

Mary Fetsch, Tri-Met's Leading Lady

BY WYNDE DYER
THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

It is said that behind every great man there is an equally great woman.

Mary Fetsch, director of communications for Tri-Met, plays right hand woman for Tri-Met General Manager Fred Hansen. They are something of a dynamic duo, a Batman and Robin-esque team in the fight for public transportation. The bus is their Batmobile.

But Fetsch would rather talk about Tri-Met than herself. "I'm nobody," she said, "but my bowling is improving."

Fetsch has her involvement with Tri-Met's 'Interstate Avenue is Open for Business' campaign to thank for those bowling skills. She has organized four bowling challenges at Interstate Lanes to help reduce the impact of construction on business for the north Portland Bowling alley.

"At first everybody thought I really loved to bowl," Fetsch said. "I was basically going everywhere saying, 'Hi, do you like to bowl?' I was constantly recruiting bowlers."

The first challenge was between Tri-Met maintenance staff and the administration. Next came

a bowl-off against the Portland Development Commission, and another against Port of Portland. Tri-Met has yet to take home a trophy, but the events have been hugely successful, Fetsch said. One time the bowling bus brought in a crowd of 45 people who spent \$550 in an hour at Interstate Lanes.

Once construction began on Interstate Ave., Tri-Met began hosting weekly Lunch Bus tours. Staff at Tri-Met partner agencies, like PDC, City of Portland, Metro and DEQ could reserve a spot on the bus for \$7. At the end of the tour, they have lunch at a different restaurant along the Interstate alignment. Fetsch estimates over 1,000 individuals have enjoyed Lunch Bus tours and the total revenue generated is somewhere around \$10,000.

"That's tremendous," she said. "Many of those people will be return customers."

Since the bowling alley wasn't on the Lunch Bus route, Fetsch devised a plan to help out. The bowling challenges have been just as good for the bowlers, she said. Members from different departments of large public agencies don't always come into contact in the workplace. Fetsch thinks bowling has been a good exercise in team building.

As for the completion of the light rail, Fetsch is

Mary Fetsch is intimately involved in helping businesses thrive along the Interstate Max line while construction is taking place.

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DAVID PLECHL/
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proud to say that Tri-Met is ahead of schedule and under budget. The construction impacts on businesses will be gone by the end of the year. New handicapped sidewalks along with on-street parking and freshly paved roadways, should make businesses more accessible to pedestrian traffic. Once completed, there will be three times the current number of trees and art exhibits at each Max stop.

"The new look is one that we find very inviting," Fetsch said. "The area was really in need of revitalization."

Since Fetsch lives less than a mile away from the new Max line, she knows this first hand. She rides her bike every morning to work from her home in the Arbor Lodge neighborhood along the bluff. Fetsch said she remembers Interstate Ave. before the construction began. The road was infamous for potholes, speeding vehicles and large trucks.

"Interstate was so torn up," she said. "It was not at all friendly for a cyclist."

She also thinks the long strip of road was unfriendly for shoppers.

"It was a place you just sort of drive through," Fetsch said.

So Tri-Met launched a business support program to help the marginalized stores and restaurants along

the line. They financed temporary 'Open for Business' signs, paid for advertising, signs to redirect traffic if parking lot entries were blocked and made a commitment to work on 4-block segments to disrupt business as little as possible. During the second phase came the 'Interstate is Open for Business' campaign. Tri-met paid for the design and distribution of a direct mail piece that was sent to 16,000 homes in the Portland area. When the business directory was created, the campaign slogan appeared in bus shelters and along the side of the Max for months. Tri-Met involved the University of Portland entrepreneurial program to host free workshops to provide technical assistance and write business plans for Interstate businesses. Over \$300,000 in low-interest loans were awarded to business owners along the line.

"We've tried to be a good neighbor and I think we've succeeded," Fetsch said. "Some of these businesses didn't even have logos and one didn't even have a checking account. We've helped with all that."

Once the light rail is running, Fetsch said the businesses will be in good shape.

As for her, well, like any other superhero, she'll be on to something else.

"Every day it's something different around here," she said.

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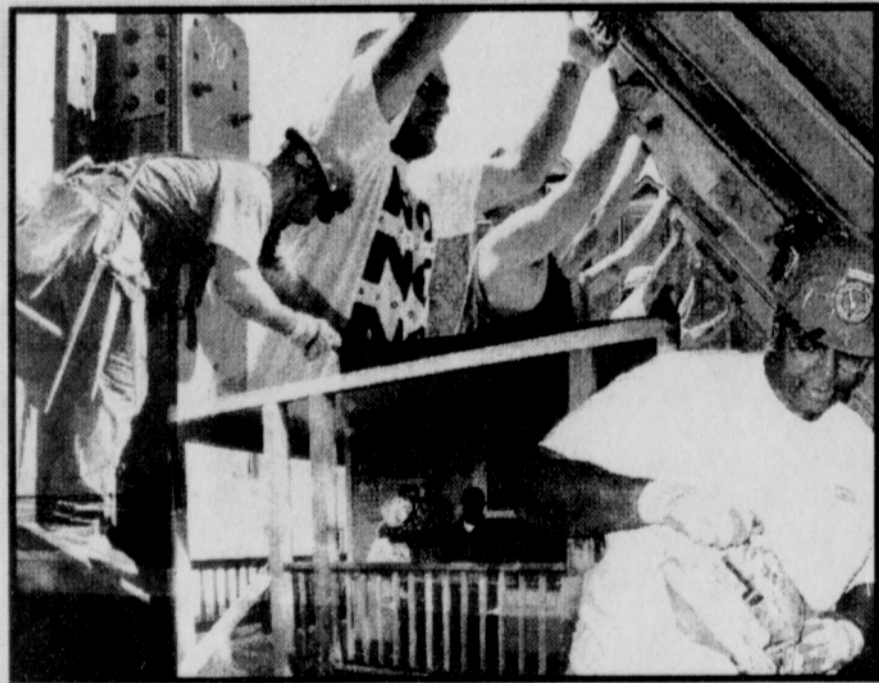
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