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IMMEDIATE

TRANSCRIPT: Metro-North President Catherine Rinaldi Appears on WVOX 1460

MTA Metro-North Railroad President Catherine Rinaldi appeared on WVOX 1460's "Good Morning Westchester" with Dennis Nardone and Tonny Guido to discuss Phase 1 of the Mid-Hudson Valley reopening and Metro-North's Essential Service Plan enhancements.

A transcript of the interview appears below.

Dennis Nardone: This is Dennis and Tonny morning here on the 28th day of May, a Thursday. Good Morning Westchester, your morning information center for news, weather, traffic, guest interviews, your phone calls from 6 a.m. to 9 a.m., Monday through Friday. So, we are live from the Golden Apple, Westchester County, the heart of the Queen City to Sound and heard around the world on Alexa and WVOX.com. 1460 AM, Ms. Tonny, please bring on our guest.

Tonny Guido: Yes, on the line we have with us MTA Metro-North President, Catherine Rinaldi.

Nardone: Good morning Ms. Rinaldi.

Catherine Rinaldi: Good morning, it's so good to be with you today.

Nardone: Yes and very nice to hear your voice because you are the first female president. Is that not true?

Rinaldi: That is absolutely true, first female president of Metro-North.

Nardone: Congratulations on that, and boy with a job like yours a lot of challenges, and now a lot of changes and plus right in the heart of this COVID-19, man I'm sure you've been very, very busy.

Rinaldi: I mean, it's been obviously a crazy couple of months, but, even before we get going, I want to talk about how wonderful our employees have been throughout this pandemic. They come to work every day, moving essential workers every day, keeping the region moving, so I want to give a shout out to the Metro-North workforce they've been doing an unbelievable job.

Guido: Yes, we agree.

Nardone: Yes and you're in charge of the midnight crew too, as well?

Rinaldi: I'm in charge of all of them, yes, absolutely.

Nardone: Yeah and there was a little controversy to that but whatever, the bottom line is they say station and they're cleaned and if you watch on the monitor, a TV, they got a little challenging job themselves because they have to get all dressed up in their gear and be very careful and get it all cleaned up for the residents and people who use the transportation, so kudos to them.

Rinaldi: Yes, absolutely, it is something that our customers expect now, right? I mean, this has been, this has really changed I think a lot of how people view the world so we've been stepping up keeping stations clean, keeping our trains clean, you know, we clean stations twice a day, we're disinfecting the rolling stock every single day. So, you know, we're really trying to step up our cleaning and disinfecting protocols so that people feel comfortable riding every single day.

Guido: I have to say right away, you guys stepped right up, right away as soon as this happened you guys jumped right on it started cleaning and you know, I saw a lot of it on TV that you guys did a real good job.

Rinaldi: Well thank you, I really appreciate that, thank you so much.

Nardone: Did you did you lose a lot to, have to, lay people off for a while or anything to that nature?

Rinaldi: I'm sorry, did you say lay people off? We didn't lay anybody off.

Nardone: Well, ok.

Rinaldi: We lost people, in terms of the virus, yeah. I mean we lost, I think 150 people tested positive but the good news is that we've brought more than 1,000 back to work. So we really feel like we've turned the corner with respect to people being out because of COVID, and we unfortunately had lost two employees, which is obviously terrible tragedy for their families. But we really, we're bringing a lot of people back to work now, more every week and we feel like with respect to the impact of the virus on the workforce, we've really turned the corner and we're back better than ever.

Nardone: Speaking to Catherine Rinaldi, president of the MTA. Now because of decline of people need to work in the city you had some modified schedules, are you going to slowly but surely change the schedule or are we still on modified?

Rinaldi: We're both actually. So about a month ago we went to a very reduced schedule, which is essentially hourly service all day long, seven days a week. But the reopening of the Mid-Hudson region this week we added some additional trains, during peak hours just in case people started to come back to work and that went into effect this week. And then we have a full blown scheduled change that's going to go into effect Monday, June 15 that will restore more trains, and again, we're concentrating on the peak hours because that's when people tend to travel now that people are starting to come back to work, and as I said, that is going to effect on Monday, June 15. We're also looking, Metro-North is kind of unique in that we have a very robust reverse commute. So people will get on, for example at Fordham in the morning and they'll get off in White Plains because they have jobs up in White Plains. We're also looking very carefully at the reverse peak to see what we need to do there because given that the west, the Mid-Hudson is open but the New York City not yet, we're seeing a lot of traffic in the reverse direction too.

Nardone: Ms. Rinaldi, how about Grand Central with the restaurants. What's happening with all that?

Rinaldi: Many of them, most of them shut down, right? We have a lot of tenants in Grand Central, some stayed open, some are still open and we're gradually working with MTA Real Estate and the vendor who manages the tenants to bring certain of them back. Throughout this crisis the dining concourse has been closed because we've been running fewer trains, now that we're going to be reopening the dining concourse with the new schedule those tenants will gradually come back as well. So the terminal is still pretty quiet but as more and more people come back and as we open the lower level, people will start to see the tenants come back and it'll be a little bit, there'll be a little bit more activity in the terminal.

Nardone: Now your commuters, is there a way they can follow if there's any changes, like on a website or anything like that?

Rinaldi: Yeah, absolutely, all of that. I mean, we have, people can sign up for email alerts, we have a webpage that we regularly update, social media is a huge tool for the younger generation so we regularly use social media to communicate with our customers. So yeah, there's any number of ways that people can keep up to date with respect to the various changes in our service and what's going on.

Nardone: Anything you want to add before we close up?

Rinaldi: Well, I just want to say that we've been carrying essential workers really ever since this thing started in the middle of March, and we want to thank the people who've been staying home for staying home. But those of you who are starting to come back to work, who want to know whether it's safe to ride, we will get you where you want to go safely and reliably and we welcome you back and we will keep you safe.

Nardone: Alright one quick question, problems with the homeless, is that all been working and dealt with our mayor of New York?

Rinaldi: It's obviously a big societal issue. We've been working very, very closely with the MTA police to handle this issue and we're doing the best we can to manage a very complicated social issue.

Nardone: Yeah absolutely correct, it is a tough issue and you guys are doing a great job. I thank you, Catherine Rinaldi, president of the MTA for a few minutes and I hope we can talk again down the road.

Rinaldi: Thank you so much, everybody stay safe.

Nardone: Thank you and thank you for the service you guys provide that's for sure, I love riding the trains and they're doing a great job to keep it safe.