



**Tony Au:** A gift for coordination

At 5 p.m., when most people are heading home from work, *Outstanding Railroader* **Tony Au** is clocking in for his usual shift as a bridgetender. Right up until he leaves in the wee hours of the next morning, Tony has to keep on his toes.

Tony operates the Second Narrows lift bridge, a vertical lift railway bridge that crosses the Burrard Inlet and connects Vancouver with the North Shore. The bridge is part of the route for the rail traffic that crosses between Thornton Yard and the Lynn Creek Yard in Vancouver.

“My job is to coordinate the rail and marine traffic, which means lifting the bridge whenever a boat needs to pass through and lowering it when a train is approaching so that it can get across,”

Tony explains. Approximately 20 trains and an equal amount of boats are scheduled to pass through what is called the *Second Narrows Bridge Managed Restricted Area* every day.

Tony also controls the switches for the rail lines, giving the trains the signal to cross the bridge. The trick, he says, is “to coordinate it so that the trains don’t have to slow down or stop because of marine traffic.” While this juggling act may seem complicated, after 20 years on the job, Tony assures us, that to him, “it’s a piece of cake.”

But that kind of precise coordination actually requires meticulous attention, points out Plant Maintenance supervisor, **Don Brears**. “He’s basically like an air traffic controller,” he elaborates. “Tony’s



ability to juggle the incoming rail and marine traffic without becoming frazzled is one of the main reasons he was moved up from *Skilled Railroader* to *Outstanding Railroader*,” specifies Don. “There’s constant information coming in on the marine and train radios plus a couple of phones ringing all the time. But Tony never panics.”

Maybe that’s because he has faced his share of challenges in life. In 1977, Tony moved to Canada from Hong Kong at the age of 32 with his wife and four-year-old daughter to start a new life. He soon landed a job at CN, slowly moving up the ranks from painter, to carpenter and then eventually to bridgetender in 1985. In the intervening years, CN has provided both him and his wife Yinmei, who retired from CN in 2007, with a comfortable living.

**Now just seven months from retirement, Tony is looking forward to indulging his two great passions: growing hybrid tea roses and traveling throughout Southeast Asia to some of his favourite places: Thailand, Singapore, Korea, Japan and, of course, Hong Kong.**

