

Bus Dispatcher Counsels Addicts In The Bronx

Julio Romero is a man of the streets. As a Surface Line Dispatcher for New York City Transit, Romero orchestrates the movement of buses from his post at a Bronx intersection where multiple routes converge. He troubleshoots any equipment-related problems, like bus breakdowns, and he handles schedule-related issues, like traffic causing buses to arrive late at their appointed stops.

Off duty, Romero helps drug and alcohol abusers, including those who have fallen so low they are homeless and living on the streets. Romero links them with government agencies and nonprofit organizations that provide services, like temporary housing and in-patient detox programs. He gives encouragement and advice. And he serves as an example of someone who turned his life around.

“It’s not the beginning but the ending that counts,” said Romero, a member of TWU Local 106. “I’m proud of who I am. I’m proud of what I became. If I can help someone, I will. It’s what I love to do.”

Romero, 66, grew up in the Bronx and fell in with the wrong crowd as a teenager.

“I started doing things you’re not supposed to do,” he said. “I started going in the wrong direction, doing things I shouldn’t have been doing, wasting time, wasting my life.”



Bronx Borough President Vanessa Gibson giving Bus Dispatcher Julio Romero an award for his volunteerism in the borough



Surface Line Dispatcher Julio Romero discusses a bus-route issue with a NYC Transit Bus Operator

It was a rut that Romero stayed in for years. Finally, with encouragement from his loyal parents, he received counseling and stopped his self-destructive, bad habits. After working a job in maintenance, Romero was hired as Bus Operator in 1997 and promoted to Surface Line Dispatcher in 2004.

Today, Romero volunteers hours every week to talk with patients at hospitals, detox facilities, and counseling centers. He also will strike up a conversation if he sees someone on the street in clear need of help. Others are simply referred to Romero by community members who have heard about his knowledge and volunteerism.

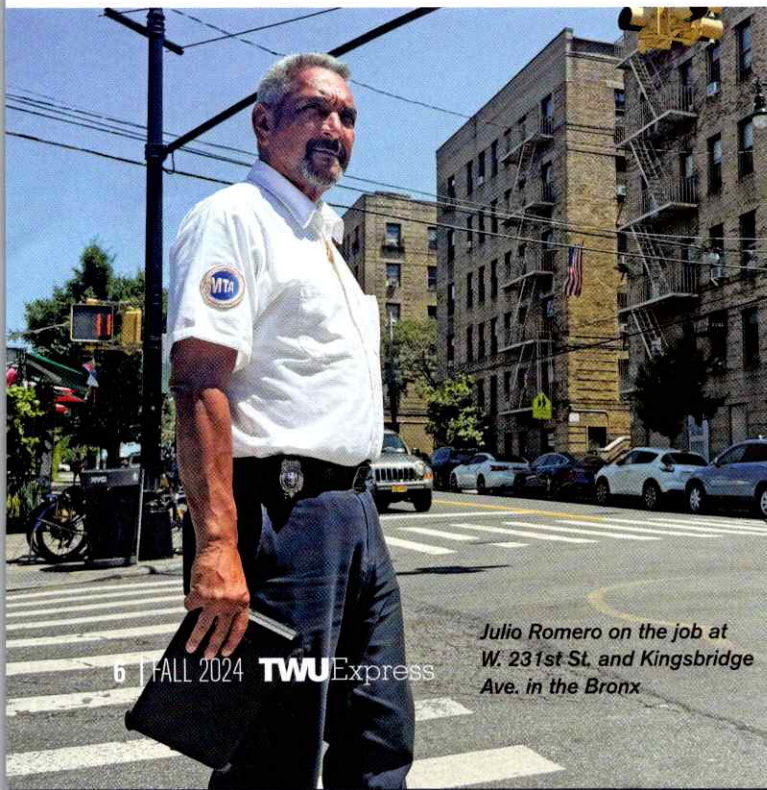
“Everybody knows somebody using something,” he said. “It could be a grandson, a husband, the check-out person at the grocery store. It’s really bad out there.”

To start with, Romero tells substance abusers to be honest with themselves.

“You have to want to change for yourself,” he said. “If you stop drinking or doing drugs for your mother, or for your brother, or because your wife or husband want you to stop, it’s not going to work. It’s not going to last. You have to do it for yourself.”

For his efforts, Bronx Borough President Vanessa L. Gibson presented him with a Citation of Merit in May. He was nominated by Local 106 President Philip Valenti, Recording Secretary Jose DeJesus and MaBSTOA Transportation Chair Mike Rodriguez.

“I can’t tell you how much it means to me personally to have a man like Julio in our organization,” Valenti said. “What this humble man does in the community as a substance abuse counselor is amazing and really is God’s work. He is the best that you can want, not only as a member of your union, but more importantly, as a neighbor.”



Julio Romero on the job at W. 231st St. and Kingsbridge Ave. in the Bronx