This year’s President Award winners were honored for their creativity, initiative, and willingness to go beyond the whole nine yards... and more! Inducted into the prestigious group were (l.-r.): Maria Generosa Olazo-Luardo, Roberto Almodovar, Marie A. Calandrelli, Karen L. Timko, Stephen J. DePalma and Anthony Garcia. Offering his congratulations was President Howard Permut (center) at the recent awards ceremony. See this special issue for more about your outstanding colleagues.

The Station Enhancement Program team proved that a lot can get done when employees from various departments come together in a well-oiled effort to improve our customers’ travel experience! Read about how they “spiffed” up some of our stations, making it even more pleasant for customers to ride with us! Story on page 10.

What sets this year’s seven President’s/Team Excellence Award Winners apart from their colleagues?

President Howard Permut explained at the recent award’s ceremony: “They set ambitious goals for themselves every day, in everything they do. They shine so brightly that they can’t help but be noticed by their peers in the workplace. They are people who perform their jobs to the best of their abilities, and then give even more. They show amazing creativity and initiative. They pay attention to the smallest of details. And they still look to help others in their day-to-day

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A great Beaux Arts work such as Grand Central deserves a great craftsman to watch over it. And Roberto Almodovar truly fits the bill.

His colleagues, who are in awe of his wood-working skills, call him a “Cabinet Maker.” Roberto is considered the “go to” person whenever a high-quality project needs to be undertaken in Grand Central. His work involves more than just using the tools of his trade. Whenever a wooden artifact needs to be replaced, Roberto does research on the item — looking into the history, location, original construction, materials and finishes used, so that he can build an exact replica of what needs to be replaced or restored.

“I feel very honored to have won this prestigious award and humbled to have even been nominated,” Almodovar said. “I have been here long enough to know that this is not to be taken lightly. When I was told I had won, it took me totally off-guard. It is very humbling when someone believes in your work and in your work ethic that they even had the thought, and then took the time, to nominate you.”

He treats each project he is assigned as if it were the most important piece he has crafted. And his creativity and innovation are always apparent in the final results. In fact, there appears to be no project too big or small that Roberto cannot craft. Even-tempered, with a gentle manner, Roberto is more than willing to mentor his coworkers on the techniques he uses, and, of course, how to do the work safely. And he is the first to pitch in to help with coworkers’ projects, regardless of how busy he may be, to ensure that the work is done on time and to an exacting standard.

Roberto even takes extra time to craft special gifts for retirees, crafting such one-of-a-kind items as a replica Grand Central Terminal plaque, a giant pencil and wrench, and even a replica of a thermostat for a former MTA Chairman…all are works of art.

“Now that I have won, I definitely take even more pride in the work that I do here at the railroad. Knowing that the good-natured employees around me are proud and even took the time to recognize my work before this is a really great feeling. When I shared that I had won this award with my coworkers, some of them said: ‘It’s about

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here are those who say the grass is always greener on the other side. But don’t
tell that to Ticket Agent Marie Calandrelli.

During her career, Marie has worked “both sides of the fence” — holding both
agreement and non-agreement positions. This puts her in the enviable position of
being well aware of what the job of Ticket Agent entails and how to do it properly. As
lead ticket seller, Marie runs the ticket office in New Haven. She handles administrative
duties, works the window as a seller, and is also the cashier. (She’s a real multitasker!)

As cashier, she is responsible for all the money in the ticket office; she handles the
daily remittances, and the accounting is never off or short.

And thanks to her abilities as a supervisor, the New Haven Ticket Office never receives any customer complaints. In fact, Marie is known for remaining cool, calm and personable, even when dealing with irate customers during service disruptions.

“I was speechless when I found out I had won!” Calandrelli said. “I was extremely happy and very overwhelmed when I was handed the letter from my supervisor. She gave me the letter and since I couldn’t speak from shock, she announced I had won to my coworkers for me and gave me a big hug — we were all very excited.”

Any time an issue or problem arises, Marie does not need to be told what to do or how to handle it — she just does it. And you never have to worry about her making a bad decision. When working with new hires, Marie is able to identify the person’s strengths and their weaknesses. She then gets the employee to build on their positive skills to become the best ticket agent possible. And her good deeds are not limited to Metro-North. She works with both Amtrak and CTDOT/Shore Line East to provide connecting train information. And if Metro-North’s train information is missing from the departure board, Marie calls Amtrak (which oversees it) and gets it posted ASAP!

“I’m extremely happy to be awarded the President’s Award and be recognized for this honor. I got a lot of phone calls and emails after I had won congratulating me. I have been at the railroad for so many years — almost 30 now — and this job becomes a part of who you are...you just do the very best you can do. Everyone here at the railroad does a great job and that is what it’s all about — and after all these years it feels

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Marie’s colleagues like being on the same team with Marie!
Stephen DePalma's coworkers claim that he "soars like an eagle." But then what else would you expect from someone who has taken so many employees "under his wing"?

In his current post as Assistant Director of Conductor Compliance, Stephen is very aware that he has a direct impact on the quality of the railroad's service. He oversees the licensing of all conductors, primarily on the New Haven Line. (The FRA requires that all conductors, like engineers, be licensed.) Stephen was responsible for creating the program, based on FRA standards. His background makes him ideally suited for the task. He has done Conductor Training, and worked as an Operations Manager in Capital Construction, coordinating construction projects, track outages, flag requests, and maintaining the Roadway Worker Safety Program.

“I feel honored and privileged to have won the President's Award,” DePalma said. “It’s a special feeling because you are nominated by your peers and it’s great to know that your peers feel that you are worthy of such an award. I know it is a very competitive process, and I also know there are many hard-working and dedicated employees at Metro-North.”

Stephen takes a personal interest in our Conductors, and has been known to answer phone calls from students in distress, coming out in the middle of the night if needed to help them. He has been known to work an entire shift with a student to help them "get it." Stephen has guided countless new employees through tough times and is always there with a helping hand.

“It’s a special feeling to be recognized and I appreciate all the kind words from all the people that have reached out to me. I have received so many congratulatory emails and well wishes not only from my current coworkers but from other coworkers that I haven't seen or talked to in years.”

Known as a good listener, Stephen's advice and guidance are his strongest asset. He treats every employee with respect and kindness, and they are not afraid to seek him out. Chances are they will find him, too, as he makes himself available on a 24/7 basis, meaning even when he is on vacation.

Stephen knows what the first priority in the workplace is: Safety. That is why he is an unavering proponent of it, starting and ending his day talking about safety with employees. A problem solver with strong teaching skills and an infectious personality, Stephen is proof that being "professional"...
Thanks to Anthony Garcia, everyone at Metro-North is well connected!

Anthony, as part of his role as PEP Tariff Specialist, oversees the distribution and maintenance of all of Metro-North's smartphones, tablets, and other electronic devices. And since communications is an essential piece of Metro-North's daily operation (many employees are expected to be on call through their electronic devices 24/7), new accounts need to be set up right away, and employees who have trouble with their existing devices need them fixed immediately.

“It feels good to know that you have the support of your colleagues and your supervisors… it’s important to know that you can not only rely on them to be there for support, but they appreciate your efforts,” Garcia said. “You do what you do, you do your best and somewhere along the road they take notice of that. I really appreciate the recognition.”

Anthony does it all and more… he is an expert in the technical aspects of almost every model of phone. And, unlike your outside service provider, when you experience a problem, he will give you same-day turnaround or as close as he can get to it. He works collaboratively with the C&S department and IT to troubleshoot device issues, and maintain device accounts.

His reputation for good customer service is well known, and he will always have the answer to user questions. An example of his proficiency: Anthony handled the exchange from hundreds of Nextel devices to Sprint over a two-day period. He had to coordinate this effort with all Metro-North departments using cell service, and all service and contacts needed to be switched over while keeping track of each device. He then needed to update internal/external databases. His final task was to sort out all the Nextel devices and ship them out. And it all happened seamlessly! Instead of letting the constant demands of his job get to him, Anthony handles the constant flow of customers coming to him with device issues with respect and courtesy, going out of his way to meet every employee’s needs. And he is a true professional in his interactions with telecommunication vendors.

“My mom used to work at the railroad and she was here for a very long time – so she was ecstatic when I told her I won. I could finally say, ‘I beat you at something,’” he noted with a chuckle. “This award reinforces your approach on the job and reminds you to just keep doing what you’re doing.”

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Hurricanes and blizzards are not enough to stop Maria Generosa Olazo-Luardo. She is, according to her colleagues, her own force of nature!

Maria is like “having the equivalent of two people on the job,” Which is a good thing, since as Assistant Deputy Director in the Controller’s Office, she is primarily responsible for compiling financial information for insurance claims. Maria is used to working countless extra hours to meet the deadlines for insurance filings. In the course of her work, she regularly interacts with many internal and external departments that include state and federal agencies and Metro-North’s insurance provider. Her pleasant demeanor and advanced knowledge of financial matters always results in these sessions being positive and productive!

“I feel proud to have won this award because it is my peers who voted to recognize my value. I am most humbled as I know of several talented and motivated coworkers who are as, or even more, deserving,” Olazo-Luardo said. “I never thought that others, outside of my department, would have noticed my deep sense of responsibility and my caring for this company, my coworkers and the work that I do.”

When Superstorm Sandy and Hurricane Irene struck, and Metro-North faced insurance issues on a scale that had never been encountered in the company’s history, Maria eagerly spearheaded the effort to gather all the necessary data for insurance filings. As a result of her effort, Metro-North was the first agency to be reimbursed for the massive amount of damage that was sustained due to Sandy. She also devised a unique financial data compilation system that became the standard for all MTA agencies. Maria also manages audits from New York State. She holds the distinction of being the only person in the last 20-plus years to receive an unqualified order report from New York State—which is a report issued when there are no major issues found in an audit. This is an accomplishment that is nearly impossible to achieve. But it is not just the relationships with external contacts for which she is recognized. She is a mentor to her staff, working one-on-one with those who report to her, sharing her extensive knowledge and cross training them to improve their skills. Maria is a true team builder with a positive attitude, and exemplifies everything for which the President’s Award stands.

“I would like to think that the award not only energizes me, but my colleagues in the Controller’s Subsidy Department. After all, I could not have gotten this award without

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Karen L. Timko
Director Environmental Compliance & Services, General Counsel

Metro-North is a “greener” agency under Karen’s eco-friendly leadership.

Karen Timko is a true “LEED”-er. In her role as Metro-North’s Director of Environmental Compliance & Services, she is our chief proponent of LEED — Leadership in Energy & Environmental Design — and all things green on the railroad. The Environmental Compliance & Services Department was created in 2000 with Karen in mind. Back then, the railroad had 54 environmental violations. Since the department’s inception, and thanks to her hard work, we now only have three.

“I’m thrilled to receive this award and I am proud to be sharing this with my department, which has worked incredibly hard to boost and maintain Metro-North’s environmental reputation — as well as with Seth Cummins, our boss, who is always so supportive of our efforts,” Timko said. “This is a big deal because it’s like a pat on the back for all the work our department has put in. But it’s not just me and my department, it’s the entire railroad.”

Karen is an exceptional attorney, capable of dealing with federal, state and local officials, as well as representatives from various historic preservation and environmental protection groups. She is held in high regard by these external stakeholders. Her love of the environment and all things sustainable is apparent in her meticulous work. She is genuinely excited to move green initiatives forward, and brings a clear vision to every project in which she gets involved.

“The ENTIRE railroad, particularly the operating departments, has become environmental stewards and my department’s eyes and ears throughout the Metro-North territory. They are proactive and responsible and are amazingly helpful, whether it is to assist with clean-up of a spill, help advance an energy efficiency project or assure that hazardous and other regulated wastes are managed in the right way.”

Karen was the driving force behind an innovative large-scale recycling/repurposing effort that saved the railroad millions of dollars in fees formerly paid to outside contractors. Because the railroad cannot use chemicals on the right-of-way, Karen spearheaded the drive to finding a chemical-free solution to preventing slip-slide on our territory. Her efforts and research led to Metro-North using an environmentally friendly substance to pre-treat rails before leaves fall to limit slip-slide, and the train delays associated with it. Karen also played a large role in the design of 525 No. Broadway, which earned LEED Silver Star Certification—the first building at Metro-North to garner this distinction. Karen works closely with the Safety & Security Department to ensure all environmental rules and regulations are followed. And she always takes the time

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Our 525 N. Broadway facility got the silver (LEED certification) thanks to Karen’s guidance.
time. It’s nice to be appreciated by my fellow employees and supervisors after being a part of the railroad for almost 25 years.”
A master craftsman could not build a better recipient than Roberto for the President’s Award. His knowledge of his craft, his attention to detail, and the way he is respected by his peers are just a few of the many reasons he is deserving of this award.

Marie leads by example and treats everyone with respect and dignity. She is a manager’s dream in that she requires little, if any, supervision, no matter which side of the “fence” she is working on!

Marie Calandrelli

“Even though this is an individual award, there are many people here at Metro-North that have mentored me, supported me and have contributed to my personal growth and development. Also, I know many previous President Award winners and feel honored to have joined them.”

Stephen DePalma

does not preclude being personal. It, in fact, makes for better, more effective leadership.

Nominate Your Colleagues Today!

Find nomination forms on our Intranet, or from your home computer at www.yourmnr.org or call Kyle McCarthy, Manager – Special Events
212-340-4844
“Serving on the committee has been a terrific experience,” Tobachnick said. “At first I was nervous about holding someone’s fate in my hands. I wasn’t sure if I could devote the hours needed to do this job well, but I believed in the process enough to want to give it my all.”

Tobachnick soon discovered that for him it was all about relationships. “You work with the coordinators, with each other, with those you interview, and, yes, even with the nominees, who the committee members might not even know!”

“From the first relationship formed, I knew that I would be okay,” he noted. “Our committee coordinators, Kyle McCarthy and Meredith Conti, broke us into sub-groups, assigned us a bunch of nominees and put us to work. They did an excellent job watching over us to ensure we did an excellent job!”

The relationship with fellow committee members was vital to successfully finding the best inductees, Tobachnick explained. “We were open, honest and trusting with each other while sharing our findings.”

Once Tobachnick started vetting his assigned candidate, he started to also feel a certain bond with that person. “You hear praise heaped upon praise and soon, you can’t feel anything but admiration for them! And then you go to battle for them! Many of us spoke passionately about our nominees… the enthusiasm was contagious.”

“I have to say that the final vote was tough. The remaining individuals and teams were ALL more than talented, dedicated and accomplished. We had to focus even harder on who were the most outstanding of them all!” Tobachnick noted.

After this experience, Tobachnick realizes that we have A LOT of outstanding employees on this railroad, and urges everyone to nominate. “I want to encourage everyone here to open their eyes—look around you, see who does an excellent job on a daily basis, and nominate them for this prestigious award. Get involved and serve on the committee… it’s an experience I don’t regret for one second and one I’d like to revisit if ever asked!”

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2013 President’s Award/Team Excellence Selection Committee Members

**Lucia Accardo**, Applications Developer, IT
**John Burns**, Machinist, Operations – M of E
**Lydia Byer**, Manager – Administration, Human Resources
**David Epstein**, Assistant Director, Procurement & Material Management
**Tony Greco**, Manager – Administration, Office of the President
**Vahak Khajekian**, Assistant Deputy Director, Business Development – Facilities & Marketing
**Nick Kupec**, Manager, Safety & Security
**Alexander Lu**, Senior Specialist, Planning – Capital Planning & Program
**Peter Nikic**, Manager – Communications Training, C & S – M of W
**Autumn Paulacka**, Manager – Administration, Planning
**William Pond**, Supervisor Power Inspector, Power – M of W
**Andrea Ramos**, Operations Manager – On Board Services, Operations Services
**Robert Rodriguez**, Director – Diversity & EEO, Office of the President
**Kirk Thomas**, Conductor, Operation Services
**Brian Tobachnick**, Manager – Customer Service Administration, Customer Service & Stations
**Robert Vrablik**, Deputy Director, Operations – M of E

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Kyle McCarthy and Meredith Conti: Committee Coordinators
Karen L. Timko
to mentor others within, and outside, her department, keeping them updated on new regulations or courses and exchanging ideas and information.

“The railroad has seen its fair share of environmental troubles in the past – at one point Metro-North was listed in the media as one of the top polluters in New York State. Due to the issues that we had inherited when we were first created, there was definitely a low point for us. But over time we fixed these problems and now our reputation with the Department of Environmental Conservation, conservation groups and the public is vastly better. We have a reputation for being environmentally friendly, and we haven’t been fined in years — I am very proud to tell people in the environmental arena that I work for Metro-North.”

When she isn’t working on cleaning up our property, she takes time on the weekend to initiate wetlands clean-up efforts, getting “knee-deep” in the muck to remove trash, hypodermic needles and other debris fouling these important local ecosystems. Karen is continually seeking new ways to go green, to save the railroad money, and to make the world and Metro-North a better place.
Metro-North established its aggressive and comprehensive Station Enhancement Program to get station maintenance on a regular schedule and to improve the environment for our customers. The results of the initiative are a testament that management and labor can come together and produce a positive result for all.

The new “Station Gangs” report to work at a designated station, which means that there is no loss of productivity because there is no travel time. The entire shift is spent performing upgrades.

Under the Station Enhancement Program, everything that needs fixing gets done, starting with a fresh coat of paint. While the intensity of each project varies, all upgrade work includes: changing recycling bins if needed, replacing damaged protective film on windows that prevent scratches from ruining the glass, cleaning the station right-of-way (track), re-stenciling the “Watch the Gap” signs, repairing damaged edge board (the wooden strip between the platform and the train), replacing concrete benches with more comfortable wire ones, fixing shelter heaters, installing energy-efficient lighting, and power washing all station exterior surfaces, windows and overpasses.

Station Gangs are supplemented by sheet metal workers, plumbers, masons, carpenters, electricians and elevator mechanics—just about every trade is involved in this team effort.

The first year of the program (2010), two stations were painted: one small, Southeast, and one large, White Plains. Because of the success of the new approach, in 2011, a second gang was created and five stations were spruced up in Connecticut: Wilton; Cannondale; East Norwalk; Rowayton; and Springdale got the station enhancement treatment, including painting the shelters, replacing glass windows and installing new recycling containers. Metro-North’s partner, the Connecticut Department of Transportation (CTDOT), also painted most of these stations’ exteriors.

Other stations that got “the works” were New Hamburg, Beacon, Cold Spring, Garrison and Cortlandt—all on the Hudson Line.

In 2012, in addition to Bedford Hills and Katonah, “Gangs” worked at Chappaqua and Mount Kisco. Lead abatement also was completed at the station building at Peekskill, which then was repainted in its historic color scheme. And this year, work is occurring at Crestwood, Hawthorne, North White Plains, Pleasantville, Valhalla and Sloatsburg.

The work is scheduled so there is little or no impact on customers’ commutes. If tracks must be taken out of service so that employees can work safely to paint the overpasses from high rail bucket trucks, to clean the tracks or to install edge boards, the outages are scheduled during off-peak periods. The Station Enhancement Program defines our Vision 2013 goal of teamwork.
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responsibilities.

“Most importantly, they always work safely — and look to see that others do the same. They make a huge difference in the lives of their colleagues, and our customers. They are an inspiration to all of us.

“That is what excellence is all about at Metro-North. And the President’s Award was created to recognize the contributions of these individuals.”

Permut noted that great things also happen when motivated employees from different departments come together as a team and create an outstanding product or service. “That is why we developed our Team Excellence Award,” he said. “The award is given to multi-departmental teams whose efforts: improve our external or internal customer service; enhance the customer experience on Metro-North; and improve safety and productivity in the workplace.

“The outstanding work of both individuals and groups is something that we will always take time to celebrate at Metro-North.”

Let’s meet this year’s award winners in this special edition of On Track.”

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On the Road to Vision 2013

Here’s how the railroad stands in some of our key goals for 2013 as of October 31, 2013:

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For more information, visit our Intranet at www.mnr.org or our Extranet at www.yourmnr.org.

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