

Rider Advocates on Chopping Block

N/NE Neighborhood group petitions to keep safety team

BY LEE PERLMAN

THE PORTLAND OBSERVER

David Miller loves his job as a TriMet Rider Advocate. He works to tap down potential disturbances on Portland's transit system while helping people and generally making life safer and more pleasant for riders. Unfortunately because of budget cuts, Miller and his seven co-workers won't be doing it much longer.

TriMet Director of Transit Operations Peggy Hanson has informed Northeast Coalition of Neighborhoods Executive Director Paige Coleman that the transit agency would end its contract with NECN to operate the Rider Advocates program.

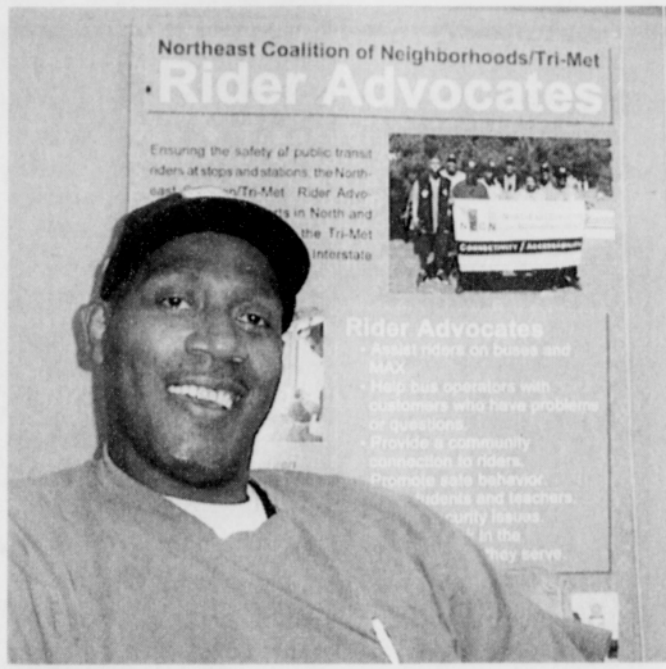
Unless some other funding source can somehow be secured, the eight Advocates will be laid off on Sept. 30.

Dressed in green TriMet shirts, Rider Advocates have been riding TriMet buses and MAX Light Rail trains since 1994, primarily in north and northeast Portland but in other parts of the system as well. They are not a security force — they do not carry weapons and

do not intervene physically in problem situations — but they do work to defuse confrontations that could become fights, and urge riders to “play by the rules.”

“If we see people who are about to get into a fight, we try to find out what the issues are and if there's another way to resolve them,” Miller says. “We sometimes have to remind people to do things like keep their feet off the seats. We say, ‘If someone comes on wearing their best clothes, do you think they'd want to sit where you've been putting your dirty boots?’” They may remind young people to give up front seats so seniors and the elderly can use them.

“We might say, ‘If you don't want to talk to me, I can call the transit police and you can talk to them.’” Miller says. Usually this is not necessary. Transit riders “see me as being just like them, not an authority figure,” he says. “They relate to me better than they would a transit policeman.” They are authorized to give out courtesy bus passes to help defuse any lin-



David Miller is slated to lose his job as one of eight TriMet Rider Advocates working to make Portland's transit system safe. The advocates are scheduled for elimination because of budget cuts.

gering bad feeling.

The advocates monitor potential flash points, such as when school lets out at Benson, Grant, Jefferson and Roosevelt high schools, and Beaumont Middle School, because these gatherings sometimes attract gang members looking to recruit or start a fight. Another flash point is Holladay Park near Lloyd Center. There, the Rider Advocates may also ask beg-

gars at MAX platforms not to panhandle passengers. They help move crowds along after sporting events.

In the event of injuries or medical emergencies, “We try to keep the victims calm, and the other passengers calm, until medics arrive,” Miller explained.

Coleman says the advocates also serve as community ambassadors to “targeted audiences”

such as youths and seniors.

“They've done a great job of taking outreach to another level,” she says. “We've had a lot of feedback from senior citizens about this program.”

Northeast Coalition board member Ron Laster says some transit riders have pointed to the rider advocates as the added safety measure needed to make it possible to continue to ride the bus without fear, especially after school starts.

Even in its Aug. 6 termination letter, TriMet praised the professionalism and shared commitment of the Rider Advocates.

The \$472,000 contract is not being terminated because of dissatisfaction with the service, Hanson told the Portland Observer, explaining how the cuts are part of a \$25 million budget shortfall that has caused the agency to lay off more than 100 of its own employees.

In June, Hanson suggested cutting the program by 75 percent in order to keep it in operation. “We looked at what we could accomplish under those circumstances, what would be in the best interests of the community and NECN,” Coleman says. “We decided to continue as we were even though we knew we'd be taking a chance

the program would be eliminated this way.”

The neighborhood coalition is fighting to get the funding back.

The group is circulating a petition that argues that the loss will drastically reduce the sense of security and service of the TriMet system. Disturbances will increase without the mediation and skilled outreach of the Rider Advocates team, the petition states.

Coleman hopes the program will be back.

“We were assured that as we come out of the recession, we'll all look for ways for the program to resurface in some form,” she says.

Hanson says, “As the economy improves and we're able to restore our service cuts, there are all sorts of possibilities.”

For now, however, Coleman says, “A lot of good people will be out of a job, and there'll no longer be advocates to stop incidents from escalating.”

As for Miller, he says, “Am I bitter or mad? No. I'm sad, but not mad. I'd like to go back to doing outreach with youth at risk, as I did before and maybe one day come back to this program.”

Dear Deanna!

My best friend wants me to be a bridesmaid in her wedding. I want to decline because her future husband is cheating. He's been seeing someone else the whole time he's dated my friend. I don't want to tell her because it would break her heart but I don't want her to marry him either. Do I need to go through with the wedding to make her happy or risk the friendship by telling her? --Shannon; Omaha, Neb.

Dear Shannon:

You're a lousy friend because you should be able to tell your best friend anything. You would be as guilty as the future hus-

Ask Deanna!



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band if you know he's cheating but won't tell it. They're going before God with adultery on the plate and you can prevent this by being mature and doing the right thing. Pray for strength and words of wisdom as you get the facts. Tell your friend about the situation and you'll be able to sleep better at night.

Dear Deanna!

I met a guy a few years ago and we really felt a spark. I was dating someone else but dumped him for the new guy. He had also met another female at the same time. As luck would have it, I said or did something that spooked him and he started dating the other lady. I went on with my life. After two years of staying in touch, his relationship ended and he's back. He's still friendly with this ex-girlfriend and I'm scared to go back for fear he'll do the same thing again. What do I do? --Confused; Sacramento, Calif.

Dear Confused:

This isn't the only man you can have a relationship with and I suggest you look elsewhere. If he dumped you the first time for someone else, he'll do it again. However, if you're still feeling the spark, observe him much closer and take your time before getting too serious. A woman's sixth sense is real. If your gut feeling is telling you to run or something's not right, spare yourself some pain and follow your instincts.

Dear Deanna!

In my marriage I always listened

to my husband, let him make decisions and manage the finances. Recently I was devastated to learn that he has a double life with another wife, children and a home. I'm ready to stand up and fight but he's a bully and scaring me. Is it worth it to get what's right for me and my children or should I let him go and let things catch up in the long run? --Anonymous; Dallas, Texas

Dear Anonymous:

You can wait for the long run but you'll find yourself on the curb with your kids looking stupid. You're entitled to alimony, child

support, and everything else as a result of his decision to commit adultery, be a liar and a two-timing bigamist. As the first wife, you have the court's favor as well as the favor of God as you proceed. Your husband didn't think of you, your kids or the other woman while doing his dirt so why should you. Call the judge, handle your business and keep it moving.

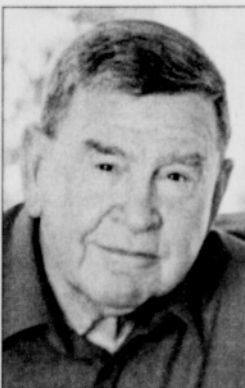
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Vancouver Votes to a Draw

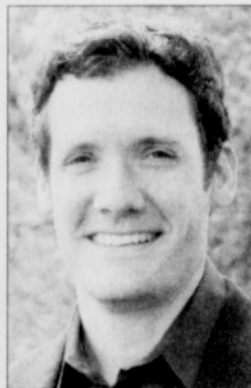
A dead heat in Vancouver's Primary Election shows that Mayor Royce Pollard might be in a fight for his political life because of a controversial stance on tolls for a new I-5 bridge over the Columbia River.

The largest public works project ever proposed in the Pacific Northwest is emerging as a wedge issue in the election that pits Pollard, who has held the office since 1996, against Tim Leavitt, an environmental engineer and member of Vancouver City Council.

Pollard, who has coasted to



Royce Pollard



Tim Leavitt

victory in the past, barely came in second place in the Aug. 18 primary, with 42.2 percent of the vote, compared to 42.4 percent for Leavitt. About 23 percent of eligible voters participated in the election.

A third candidate, Charlie Stemper received about 15 percent of the primary vote and will not qualify in the general election runoff this November.

Pollard has joined Portland Mayor Sam Adams and most other state and regional governments in supporting tolls on both the I-5 crossing and the I-205 bridge to help pay a share of the \$4.2 billion Columbia River Crossing project and serve as a brake to expanding traffic while also stimulating mass transit use.

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