

Willie Jack: TriMet Master Operator

By Bruce Poinsette
Of *The Skanner News*

In order to obtain Master Operator status as a Tri-met bus driver, one has to go 1,960 hours without accident or incident ten times. Willie Jack has done it 30.

"There is never a dull moment as a bus driver, and I have enjoyed my 35 years of service," says Jack. "I am much honored to be the first recipient of the Golden Master Operator award."

Tri-met created the honor specifically for Jack, who became the first driver in the history of the institution to complete Master Operator requirements three consecutive times.

Jack, who has been with Tri-met for 35 years, is a committed bus driver who values time with his family and giving back to the community.

He grew up in Mississippi during the 50s and 60s, where he says there was much less opportunity for Black people.

Jack remembers when civil rights workers



Willie Jack

Jack moved to Oregon in 1968 after his mother passed away. He stayed with an aunt that lived in Northeast Portland as he was transitioning from his high school graduation into the professional world.

The first job Jack had was painting cars. He would work outside no matter how cold or warm it was.

Being a bus driver wasn't on his mind but he utilized advice he got when he was a child about work ethic.

"I didn't look that far ahead at that time," he says. "An old man once told me that no matter what you do, be the best that you can."

When Jack first started with TriMet, the transportation institution was much different than it is today. There was only one garage, compared to the three they have now, and no MAX.

Since there were fewer employees, Jack says that the drivers had to make all of the runs.

Jack attributes his success to preparation. He says he's learned to look for potential problems before they happen.

Some of the main issues he handles on a daily basis are traffic, rude passengers, people getting sick during the course of bus

rides, lost children and gang activity on the bus.

Beyond preparation, Jack also says he's been lucky.

"My wife says I've been blessed," he says. "I've had very few sick days."

The lack of sick days allowed Jack to complete his first 1,960 hours of driving ten times without incident, accident, or lost time and pass through TriMet's Master Program. Similarly, he completed the next 1,960 hours ten times to become a Grand Master, which was Tri-met's highest honor at the time.

Last month, Tri-met had a private party for Jack to celebrate his milestone of completing this task for the third time, which came out to 58,800 total hours with no incidents, accidents or lost time. He became the first and only driver to become a Gold Master Operator.

Although Jack takes pride in his work, he is quick to turn the attention to others.

"Earning this award would not have been



Willie Jack has three daughters and five grandchildren

nied him for his interview with this reporter. He says his grandchildren take up the majority of his free time.

When he's not spending time with his grandchildren, he says he enjoys landscaping and catering for family events with his specialties of fried turkey, fried fish and BBQ ribs.

In addition to family events, he also caters for the community Juneteenth celebration.

This is one of the many ways he tries to give back. Jack was an active volunteer for Community Care and has offered his driving services for his church's van. He has also helped boy scouts collect Christmas trees for recycling and provided lawn care for older citizens who were unable to do it themselves.

"I like to spend time giving back to my community when I can," he says. "I enjoy doing what I can for others."

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James Chaney, Andrew Goodman and Michael Schwerner were murdered in 1964 in one of the most infamous lynchings of the Civil Rights Era.

While this moment and other instances of Jim Crow racism stood out to Jack, he puts more emphasis on lack of economic opportunities as the biggest obstacle for his peers at the time.

"The jobs weren't as easy," he says. "You had more opportunity here (Oregon) than in Mississippi."

Five Tips for Young Workers Taking Summer Jobs

By The Washington State Department of Labor and Industries

TUMWATER — Among those killed on the job in Washington last year were five young men under the age of 25, including one who was just 18. An average of 79 young men and women between 16 and 24 are hurt on the job every day across the state.

With the approach of the summer job season, the state Department of Labor & Industries (L&I) is urging young workers to be mindful of the workplace hazards around them.

"Something that happens to you when you're a young worker is going to affect you when you're 30, 40, 50 years old. It could affect you for the rest of your life," said Matt Pomerinke, who lost an arm to an industrial accident when he was 21 and now speaks to teens about workplace safety for L&I's Injured Young Workers Speakers Program.

Young workers tend to be hurt at work at a higher rate than adults. If you're a young worker about to start your first job this summer, here are some tips to stay safe:

1. Always get proper training on how to complete a job or use equipment properly before you begin the work.
2. You have the right to say 'No' to tasks you feel unsafe doing, such as climbing a ladder or operating a new piece of equipment. Your boss cannot retaliate against you for refusing hazardous work.
3. Look for hazards at work, like slippery floors, hot grease, dangerous machinery or ladders. If you see a hazard or a problem that needs fixing, don't try to do it yourself, ask a supervisor for help.
4. There are special laws that protect teens under 18 – make sure you know your rights on the job by visiting www.TeenWorkers.Lni.wa.gov.
5. If you are injured at work, even a small cut, be sure to report it. That way you'll be covered by workers' compensation if the problem becomes more serious.

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