joe Person, MVTA Chair Jon Ulrich, Vivian Person and MVTA Vice Chair Bill Droste.

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- The driver must be recognized by his/her peers as a leader.
- Positive role model for other drivers.
- Nominated by peers or supervisors.
- No substantiated incidents that resulted in a driver complaint penalty during the year.

The award consists of a plaque, a personalized MVTA sweater, and an MVTA scarf. The runners up this year were 2nd Place – **Denny Unze** (full-time driver); **Hector Espinoza**



Audrey Schnabel

(part-time driver) and 3rd Place **Audrey Schnabel** (full-time driver).

Unze is also a sub-driver and is proficient in all

MVTA routes. He has been a driver for Schmitty and Sons for more than 11 years, first as a school bus driver and for the past 8-1/2 or 9 years as a transit operator. He and his wife, Stephanie, live in Chanhassen, MN. They have one daughter and six grandkids. Unze is a graduate of Minnetonka High School and he attended Brown Institute to earn a Broadcasting Degree.

Natalie Leask, Lead Trainer, reports: “Denny has a big heart and is always willing to help, he’s someone we can rely on and when asked to assist his reply is ‘always there for you.’ “



Denny Unze

nose in a Crossword book. He always has a great story to tell and with his infectious personality he leaves you with good memories of a good person.”

Espinoza has been driving for Schmitty’s for 10 years and he operates all MVTA routes as a sub-bus operator. He is a graduate of Apple Valley High School and Dr. Fields’ Lab School in Chicago. He lives with his wife and dog in Apple Valley, MN. He has four children. Espinoza also

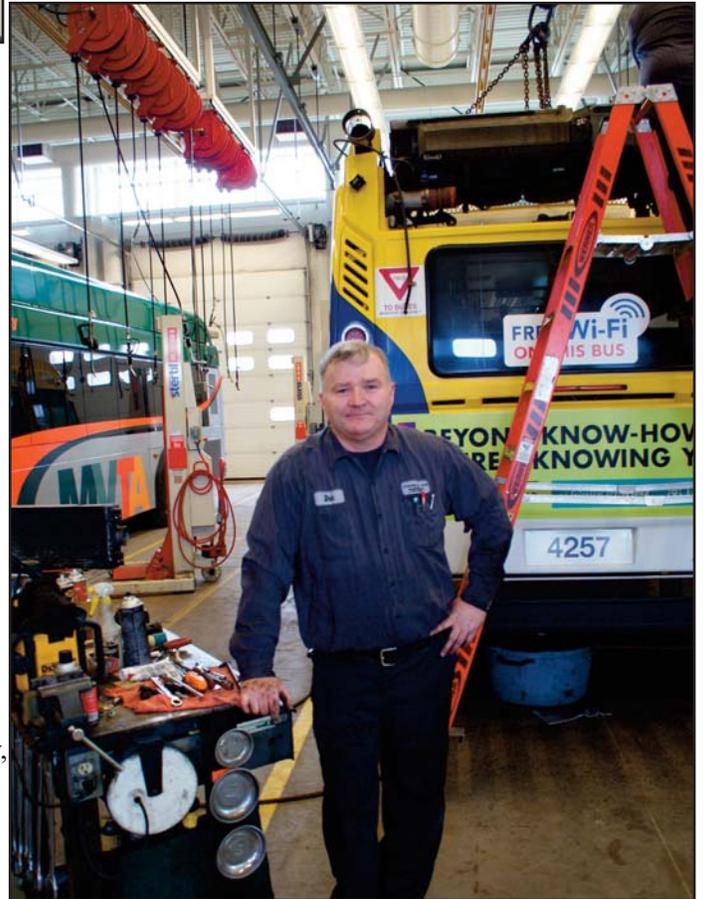


Hector Espinoza receives his award from MVTa Chair Jon Ulrich.

serves as an Ecuadorian Representative in Apple Valley and Burnsville. He enjoys painting cars in his free time along with hanging out with his children.

Supervisor Jason Francis reports that “Hector Espinoza is a

pleasure to work with due to his excellent sense of humor and thoughtful nature. Hector's attention to detail has given him a keen eye on the road.” He added, “What Hector brings to the table cannot be bought or trained; his one of a kind personality provides excellent customer relations and his attention to detail speaks volumes about his commitment to the safety of his passengers.”



Dan Glazer

A special award was presented to **Dan Glazer**, Service Technician for Schmitty and Sons. Dan has been with Schmitty’s for 22 years (since the beginning of the MVTA/Schmitty’s relationship). He currently lives in Minnetonka, but grew up in Eagan, and is a graduate of Burnsville High School.

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Dan was married to his wife, Sharon, for 24 years before losing her to cancer in 2012. He has two step-daughters and four grandchildren, with whom he enjoys spending time. He has a military background, receiving an Honorable Discharge from the United States Marine Corps. He is an ASE Master-certified Transit Technician and a State-certified DOT Inspector.

Glazer worked in a Burnsville auto repair shop before joining Schmitt's to work on school buses, and then transit buses as MVTA expanded.

"Dan is a quiet soul who comes to work every day and takes pride in the outcomes of his performance," said John Arvidson, Schmitt and Sons

Maintenance Manager. "Although he may not recognize this, he has become an informal leader as other technicians, staff, and drivers seek him out for assistance and guidance almost on a daily basis," Arvidson said. "What makes Dan even more special is that he is not an attention getter and would rather remain behind the scenes and let his abilities and performance be how others judge him."

Others said, "It's not very often that you run across a person who is a good employee, a good worker, and a good person. Dan is all of these and more."

The special award includes a plaque and a gift certificate for Glazer to purchase the tool of his choice.

MVTA Hires Executive Director

The MVTA Board of Directors is excited to introduce Luther Wynder as the new Executive Director of MVTA. He will begin his employment on April 4, 2016.

Wynder is currently Chief Performance Officer (CPO) for the Delaware Transit Corporation (DART), a statewide agency that provides fixed route, paratransit, and commuter rail service across the State of Delaware and into Philadelphia. As CPO, he sits on the five-member Executive Leadership team. He has been with the Delaware Transit since January 2005. Wynder has an MBA, a Master's Degree in Information Systems Technology, and a Bachelor's Degree in Management.

His range of duties at DART includes the development of short- and long-range plans, service planning, information technology, and oversight of the system's operational performance. He oversees a \$25 million/annual capital program and has a staff of 45. Wynder has managed a wide range of transit technology projects including automated passenger counters, real-time passenger information systems, maintenance management systems, and the upgrade of a \$9.5 million CAD/AVL system. His position requires him to interact with three MPOs and a state legislative committee that oversees DART.

"MVTA is a wonderful transit system that provides high quality service to its communities and the region," Wynder said. "I am excited to join the agency and look forward to serving as Executive Director, working with the excellent Board and staff of MVTA, and with regional transportation partner agencies."

Jon Ulrich, MVTA Board Chair and Scott County Commissioner, said "We believe Luther brings an excellent background and skill set to the MVTA and the Board welcomes him as our new Executive Director." He noted that the Interview Committee and the full Board agreed on the hiring based on several interviews with Wynder as well as a review of his background.



What can you do?

MVTA bus drivers help you and thousands of others get to work, school or elsewhere safely and on time every day.

Celebrate their contributions on **Transit Driver Appreciation Day**, Friday, March 18, with transit providers across the country!

To acknowledge the contributions of your operator consider:

> *Saying thank you* as you board or exit the bus, or even writing a special thank you note

> *Writing a commendation* explaining why you appreciate the service your drivers provide

> *Waving* or giving a thumbs up to your MVTA or METRO Red Line driver as s/he pulls into the station

> *Sharing your appreciation* on social media

News that Travels is published at least four times per year by the MVTA, Jane Kansier, Interim Executive Director; Robin Selvig, Editor.

For more information contact the MVTA at 100 East Highway 13, Burnsville, MN 55337 or call (952) 882-7500. Web-site: mvta.com; E-mail: mvta@mvta.com.

MVTA Board Members are: Jon Ulrich (Scott County Commissioner & MVTA Chair); Bill Droste (Rosemount Mayor & MVTA Vice Chair); Clint Hooppaw (Apple Valley City Councilmember & MVTA Secretary/Treasurer); Suzanne Nguyen (Burnsville City Councilmember); Jane Victorey, Savage City Councilmember; Chris Gerlach (Dakota County Commissioner); Gary Hansen (Eagan Councilmember); Mike McGuire (Prior Lake Councilmember); and Michael Luce (Shakopee Councilor).