



# INSIDE METRO: THE PEOPLE BEHIND THE TRANSIT

## Meet Rodel Jardeleza: A ParaCruz Operator Bringing Joy, Warmth, and Heartfelt Connection to Every Ride

Rodel Jardeleza has been a ParaCruz operator with Santa Cruz METRO since 2024, and in just two years he has become known for something special: the way he brings joy into the everyday. Whether he's greeting passengers with a smile, playing their favorite music before they even board, or surprising them with a playful frog gadget, Rodel turns each ride into a moment of connection. His approach to service is rooted in empathy, humor, and a deep respect for the people he transports—qualities shaped by his upbringing in the Philippines, his love of cooking, and his appreciation for the peaceful corners of Santa Cruz County.

### Tell us a little about yourself, Rodel

Good morning. My name is Rodel Jardeleza. I am a ParaCruz operator with Santa Cruz METRO. I've been with METRO for two years now. I really enjoy working here because I get to deal with different kinds of people. That's the fun part for me.

### What makes it fun? Can you share a story?

The fun part is when I make a passenger smile or laugh. I have this little frog gadget—sometimes when a passenger isn't paying attention, I play it, and they start looking around wondering, "Where is this frog sound coming from?" They smile, and it's so fun. I also know my regulars. Before I pick them up, I already have their favorite station playing. It makes their day.

One of the most fulfilling moments was when a passenger called me over and said, "I have something for you." I told her we can't accept tips, but she said, "Just come here." She gave me the biggest bear hug. She said she hadn't been hugged in a long time. That was super sweet.

### Do you have another memorable passenger experience?

One time I told a passenger, "I haven't seen you in more than six months." She said she was busy. I joked, "Are you ignoring me? Are you avoiding me?" She started coughing from laughing so hard. I had to apologize! If you know your passengers, you can serve them better. Learning them—what they need, what they don't like—that's important.

### You mentioned anticipating what people want. Can you talk more about that?

I used to pick up a passenger from dialysis who wanted the heater on—even in summer. I'd see her name on my tablet and turn on the heater for her in advance. It was only ten minutes, but by the time I dropped her off, I was sweating bullets. Another passenger would say, "You know how I like it," and I'd say, "Of course—it's already blasting." I also ask passengers how they want to be addressed. It makes everything easier.

### What does a typical day as a ParaCruz operator look like?

My day starts three hours before my shift. I come in 45 minutes early. We check the alpha list—names of passengers for the day. If I don't know someone, I ask other operators, "How do we pick this person up?" or "Is it hard to get to their place?" Talking with coworkers creates a relaxed environment. It's not like other jobs where you feel defeated before you even walk in. Then I go to the van, check everything, close my eyes, and say, "Here we go. Another day."

### What advice would you give someone who wants to be a ParaCruz operator?

Be respectful. Not everybody is the same. Everybody can drive, but not everybody can be a driver in this way. You need empathy. You need to know your passengers—their music, their preferences, even who they don't want to ride with.

### Do you have a favorite peaceful place in Santa Cruz County?

Yes—by the Boardwalk, under the railroad track. My wife and I bring a blanket and take long naps there. It's peaceful and not crowded.

### Have you discovered new places while driving for ParaCruz?

Manresa State Beach. It's a great camping spot. My wife and I stayed two nights—it's close enough that she can go to work and come back.

### What might your coworkers say about you?

They probably know I love to cook and share my food. I also tell stories about growing up in the Philippines, and sometimes they gasp. For example, I told a coworker that when we wanted coconut milk, we had to get the coconut and grate it by hand. She looked at me like she thought coconut milk came from Safeway.

### Where did you grow up, and what are your favorite childhood memories?

I grew up in Davao City in the southern Philippines. My fondest memories are going to the beach or river with my buddies, goofing around. Now those places are gone—developed into highways and subdivisions. It's sad, but that's progress.

### What are your favorite dishes to make?

Cooking is my passion. I love making lumpia, pancit, and adobo. I share them with coworkers. This Thanksgiving, I'm making hundreds of lumpia to give out as gifts.

### Can you explain those dishes?

- **Lumpia:** Filipino egg rolls with pork. I give them frozen so they can fry them fresh.
- **Pancit:** A Filipino noodle dish—everyone loves it.
- **Adobo:** Pork stewed with vinegar, garlic, and chili. I'm also learning to cook chile verde.

### What creative projects are you passionate about?

I love making furniture from recycled materials. I see something and think, "I can do something with that." My wife is going to Europe for three months next June. I told her I'm going to surprise her with building something while she's gone. I'm excited.

### Anything else you'd like to share?

I love when passengers have animals. I have a passenger in Watsonville with two dogs—Junebug and Roxy. Junebug is a sweet golden retriever who pulls a lot, so I hold the owner's hand to help. Roxy rides in a bag and needs attention, so I stick my hand in and play with her. Junebug sheds everywhere, so I sweep the van afterward—but I love that dog. I'll be sad when she retires.

*"Rodel brings a level of joy and compassion to ParaCruz that you simply can't teach. He has a gift for making every rider feel seen, respected, and genuinely cared for—whether he's anticipating their needs before they board, sharing a laugh, or brightening their day with one of his signature surprises. His empathy, professionalism, and ability to connect with people from all walks of life make him an invaluable part of our team. Rodel doesn't just provide transportation; he creates comfort and moments of happiness for the community we serve."*

— Rina Solorio, ParaCruz Assistant Manager