INSIDE METRO: THE PEOPLE BEHIND THE TRANSIT

Meet Joy Olander: 20 Years of Family, Growth, and Music at Santa Cruz METRO

For Joy Olander, Santa Cruz METRO has always been more than a workplace. With 20 years at the agency and a family history that goes back even further, Joy has grown alongside METRO, taking on new roles, pursuing her education, and building a career in payroll. Outside of work, she brings that same passion and creativity to her two bands, making her a true multi-talented member of the METRO family.

Tell us a little about yourself, Joy.

My name is Joy Olander, and I am the Payroll Supervisor for Santa Cruz METRO. I've worked here for 20 years, and METRO has really been a big part of my life.

What is your favorite part about working at METRO?

The people. The bus operators, the staff, the admin team, the family environment—really, all of it. There's a great sense of community here, and that's something I've always appreciated.

What has kept you at METRO for all these years?

I've grown up with METRO. I love everything about it, and I've been able to go through multiple positions. I started in Accounts Payable, worked my way into payroll, and now I'm supervising payroll. I've been able to learn new things and take on new responsibilities along the way, and it's been great.

You have a special family connection to METRO. Tell us about that.

I grew up with METRO. My dad retired here many years ago, before I started working here, so I was a METRO brat!

I had my little golden ticket to ride the bus, and I loved everything about it. We used to have picnics and fun things together as a group, so METRO was always part of our family life.

Then my husband came to work here and eventually retired from METRO as a bus operator. I came on board while he worked here, so it's really been a family adventure.

What did that "golden ticket" mean to you growing up?

We got passes to ride the bus, and it was a very valuable thing to have as a teenager. My dad was able to give my brother and me bus passes, so we had the freedom to just show our pass and off we would go.

We could go to Boulder Creek, Davenport, downtown, wherever our hearts desired. The bus gave us so much freedom.

What were some of your favorite routes as a kid?

I think I lived on the 71 and the 69. Going to the Capitola Mall, downtown and to the Boardwalk were a big deal as a teenager. Those routes took us pretty much everywhere we wanted to go in Santa Cruz.

How did you grow into your current role as Payroll Supervisor?

When I first started here, I was hired as an Accounting Technician, basically doing Accounts Payable. I eventually learned payroll, and over time that became my main focus.

As METRO took on more responsibilities, I was able to take on additional work involving taxation, payroll processing, retirement, and more. Each new responsibility gave me an opportunity to learn and grow, which eventually led me to becoming Payroll Supervisor.

How has education helped you advance at METRO?

Santa Cruz METRO has been amazing in the sense that it allows you to start in a position and trains you for other positions. I was able to get my master's in accountancy, and I've been able to use that education in my work here.

METRO offers opportunities to learn new things and grow into positions that you might not have otherwise considered.

What is something people might not know about you?

I'm in two bands!

The first one is Through the Flames. It is my baby. It's an alternative metal band that my husband and I founded about ten years ago. We've put out one CD and we're working on our second.

Our other band is Alter Ego, which is a smooth jazz band with a little bit of funk. They're completely different genres, so it's fun to have both.

What do you do in the bands?

I'm the lead vocalist for both bands.

Music has always been a part of my life. My dad is a drummer, my cousins are drummers, and I grew up with music all around me. My dad even played in a METRO band when I was growing up, so I would go to the METRO functions and hear them play.

I've been singing since I was little, and eventually it naturally grew into performing.

What do you enjoy doing when you're not working or performing?

I love spending time with my family. We have two dogs and two cats, and we're definitely homebodies.

I love to cook a big meal, and then we'll watch football, watch a movie, or just sit around and enjoy being together. Cooking is something I really love because a lot of what I make comes from the heart.

What would you tell someone considering a career at METRO?

I would say it's not always about your education or your résumé. It's about the heart you bring to the job.

METRO gives people opportunities to learn, grow, and take on new responsibilities. If you have a strong work ethic, a good attitude, and you're willing to learn, there are so many opportunities to build a career here.

Sometimes it's about the person you are and what you bring to the table.

What is your favorite memory associated with METRO?

My favorite memory is a funny one. Because I had that bus pass growing up, I was able to cut school one day at Soquel High and go downtown with my girlfriend.

We were down at the METRO Center when my dad walked out—and suddenly I had to come up with a reason for why I was at the METRO Center instead of at school!

It's one of those memories that still makes me laugh and reminds me just how much METRO has been part of my life.

Joy's story is a perfect example of how a career at METRO can grow alongside the people who make up our agency. From riding the bus as a child with her family's "golden tickets," to building a 20-year career and becoming a Payroll Supervisor, Joy has truly grown up with METRO.

And when she's not keeping payroll running smoothly, you can find her behind a microphone, bringing her love of music to stages around Santa Cruz County.

"Joy's story really captures what makes METRO special. She grew up with METRO, built a 20-year career here, and continued to challenge herself and grow along the way. She brings an incredible amount of knowledge to her role, but just as importantly, she brings heart. Joy cares deeply about her coworkers and the organization, and her dedication has made a lasting impact on our METRO family."

— Kristina Mihaylova, Finance Deputy Director