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Gatobu, named HDPT director, credits staff for department's success

HARRISONBURG, Va. – Gerald Gatobu knows what it takes to keep the city's public transit system running every day. He's tracked it minute by minute from his desk as interim director of the Harrisonburg Department of Public Transportation, and he's seen it from behind the wheel when he steps in to help transport residents.

It's that dedication to the City's mission, the welfare of HDPT's riders and the happiness of his nearly 200 employees that has earned Gatobu the position as the permanent director of the City's largest department.

Harrisonburg City Manager Eric D. Campbell officially named Gatobu as the director of

HDPT today, keeping the transportation expert as the head of a department he has helmed as interim director since April. Gatobu's efforts leading HDPT in that time have solidified his standing as one of the City of Harrisonburg's most dynamic directors, and set the growing department up for a bright future.

"During his term as Interim Director, Gerald has shown himself to be an inspiring and dedicated leader. I am confident he will continue that leadership with HDPT and take it to a new level of customer service," Campbell said. "Public transportation is vital to our mission of serving all of Harrisonburg's residents, and Gerald, his operators and everyone at HDPT are remarkable ambassadors of all we seek to do in the community. I look forward to seeing what this team achieves in the years to come."

For Gatobu, the selection is not only a validation of all he's accomplished, but also of what his team has done for the City's residents.

"It's the people... I can't stress enough how good I have it with our staff here," Gatobu said. "I have people who are dedicated to HDPT and our riders. I value them and I wish people could know more about them, because they make this place run, they get kids to school, they are invested in our community. Some of our operators have been working here for more than 30 years. This team is invaluable."

Gatobu joined HDPT as assistant director in May 2016, and has helped shape the department's growth every step of the way since then. As interim director, Gatobu and his team integrated new technology into how HDPT helps staff keep track of their hours and schedule, streamlining the process and supporting staff as they manage their routes. His time as interim



(Above) Gerald Gatobu has been named director of the Harrisonburg Department of Public Transportation.

has also seen the development and implementation of the Now in Color campaign, which has prioritized consistent, timely service for JMU routes to better serve students.

For Gatobu, understanding the needs of the community is vital to moving HDPT forward. That's why it's not unusual to see him taking an active role in transporting residents from time to time.

"Me driving gives me that perspective of, when people come to talk to me about things they are experiencing while driving, I can relate to what they are talking about," Gatobu said.

Moving into 2020, Gatobu is focused on continuing to grow that relationship with bus operators and finding ways to gain more input into how to improve the experience for staff and riders. He believes that "if we take care of our drivers, they will take care of our transit customers." He also hopes to continue improving HDPT policies, and to work closer with the City's other departments, Harrisonburg City Public Schools and JMU to see how HDPT can assist them.

But ultimately, he's looking forward to continuing to serve the people of Harrisonburg.

"Thank you to our riders," Gatobu said. "We have good people in this community, and we do this for them. We appreciate our riders and our community, and your support of all that we do."

The City of Harrisonburg is centrally located in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia. It is home to approximately 54,000 people. More information about the City of Harrisonburg is available online at www.HarrisonburgVA.gov.



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