

Commuter Nadine Babu hailed as Metro Transit's 3 billionth customer

Written by Ivan Phifer

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Metro Transit celebrated its three billionth customer at the Uptown Transit East Annex Center, 2855 Hennepin Ave., shortly after Thanksgiving.

Metropolitan Transit Commission (MTC) was established as a public entity in 1967, while the foundation of the Twin Cities public transportation system was not fully in place until 1972. Since then, customers have boarded Metro Transit buses and trains three billion times.

“(In 1972) that’s when we began counting ridership,” said MTC general manager, Brian J. Lamb.

To commemorate the milestone, Metro Transit invited customers to submit entries in a contest to become the three billionth rider. The winner judged to have written the best entry was awarded a year of rides on Metro Transit buses and trains.

The three billionth rider was Nadine Babu. Babu has been a Metro Transit customer throughout her college career, attending the University of Minnesota’s Carlson School of Management. Babu also owns a business, and is active in social causes such as the Leukemia and Lymphoma Society.

Babu said there were numerous Metro Transit experiences she could have used, but for her contest submission she chose the Vikings-Bears game that took place at the University of Minnesota’s TCF Stadium in 2010, after the collapse of the Metrodome roof.

“It was a big blizzard and everyone was complaining about getting home,” said Babu. “It took people hours to commute. I took Metro Transit and made it there (TCF Stadium) in one piece, where a lot of my group members did not make it in time.”

She jokingly recalled how she had on Green Bay attire, which made the trip a bit more interesting. “I’m from Wisconsin, but I was still rooting for the Vikings because we (Packers fans) needed a Bears loss,” said Babu.

According to Lamb, the buses are now hybrid using biofuels made right here in Minnesota, and every bus is tracked via GPS for accuracy in driving schedules.

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“Several transit centers facilitate connections throughout the metro area. Commuters travel from well over 100 park-and-ride facilities and rail service has become an integral part of the transportation system commuting 15 percent of transit customers,” said Lamb.

As general manager, Lamb takes great pride in commitment to service and also took time to honor four Metro Transit workers.

Silas Sharp has worked for Metro Transit since 1963. He started as a bus mechanic and now runs bus maintenance from the Nicollet Garage location. East Metro Bus Driver William Crowder has been a bus operator since 1970 and has been honored as an operator 20 times for his outstanding service. Heywood Driver Faye Brown, has been with Metro Transit since 1993 and has also won awards for her performance.

“Above all, she is well known and well liked by customers for her always positive attitude and assistance,” said Lamb.

Light Rail Operator Hugo Fuentes, a rail operator for the Hiawatha line, who started as a part-time bus operator in 2000 was the fourth employee honored. He moved to full time bus operator in 2003 and has earned eight outstanding operator awards and was named master operator.

“Today is not just about recognizing our employees, but our customers as well,” Lamb said.