



For Immediate Release

February 1, 2022

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GRTC Celebrates Black History Month

GRTC honors transit pioneers and change makers.

RICHMOND, Va. (February 1, 2022) – Each February, GRTC Transit System recognizes Black History Month. Over the years, GRTC has remembered leaders and change makers throughout the state, locally, and home at GRTC. This year GRTC honors its own employees who broke the color barrier to become the first African Americans in GRTC’s Transportation, Administration, and Maintenance Departments.

Prior to the 1960s, most jobs at GRTC were not held by African Americans as positions were denied to them



First African American Bus Operators. Stanley Lucas, top row. Unknown name, bottom row.

on the basis of race. During the Civil Rights Movement, African American workers entered more opportunities in the workforce. Although inclusive changes occurred across GRTC, one department experienced change sooner than others. GRTC’s Transportation Department was one of the first to include African Americans in public-facing roles. In the early to mid-1960s, African American operators such as David Williams Sr., Stanley Lucas, Johnny Branch, and Joe Taylor, became change makers at GRTC. These pioneers were pressured to represent GRTC with more grace and dignity than their white peers.

experienced similar changes in the 1960s. Although African Americans worked in maintenance support capacities, it was not until the mid-1960s that African Americans like Richard Mickie, Clarence Fortune, and W.C. Wooldridge were hired as technicians. Mechanic Quinton Alexander would eventually transition to a public-facing role as an operator.

The Maintenance Department



Maintenance employees at GRTC bus barn.



Ellwood Anderson

Administrative positions began including African Americans by the early 1970s. Some African American employees who initially joined GRTC as operators earned promotions on the administrative side of the company. Al Sanders, Roscoe Moon, Jr., and Ellwood Anderson were a few who transitioned to administrative leadership including Assistant Director of Transportation, Assistant Safety Director, and Director of Transportation, respectively. Another operator pioneer rose through the leadership ranks as high as Chief Executive Officer. Eldridge Coles began as a bus operator in 1967, served as GRTC’s CEO from 2010-2013, and currently serves on GRTC’s Board of Directors.

GRTC Transit System’s mission is to provide clean, safe, and reliable transportation and to improve mobility and access throughout Central Virginia.



Inclusion also meant more opportunities for women in the workforce. Lena Iverson (nee Banks) was one of the first African American women in Administration working as a clerk typist, which today is known as an Administrative Assistant. This role was and remains today the cornerstone of the administrative team. Customer Service was another administrative function that integrated in the 1970s. Barbara Bingham and Brenda Evans were two of these pioneers who started working in GRTC’s Customer Service Department. Starting in 1973 and 1974 respectively, Barbara and Brenda engaged with customers about bus service and helped all riders know how to commute. After several decades of progress, in 2001, GRTC hired its first female African American Chief Operating Officer, Sheila Hill-Christian.

By 2005, John Lewis became GRTC’s first African American Chief Executive Officer, the highest-ranking position at the company. Although it took decades of progress between the 1960s and early 2000s, GRTC believes inclusion and employment representation of minority voices is not only integral but essential to the success of the organization. GRTC’s new [Equitable Innovation & Legislative Policy Department](#) is driven to ensure that the agency continues to foster and cultivate a healthy workplace by ensuring the inclusion of all staff and community leaders while providing equitable solutions to public transportation for the communities GRTC serves.

GRTC welcomes submissions now for next year’s local Black History Month honorees; names will be saved for future consideration. Male and female, living and deceased, nominations are accepted. Please email nominations, including a biography, photo, and any contact information, to marketing@ridegrtc.com.

GRTC is a public service corporation providing mobility services in the Greater Richmond area. GRTC’s current operational budget (FY22) of \$63.2 million primarily funds daily mobility operations and vehicle maintenance. GRTC provided 7.8 million trips during FY21 (July 1, 2020 – July 30, 2021).

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