

Oscar Epstein Record of 65 Years Working for Massachusetts Transportation

Headline in Boston.com

MassDOT employee Oscar Epstein, 90, pauses – just briefly – for a birthday at work

Link <http://tinyurl.com/ntyn2fn>

A guest post from transportation reporter emeritus Eric Moskowitz:

Oscar Epstein, a World War II veteran who helped design Route 128, marked the beginning of his 65th year as a state highway engineer the other day without any attention, which is just the way he likes it. But for his 90th birthday today, he gave in to a little fanfare.

“I told them no,” said a smiling Epstein, who until now had successfully fended off birthday parties at work every year since they got him a cake for his 80th. “They wait for the [10-year] plateaus.”

After a coworker took him to lunch at Legal Sea Foods, Epstein - who reviews highway and bridge design contracts for the Department of Transportation - entered a sixth floor conference room at the Transportation Building to cheers. Three dozen project-management colleagues waited to share cake, coffee, and a citation from Governor Deval Patrick, read by Frank DePaola, administrator of MassDOT’s Highway Division.

“Any words of wisdom?” one coworker called, after DePaola finished reading. “Speech!” someone else said, and then another. “Speech!”

“I really appreciate you’re all here,” Epstein said, shrugging. “I don’t know why they single out me for birthdays. Everybody has a birthday.”

“Not everyone has 64 years of experience,” someone suggested. And another: “Cause you’re awesome!”

“I hope to be around a few more years. Maybe yes, maybe no,” Epstein said, blushing a little. “It depends on, you know,” and he gestured skyward. Then he cut the cake.

After [the Globe profiled Epstein last year](#), the oldest of the roughly 35,000 public employees who work under the governor, he heard last winter from a few long-lost colleagues and acquaintances, including a woman from his old neighborhood – he grew up in the razed West End – eight years his senior. “And the guy at the post office recognized me,” said Epstein, reenacting it with slight bemusement. “ ‘That guy! I saw him in the paper.’ ”

But otherwise, 2013 was a lot like the ones that preceded it. Epstein dutifully rode the Green Line downtown every day, turned his eagle eye to the documents before him, stayed out of trouble, cared for his pet bunny Horatio, and cherished the memory of his late wife, Adele, who will be gone four years in March. And again, after more than 15,000 workdays with the state, he gave little thought to retirement.

“He’s an amazing guy,” said colleague Jack Mallios, whose “can’t wait till your 100th!” line on a card for Epstein drew a laugh from the birthday honoree. “Sets the bar high for all of us.”

Still, Epstein suggested he might not see 100 at work. Administrative assistant Gertrude Brown, who had led the crowd in the “Happy Birthday” song, looked aghast. “I’m not ready for you to go yet. It’s too early!” she said, wrapping Epstein in an embrace. “I don’t have any grandchildren yet for you to see.”

A few people lingered as the party approached half an hour, going back for refills on coffee or cake. By then, Epstein was already in the hall—“I guess the party’s breaking up,” he had said, quietly excusing himself—another document in his hand.