

HOUSTON AT WORK

# Metro gearing up to hire service-oriented operators for bus, light rail

By ERIKA McDONALD  
Employment Correspondent

With last year's approval to expand Houston's Metro Light-Rail, human resource managers are anticipating hiring staff for the new light rail lines and expanded bus services outlined in the proposal.

"There is a real sense of pride about the Metro Solutions plan that all staff — including bus operators — feel," said Roland Manzano, director of staffing and diversity. "You really feel like you are a part of history."

He said the Human Resources and Diversity Department's already-aggressive goal of adding four to five new part-time bus operators per week has been increased. During the next two months, they plan to hire nine new drivers per week. Manzano said Metro would likely see more employment spikes once Metro Solutions goes from design to construction.

All new hires start as part-time operators and are promoted to full-time positions as vacancies arise. Manzano said it takes six to eight months to make full-time, on average.

The hourly pay rate is the same for full-time and part-time bus operators, as are the types of benefits, which are prorated for part-time drivers. Pay starts at \$12.85/hour and follows a progression chart up to \$17.13/hour after 48 months.

Manzano described Metro's hiring process as highly selective with an emphasis on safety and customer service. Applicants must be able to provide employment references, and pass background checks and drug screenings.

"We have the highest possible safety standards for our

bus operators," Manzano said. "They are being trusted to carry passengers throughout the fourth-largest city in the nation, and we take that responsibility very seriously."

An applicant must have a driver's license that has been valid for at least three years and no alcohol-related violations. Though applicants who already possess a commercial driver's license will receive preference, Metro will provide free training so new hires can obtain their CDL.

Metro also prefers bus operators who are bilingual.

"If you are bilingual with either Spanish, Chinese or Vietnamese, that is a huge, huge plus because those are the languages commonly spoken by Houston riders," Manzano said. Metro prefers candidates with a high school diploma or GED.

However, applicants who pass the TABE test proving they can read English at a ninth-grade level may be hired, and Metro will help them obtain their high school diploma by paying for classes at Houston Community College.

In addition to demonstrating literacy and English proficiency, applicants are tested to ensure they meet physical requirements, including 20/20 vision, which are mandated by the Texas Department of Transportation.

Though Metro's hiring criteria is rigorous, the benefits for bus operators are impressive.

Manzano said some of Metro's bus operators have been working for the transit authority more than 20 years, a rarity in the transportation industry.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION**

For more information about employment with Metro, visit [www.ridemetro.org](http://www.ridemetro.org).

dustry.

He attributed operator loyalty to the benefits Metro provides, including a health-care package, life insurance, paid holidays and vacations, and a pension plan funded completely by Metro (many private companies require the employee to contribute part of their salary for retirement savings to accrue).

Manzano said Metro also offers potential for advancement with many bus operators moving from behind the wheel to administrative responsibilities.

Many of Metro's current directors and vice presidents started out as bus drivers.

"What many people may not realize is that Metro is not just offering jobs, but real career opportunities," Manzano said.



**SAFETY FIRST:** A Metro bus driver inspects the vehicle's equipment before getting on the road. **MATT WHITE: AC STUDIOS**

**EMPLOYER PROFILE**

## Staffing agency specializes in skilled-trade workers

*Skilled Craftsmen of Texas places workers in temporary, permanent jobs*

By REBECCA MAITLAND  
Employment Correspondent

Skilled Craftsmen of Texas Inc. began in 1992 with the dream of one man, Jerry Templeton, whose goal was to deliver quality, skilled employees to his customers.

He believed to be successful as a staffing service he had to pick one industry and give it 100 percent. Templeton chose to focus on the industrial trades.

"We started with a goal to help manufacturing companies solve their hiring problems in the industrial-trades field. Skilled Craftsmen of Texas is not your typical staffing service company. We do not handle any type of office workers," said Daniel L. Gibbs, vice president, Skilled Craftsmen of Texas Inc.

"Our professional staff has thorough knowledge of the industrial industry and fully understands the job descriptions employers have. We pride ourselves in being able to select the right industrial employee to meet a business' need."

Skilled Craftsmen of Texas offers direct-hire, temp-to-hire and temporary employees for assembly-mechanic positions,

electronic assemblers, electricians, instrument techs, maintenance mechanics, drafters, burners, HVAC workers, welders, painters, millwrights, all ranges of machinists, boiler-makers, general laborers, forklift operators, warehouse helpers, pipe fitters, shipping and receiving clerks, sheet-metal workers and others.

"Most of our candidates have at least three to five years background in their fields. We do receive entry-level positions so those applicants may not need any experience. All must pass a background check, drug test, and some positions may require a physical," Gibbs said.

Gibbs said Skilled Craftsmen handles a lot of the initial burden for employers when it comes to finding a new employee.

"When a company hires a new employee they often pay to advertise the position, conduct a drug test, background checks, (pay) employment taxes, unemployment, and worker's compensation. That is a significant amount of money invested initially in a new employee that may or may not work out," Gibbs said.

"If they don't work out, for

most employers it is a financial loss. Whereas with us, we recruit applicants, and if an employee doesn't work out for any reason . . . we not only will replace that employee at the company but may also be able to place that person (with) another client. This way, a company does not take the financial loss, and the employee may find a place he fits.

Skilled Craftsmen also saves companies money and time. The company is able to save the hiring person's time by screening applicants, pre-interviewing, arranging background and drug tests, and selecting a few potential employees for a company to review.

"Currently, there are shortages in all trades, and we are recruiting men and women looking for a job that pays well; that is if applicants are not afraid to get their hands dirty. There are a lot of opportunities in these positions. Some positions may require attending a trade school; others may just take time on the job learning the trade," Gibbs said.

Gibbs said the company predominantly supplies skilled temporary work, and individuals are paid every Wednesday.

"We do not hold back a week's pay, nor do we charge any fees to employees," Gibbs said.

Regarding benefits and holi-

day pay, Gibbs said 90 percent of its employees are not on SCI's payroll for long.

"The length of time an employee has to be with us before the client can hire them as a full-time employee is 90 days. We have about a 90 percent turnover rate, so if we had a benefit package, most would not qualify because they've been hired by the client when they become eligible for benefits," Gibbs said.

Gibbs said those looking for a staffing company should check if the company belongs to the American Staffing Association or the Texas Association of Staffing. If so, they have agreed to adhere to the ASA or TAS code of ethics.

"It is also important the temporary service tests, checks references and interviews each new employee. If so, then the customer is assured that a qualified employee is properly matched to the job. There are other questions we encourage companies and applicants to check, all of which can be found on our Web site," Gibbs said.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION**

■ To learn about Skilled Craftsmen of Texas Inc., go to [www.skilled.com](http://www.skilled.com).

## MACHINISTS: Training prepares workers for variety of fields

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All of the HCCS courses in the Basic Machining Technology Certificate program can be applied toward the Machining Technology Associates degree for those interested in continuing their education after completing the certificate program.

According to Neal, most every item that has parts that fit together or move are the products of a machinist.

"For example, your kitchen blender has a number of parts that fit together and move, so when you press the button, it works. All of these parts are manufactured either manually or with a CNC. These parts are required to be a certain size and dimension to fit together. Think about car parts, parts for valves, well heads, medical devices, anything with a part started with a machinist," Neal said.

The Machining Technology Program at HCCS is designed to meet industry's continued and growing need for trained machine operators and programmers. This program pre-

**FOR MORE INFORMATION**

■ To learn about ResourceMFG, visit [www.resourcemfg.com](http://www.resourcemfg.com).

■ To learn about Houston Community College, go to [www.hccs.edu](http://www.hccs.edu).

pares students for employment in machine shops, manufacturing facilities and in the maintenance of industrial plants.

The AAS degree in Machining Technology is designed to develop competent support technicians for employment in the field of machine shop and related occupations. The curricula are designed to provide a broad-based education with opportunities for specific employment and personal-interest goals.

The shop has more than 60 pieces of manual equipment, such as lathes and milling machines, seven pieces of computer numerical control (CNC) turning and milling machines,



**PRECISION SKILLS:** Most products with movable parts or pieces that fit together have passed through the hands of a certified machinist. **JIM LOYD: AC STUDIOS**

six robotic arms, a computer-integrated manufacturing cell, hydraulic and pneumatic trainers and 60 personal computers with up-to-date training materials.

The program also is an authorized training center for Engineering Geometry Systems, Vu said.

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