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### Guest Column/Op Ed Submission

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## **Fort Wayne Citilink, Yesteryear**

The Fort Wayne Downtown Improvement District Holiday Window Contest theme of “Yesteryear” provided us the opportunity to look through our collection of bus memorabilia for our window display. In addition to the 1950’s photo of electric trolleys on Calhoun Street (looking Northeast from Washington Street), that became a painting by Terry Ratliff in 2002 and a window display by Paint the Town Graphics in 2015, we filled a display case for our employees to enjoy (photos attached).

Public transportation in Fort Wayne has a long history, dating back to the **Citizens Street Railroad** Company’s introduction of horse drawn railcar service on Calhoun Street in 1872. In 1900, the extensive Indiana Interurban Railway system connected Fort Wayne to Huntington and beyond.

In the 1950-60’s trolley/motor bus service was provided by the **Fort Wayne Transit** Company. The administrative/maintenance facility on Leesburg was built in 1955 and Lewis Sims was hired; the first African American bus driver in Fort Wayne. Mr. Sims recalls “Some drivers quit, some riders waited for the next bus or made negative remarks but the General Manager, Donald Walker, some of the drivers and some passengers stood behind me and more followed along after”. Mr. Sims joined the ranks of 580 drivers as a part-time Bus Operator at 84 cents/hour and 36 years later retired number one in seniority.

Ed Brager was hired as a Bus Mechanic Apprentice in 1968 when the system became the government owned **Fort Wayne Public Transportation Corporation**. He recalls working on the oldest bus in the fleet - built in 1947. He started while still in High School so he learned on the job, from the more seasoned mechanics, how to read the manuals and rebuild when there wasn’t money to replace. Susan Walter remembers becoming a Bus Operator in 1979: “When I started as a driver, the buses were cold and drafty. There was no power steering and many thought a young girl wouldn’t be strong enough to turn the big bus steering wheel around the corners, I showed them!” These days the buses, and maintenance tools, are cutting edge

