

TriMet Names First Black GM

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Desue was named interim TriMet leader in March after his predecessor, Doug Kelsey, retired. As interim GM, he has already made huge strides to build back trust and improve the agency relationship with union leaders, TriMet officials said.

He is credited with advancing climate initiatives and championing safety, maintenance and critical equity and social justice policies. Desue has also begun developing new strategies to manage TriMet's recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and the associated economic impacts, officials said.

As recently as Monday, Desue announced the agency's move to 100% renewable electricity for the MAX light rail system, TriMet's electric buses and all TriMet-owned facilities. This move immediately reduced TriMet's carbon footprint by more than 25% and will soon be followed by other climate initiatives, officials said.

Desue has also led the largest capital improvement project in

TriMet's 51-year history, replacing and upgrading track, switches and the signal system across the 108-year-old Steel Bridge. He has improved bus on-time performance from 88% to 94% in the past two years. He improved MAX light rail safety by decreasing rule violations 28%—the largest decrease in two years.

Officials said under Desue's direction, TriMet maintained a safe operating environment for employees and riders through historic challenges: protests, civil unrest, wildfires, poor air quality, an intense ice/windstorm and the global pandemic.

Desue was instrumental in the successful negotiation of TriMet's new Amalgamated Transit Union 757 contract, the seventh successful union contract he has helped enact in his transit industry career.

He has consistently led diverse, inclusive and equitable work groups and has a track record of decreasing turnover, improving financial management and boosting employee morale, officials said.

Desue brings more than 27 years of public and private trans-

portation experience to the position. He started his career in transport as a bus operator for Gray Line of Alaska.

Desue developed a strong foundation for leadership during his nearly 11 years of service in the United States Army. As a non-commissioned officer and a leader in the military, he was relied upon by senior commissioned officers to execute complex tactical and strategic operations, make intent-driven decisions and operate in joint, inter-agency, and multinational environments.

Desue serves on the American Public Transportation Association (APTA) Board of Directors and on the APTA Operations Committee. He received his Master of Business Administration (MBA) in 2006.

Desue is a dedicated MAX Blue Line rider as well as a frequent Line 17 rider. He and his wife have two grown children and enjoy spending time with family when they're not traveling and exploring restaurants and coffee shops in the Portland metro area.

Experienced Teacher Raises Achievement Bar

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Schools educator in 1986, when he was in his 20s.

"So, when I started teaching in Portland and went to the first couple meetings, some of the legendary names were in the room," Bacon said. "Some of them became sort of informal mentors. I knew where to go if I needed anything. More so than anything, it showed me the possibilities of a career in education in Portland."

The Black mentors who were there to help him included Dr. Matthew Prophet Jr., who became the PPS superintendent in 1982, served for 10 years, and was named among the top 100 outstanding school managers in North America. Some of the others were Dr. Ernest Hartzog, who worked in education for over 60 years, including a position as an assistant superintendent for PPS. Hartzog founded the national chapter of Black School Educators in 1973, which now has 30 affiliates, and the Oregon chapter in 1975; Harriet Adair, who worked for PPS for 47 years and retired in 2017 as an assistant school superintendent; Ken Berry, who worked in education for 44 years, 20 as a school administrator, before retiring as an elementary school principal in 2003 and Leila Roberts, who worked in Portland Public Schools for 40 years, both as a teacher and as a principal.

For much of his career, Bacon was active in ORABSE. So

once he retired from education, he wanted to infuse more energy into an organization that had been so instrumental in helping shape his career.

"I really wanted to get on the board because the focus of ORABSE shrunk to just the scholarship banquet," Bacon said. "They were only doing that because they didn't have capacity to do more. It was all volunteer. So, I decided to throw my hat in to run for president and nobody ran against me. It was one of those things that nobody else had time and/or interest to do."

Since Bacon took over leadership, the organization's membership has expanded from only 30 members to 120 around the state. The group took on a new acronym, switching from OABSE to ORABSE to avoid confusion with the Ohio chapter's acronym and designed a new website - <https://www.orabse.org>. ORABSE became a member of the Black Student Success Network, an Oregon Community Foundation Program, and received almost \$100,000.

The funds have been used to hire the first part-time administrative assistant and also will allow ORABSE to provide professional development and services to member educators, develop a culturally specific curriculum about Oregon's Black history, and hire a Program Manager.

ORABSE also partnered with the Oregon Department of Education to organize three events in

May 2021 that featured Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Nikole Hannah-Jones. It is also expanding its partnership with other education-related organizations, including the Educator Advancement Council.

Bacon also created several committees to take on some of the workload, and just completed a strategic planning process in April where Black educators from the Portland Metro area, Central, Southern and other parts of rural Oregon participated.

Bacon estimates Oregon has about 1,000 Black teachers working in classrooms around the state. But he is also aware of Black professionals who are district administrators, counselors, educational assistants or even employees at colleges and universities.

He plans to expand ORABSE's services to include helping all types of Black educators find job opportunities, get connected with legal or other advocacy resources and have access to professional development and curriculum resources.

"We want to support the Black educators; that's first and foremost," Bacon said. "And then we want to be a part of helping supervise the expertise of working with Black students. There's lot of organizations working on that and we want to do our part and bring our expertise and lead the way in educating Black students to make sure our kids are getting what they need."



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