As we near the end of 2015, it is nice to take a few moments to think about everything we have to be grateful for. This year has been a full and eventful year for our country and for our WTS Connecticut Chapter.

As a Chapter, we have much to be thankful for. The 9th Annual Transportation Mini-Series was successful and our corporate partners continue to support us both with their generous contributions and by supporting our members. Their participation in our programs is central to our continued success. Our membership has grown and we are lucky to have many talented, knowledgeable people working with us to make the Chapter a success.

In anticipation of the New Year, we have already made some slight changes to our Committee chairs and board of directors. Starting in January, Amanda Marino (VN Engineers) will be taking over as secretary; Bonnie Torres (Urban Engineers) who was fulfilling this role while Amanda was out on Maternity leave will be the new events chair; and Alicia Leite (CTDOT) following a successful year as events chair will be assuming the responsibilities for our Newsletter. We are extremely appreciative of their efforts and for the efforts of all of our board members, committee chairs and members.

As a country, we have had some occasions for concern – situations that lead us to reflect on where we are and how we can move forward as a country and as a people. We must remain strong and continue to give back to those who are less fortunate than us. It is easy to look at the generosity of people like Bill Gates, Warren Buffett and Mark Zuckerberg and the billions of dollars that they give to various causes and think what do we have to offer, how can we make a difference? No matter how small, any time or effort spent to aide another person also has the added benefit of improving our life and the lives of those around us.

"Each person must live their lives as a model for others.” ~ Rosa Parks. It is hard to believe that it has been 60 years since Mrs. Parks refused to give up her seat on that bus – a woman using Public Transportation to make a statement. I am hoping that in the coming year, we can all continue to live our lives cognizant of the example we are setting for others.
Chapter Newsletter

Hike & Book Review

On a cold, yet sunny, Saturday morning in November WTS members gathered for a hike and book review in Giuffrida Park in Meriden. Focused on the conversation the group leisurely walked the length of Crescent Lake, discussing the books, How Women Lead by Sharon Hadary and Laura Henderson, eight success strategies. Agreeing to disagree with the author on sections and turning the discussion to why we do or don’t and how to make a difference, the group traversed their way to Chauncey Peak. With an elevation of 650 feet at its highest peak, the clear sky provided astounding views to the south and west, a chance for a lasting photo op and needed water break.

The group worked together for the steep, rocky descent, all the while sharing both personal professional stories.

The eight success strategies within How Women Lead are: Empower the Woman Leader Within, Own Your Destiny, Be the Architect of Your Career, Advocate Unabashedly for Yourself, Translate the Stories Number – Tell to Drive Strategic Results, Create Exceptional Teams, and Nurture Your Greatest Asset – You.

WTS Connecticut Regional Representative

WTS International is in the process of creating Regional Representative positions to enhance communications between International, the region and the chapters. The WTS Regional Council member will serve as a volunteer leader of WTS and represent their chapter within the council, while keeping the interest of all members in the region in mind. The Region Councils will collaborate with WTS International staff to develop events and activities that best support the region while also increasing membership. Specifically, Regional Councils are charged with:

- Providing leadership, guidance, and resources to support chapters and work closely with chapter leadership.
- Calling national attention to local industry initiatives and issues.
- Providing value and engagement opportunities for members within the region.
- Collaborating and share ideas with other regional council leaders.

Through an application process for eligible board members WTS Connecticut is proud to announce selection of our newly appointed WTS Connecticut Regional Representative Laurel Stegina. Laurel has served the Connecticut chapter in many capacities, including as President for the 2009/2010 term. Professionally, Laurel serves as Project Manager and the Lead Environmental Permitting Specialist within Fitzgerald & Halliday’s Connecticut office.

The Northeast Region is comprised of the following current WTS Chapters: Connecticut, Baltimore, Boston, Central PA, DC, Greater NY, Maine, Rhode Island, Toronto, Philadelphia, and Pittsburgh. The Northeast Region is the third region to be developed. WTS International’s goal is to create six WTS Regions (see map).
WTS International held its Annual Leadership Conference in Boston, MA, from November 12-14th. With its close proximity, the CT Chapter had strong representation with a number of WTS Connecticut, past and present, board members in attendance.

The program kicked-off with a welcome reception held at the New England Aquarium. Amongst chirping penguins and other aquatic life, attendees were welcomed and encouraged to stroll the aquarium with delectable food options on different levels. With over 150 attendees representing public and private entities from across the nation, the event provided a relaxed atmosphere to catch-up with old WTS friends and an opportunity to make new.

Friday morning came quick, starting with WTS International updates. Representatives from WTS International and the Foundation team as well as business leaders who mentor the newly formed leadership program were in attendance. Beverly Swaim-Staley, President and CEO, Union Station Redevelopment Corporation, and WTS International Chair, provided remarks, along with WTS International President and CEO, Marcia Ferranto.

The day proceeded onward with leadership training sessions that continued into Saturday. This year's program included: general informative sessions, collaborative round table and panel discussions, educational breakout sessions, networking opportunities, and innovative "Ignite" presentations. CT’s very own Sandy Dumas and Susan Baillargeon each provided an ignite session.

Upon the conferences close, a group walked to the city’s north end in support of a Central Virginia Chapter member’s mission of eating a cannoli from Mike’s Pastry. Pastry turned into lunch and lastly, into another lasting connection.

Still not a member of WTS CT? For information of how to join, contact Lisa Slonus at slonusl@wseinc.com

To all our WTS Members who have helped to put this Newsletter together and have volunteered their time to ensure that all our programs and events have been a success.

~ Thank You ~

We couldn’t do it without your support!

If you would like to submit an article for a future newsletter or have any ideas for articles, please email them to: sdumas@haks.net
WTS Connecticut Chapter held its 9th Annual Transportation Mini-Series ~ Technology and Transportation, on October 8th in Meriden.

Sessions included the transformation of New Britain through its Complete Streets program presented by Mark Moriarty, Director of Public Works, City of New Britain and Erika Rush of Urban Planning Group; Dr. Ugur Pasaogullari, Associate Professor of Mechanical Engineering & Associate Director of the Center for Clean Energy Engineering at the University of Connecticut shared his group’s research on hydrogen fuel cells; Alan Wiig, PhD and Assistant Professor of Community Development with the University of Massachusetts in Boston presented his research in Urban Geography which entails infrastructure studies, economic development and public policy.

This year’s student research project presenters included Annesha Enam, a PhD student in the Civil and Environmental Engineering department of the University of Connecticut. Her research compared multiple generations (GI Generation, Silent Generation, Baby Boomers, Generation X and Millennials) and their relationship with and requirements of transportation – good for planning and meeting future transportation needs. Nicole Prete, a senior engineering student also at University of Connecticut, discussed that university’s continuing Bridge Weigh-in-Motion program – a less disruptive method of determining if overweight vehicles are traveling Connecticut roadways.

Tiffany Jackson, WTS International Director of Membership and Chapter Development, was in attendance and provided details on the WTS membership drive taking place in October and the incentives for recruiting new members.

Prior to lunch, Michelle Hilary, Assistant Division Administrator with the CT Division of FHWA introduced our Keynote Speaker, BethAnn Rooney. Ms. Rooney serves as the Assistant Director of Port Commerce with the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey (PANYNJ) and is the coordinator for the Port’s Performance Task Force. She shared the course her career has taken and the role some of her mentors played along the way.

In keeping with our program of providing motivational and empowerment speakers during lunch, Monica Cornetti gave an uplifting talk on Gamification and how to make your team more confident.

Lunch was followed by the future of transportation - Autonomous Vehicles - presented by Lauren Isaac, Manager of Transportation
Sustainability at WSP Parsons Brinckerhoff and Linsey Willis, Director of External Affairs for the Contra Costa Transportation Authority presented information on developing policies and practices needed before we move into Autonomous vehicles.

Three Engineers from CTDOT contributed to the CTDOT Bridge Forum session. Priti Bhardwaj, PE, a Supervising Engineer in the Office of Bridge Consultant Design shared the history and future plans for the Gold Star Memorial Bridge (I-95 over Thames River between Groton and New London). Lesgie Ruiz, Project Engineer, Consultant Liaison Engineering, showed us the steps required and shared a time-elapsed video of a current “Bridge in a Backpack” project taking place in Weston, CT – the first project of this kind in Connecticut. Karen Riemer, PE, a Supervising Engineer in Asset Management, discussed the implementation of the new Structure Management System (SMS) and the current plans for the Asset Management Group and the Connecticut Department of Transportation.

BethAnn Rooney from PANYNJ finished the presentations with a panel discussion on Port Improvements and Productivity Issues. This diverse panel included: Lucy Ambrosino, Manager of Outreach for New York and New England; Laura Markham, Director of IT with Ports America; Peggy Mecca, CEO of Mecca and Son Trucking Co. and Josephine Johnson-Moore, International Logistics Manager with Preferred Brands.

Following the presentations, the contributors and attendees mingled and networked during the cocktail hour where the winners of the silent auction were announced. This year over $1000 was raised towards our scholarship fund. Many thanks to the Committee (Alicia Leite, Susan Baillargeon and their many helpers), the presenters and to our corporate sponsors whose support helps make this a success. We are already brain-storming for next year’s event!
Connecticut Chapter Welcomes New Members:

- Sarah Cote
- Jill Lee McLaughlin
- Candy Phillips
- Sandra Nafis
- Karen Riemer
- Maribeth Wojenski

Member Spotlight: Sofia Nirshberg

Mrs. Sofia Nirshberg is an accomplished individual that has done a lot for women in the Engineering Industry throughout her career. Sofia achieved her Master of Science in Civil Engineering in her home country of Ukraine in 1977. At just 26 years old, Sofia moved to the United States with her husband and daughter to start a new life. She found a job working as an entry-level engineer and after a few short years, decided to start her own company.

Sofia founded VN Engineers, Inc. with her partner, Ray Volpe, in 1983 and has participated in every transportation project since its inception. Mrs. Nirshberg tracks each project, reviews scheduling, and provides quality control for all engineering design and construction projects. She coordinates with clients, resolves disputes, and successfully manages all of the construction and condition inspection projects for small and major highways, bridges, and facilities.

Mrs. Nirshberg has been heavily involved with the WTS CT Chapter since she first joined many years ago. She served as a very active and influential president and has travelled all over the country to various conferences and events as a representative for the CT Chapter. She is an advocate for women in the industry and practices what she preaches. VN Engineers, Inc. is one of the only firms in the industry who employs nearly 45% women. Sofia is a natural born leader and a mentor to those she works with and WTS CT is honored to recognize her in this quarter’s Member Spotlight.

Summer Social:

On August 13, 2015 we held our Annual Summer Social at Paradise Vineyards in Wallingford. It was a beautiful warm summer evening for networking and socializing amongst colleagues and friends. Paradise Vineyards was great as always. It’s an amazing location and a local gem. The owners are always warm and welcoming to our organization. The Summer Social is free to attend and WTS Board members come together to provide a light selection of appetizers. We look forward to this event every year, as the summer begins to wind down. It’s a great opportunity to reconnect with others who have been busy with summertime activities. It is also at the Annual Summer Social that the new group of Mentors and Mentees meet for the first time and discuss the journey they are about to embark on. The Summer Social is a special event and we encourage all who can, to attend next year!
On May 29, 2015 15 female students and two teachers from John Winthrop Middle School in Deep River, CT attended a field trip to Groton-New London Airport and Kongsberg maritime training facility. This was a day of exposing girls to “non-traditional” careers for women and the possibilities of the STEM fields.

With so much to see and learn, the day was packed with many activities. Catherine Young, the director of business development for the five General Aviation airports for the Connecticut Aviation Authority, took time out of her schedule to facilitate the Groton-New London Airport tour. The group started off by touring the helicopter workshop and the students were able to see the different career possibilities from welding, wiring, and mechanics to working on the helicopter computer systems. Going into one of the helicopters was especially a treat for the girls. Moving to poolside, the girls saw the simulator for marine aircraft rescue and had an inspiring presentation.

The presentation and tour of Whalen's jet and the experience of touring Coastal Air's flight school was also a highlight with all of the presenters willing to share their stories of how they entered their chosen fields. The day concluded with a visit to the Kongsberg maritime training facility. Goeff Nichols led a great tour of how they program computers and create the graphics for their large ship simulators. The girls were then given the opportunity to use the simulator to pilot a large commercial ship through stormy waters on the Thames River. Things got a little rough as the students tried to avoid obstacles like small crafts, bridges, and the coastline.

When asked what they thought of the trip the students responded with, “It was so cool” and “I never imagined all the different jobs people can do at an airport.” Their teacher Ms. June Plecan had this to say, “It was a truly awesome day that I know has guided these girls in their image of how they will fit into the world.”
Corporate Sponsor Highlight

Student Outreach- Transportation Mini-Series Scholarship

The Student Outreach Committee launched an opportunity for two student scholarships for women pursuing studies in a STEM field. Vannesa Kello was our inaugural scholarship recipient.

Ms. Kello is a senior at University of Connecticut and will graduate in May with a BS in Civil Engineering. Vannesa has a specific interest in all things transportation. Due to the heavy core classes required of her major, Vannesa makes use of any resources outside the classroom that will grow her knowledge on transportation. She has attended speakers in the Hartford area as well as the 22nd Congress for New Urbanism in Buffalo, New York.

Ms. Kello attended the TMS and was paired with several women professionals throughout the day. The committee asked her to provide us with a summary of her experience and she stated, “I left the seminar with the desire to tell others about the new knowledge I had just gained” and “I loved meeting the professional women engineers at the seminar as it was nice to connect with people who were once in my shoes”. We look forward to seeing what the future holds for Ms. Kello.
On Saturday, September 19th 2015, the Connecticut Department of Transportation, with assistance by the staff of Parsons Brinckerhoff (Program Managers), opened the new southbound Pearl Harbor Memorial Bridge to walkers as part of the Grand Opening Celebration.

The staff was thrilled to see the turnout was more than they could have hoped for, over 9500 attendees! They came on bikes and on foot, pushing strollers and walking dogs to enjoy the day of festivities, of which there were plenty.

The day began with a Dedication Ceremony which included speakers Governor Daniel Malloy, Senator Richard Blumenthal, Congresswoman Rosa DeLauro, Board of Alders President Tyisha Walker, FHWA Division Administrator Amy Jackson-Grove, Commissioner of Veteran’s Affairs Sean M. Connelly and CTDOT Deputy Commissioner Anna Barry.

During the Dedication, plaques were presented to Jack Stoeber and Floyd Welch, survivors of Pearl Harbor, along with Jerry Lehr in honor of his late father, William Lerh, also a survivor. Additional plaques were presented to two individuals who worked on the original bridge construction project in the 1950’s, Jack Parillo and Jim McConnell.

Throughout the entire day multiple food trucks were on hand to feed the crowd. Additional displays and activities were set up by Canal Dock Boathouse, Fun Tower Radio, CTDOT Work Zone Safety, and a historical review area by Parsons Brinckerhoff and the CTDOT.

The Bridge opened to traffic on September 27th 2015, ahead of schedule and budget. It will have a lifespan of 100 years and carry over 140,000 cars daily.

The entire Project team celebrated an exciting, fun filled, successful event, years in the making.
Corporate Sponsor Highlight

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WTS Connecticut - Communication and Impressions Professional Development (PD) - February 17, 2016
WTS Connecticut - Legislative Breakfast - February 23, 2016
WTS - Boston - Luncheon & Annual Meeting - December 17, 2015 - 11:30 AM - 1:30 PM
WTS - Boston - New Year’s Reception - January 28, 2016 - 5:00 PM - 7:30 PM
WTS - Greater New York - Annual Meeting - January 28, 2016 - 5:00 PM - 7:30 PM
WTS - Greater New York - Emerging Women Leaders, training - February 23, 2016 - 1:00 PM - 2:00 PM
WTS - Philadelphia - Annual Awards Banquet - December 10, 2015 - 5:00 PM - 7:30 PM
WTS International - Winter Reception - January 10, 2016 - 5:30PM - 7:00PM at the Liberty Ballroom in Marriott Marquis, Washington DC (coincides with 96th Annual TRB)

Annual Transportation Funding Forum - December 16, 2015: 9 AM - 12 PM at the Legislative Office Building in Room 2C
SWE - Holiday Party: Gingerbread Houses & Christmas Ornament Decorating - December 17, 2015 from 6PM. (for more details email: tsimmons491@gmail.com)
Transportation Research Board (TRB) - January 10, 2016 through January 14, 2016 - 96th Annual Meeting, Washington DC.
Where does a small town public works department turn for affordable training for its employees? Where does a municipal public works department go to share best practice and critical operating information with transportation professionals in almost every other town in Connecticut with just one click? Where do most towns in Connecticut go for up to date emergency management information, even during the emergency?

They go to WTS’s 2015 Woman of the Year Donna Shea and her staff at the Technology Transfer (T2) Center at UCONN’s Connecticut Transportation Institute. As director of the T2 Center, Donna has been working tirelessly to bring a plethora of positive changes to the transportation industry locally, regionally, and nationally.

Donna has transformed the level of professionalism in the public works community by providing valuable training that had been previously unavailable or unaffordable. Over the last 15+ years she has taken the T2 Centers offerings from 2 certificate programs and approximately 25 classes per year to 5 certificate programs and in excess of 100 classes per year, aimed at all levels of a transportation professional’s career. Public works directors and users of the T2 programs consistently express their satisfaction with the training itself, and with the increased level of professionalism and pride that the training brings to the participants. Mark Carlino, Director of Public Works for the Town on Manchester, stated, “Staff members are not only trained to better and more safely perform their daily job functions, they are more aware of how vital their role is within the entire transportation system within their local community and beyond.”

As if that weren’t enough, she has also implemented a Roadway Safety Circuit Rider Program and a Traffic Signal Systems Circuit Rider Program, which provide an unprecedented level of interaction and direct training opportunities to all Connecticut municipalities.

When it comes to making connections, Donna and her staff host an enormously popular listserv that instantly connects over 500 municipal and state transportation professionals to each other. This service allows public works professionals around the state to share best practices and provide technical assistance to each other. These opportunities and resources were not readily available to most transportation professionals until she made them available through the growth of the T2 Center.

Donna is a tremendous resource to the industry on many other fronts, as well. She advocates for municipal needs by representing the public works community on the State Highway Safety Plan Steering Committee, Connecticut’s State Transportation Innovation Council, The Connecticut Traffic Records Coordinating Committee, the Connecticut Advanced Pavement Laboratory Committee, and the Governors Highway Safety Council, just to name a few. Donna has been instrumental in bringing many diverse partners into the transportation conversation in Connecticut including DEEP, DEHMS, CCM, CRCOG, and APWA. Her colleagues refer to the “Shea Magic” Donna uses to move numerous sectors of local and state transportation leaders to new levels of cooperation, openness, and creativity. With her broad reach Donna is able to provide information and sage advice to those trying to connect with Connecticut’s public works community. There have been several instances when Donna interceded to help towns and state agencies come together to discuss an issue and come to a resolution that worked for both sides. Some examples of this are with emergency storm response, storm water regulations changes, and most recently with paving specifications. She is an honest broker of information and a humble moderator- she just wants the best results for all involved, not the accolades or credit for having gotten it done.

Her leadership skills have also gained her an excellent reputation regionally and nationally. The T2
Center is part of FHWA’s Local Technical Assistance Program and is one of 58 programs across the country that provide local technical assistance to the municipal and state transportation community. Donna has served as President Elect of the National LTAP Association (NLTAPA) and has served on the FHWA LTAP/TTAP Strategic Planning Committee and the FHWA LTAP Clearinghouse Steering Committee. She is currently Co-Chair of the NLTAPA Partnership work group. She is much sought after for input and advice by the management of the LTAP Program, other Center Directors, and is highly regarded by the LTAP Community as a whole. Regionally, she has been actively involved on several fronts, from participation on the education committee of the New England Chapter of the APWA to helping coordinate the New England Transportation Workforce Development Summit to helping develop a strategic plan for a multi-state research program.

It is well known that having Donna involved in your project will ensure a quality product or outcome. She is a hardworking, dedicated professional who will step up and get things done. Donna’s commitment and service to the Transportation Industry in Connecticut have been recognized by the New England Chapter of the American Public Works Association with a Meritorious Service Award and by the University of Connecticut’s School of Engineering with an Outstanding Staff Award.

When asked recently what she considers her greatest accomplishment Donna had this to say, “When the town of South Windsor said, “you have made a difference in how we view and approach our jobs in the public works profession”, I could not have been more proud. Over the years, through our team’s efforts, I have watched 169 separate towns come together as a sharing, learning community and build solid relationships that will help the transportation workforce in CT succeed in the future.” Donna’s goal, indeed, the legacy she would like to leave, is “that every resident in Connecticut understands and appreciates the value of their public works department and these professional continue to rise to meet the professional expectations we set for them in our educational programs.” As goals go, this is a lofty one, but one that is making such great strides. Donna and her staff are, almost single handedly, responsible for bringing public works employees from the realm of unskilled laborers up to the real world of highly skilled, licensed, and trained professionals.

Donna’s impeccable work ethic and mentoring skills are most evident in the way she leads her surprisingly small team, which consist of primarily women. They value her example as she empowers them to be the best they can be. Donna seeks opportunities to highlight their work and accomplishments and supports their individual professional development and growth. She admits to having many mentors throughout her career, but one that had the most influence on her professional development is Dr. Sandy Bell at the University’s Adult Learning Program. According to Donna, Dr. Bell is the “consummate professional and the epitome of someone who values helping others achieve their goals.”

The spirit of sharing, mentoring, and learning together is echoed in the sentiments of her staff. Mary McCarthy, who works for Donna, had this to say,

_Thanks to Donna, we have a quote by Margaret Mead in her office; “Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world; indeed it is the only thing that ever has.” Due to her leadership and mentorship, I have no doubt I live it every day._

Such tributes are hard to come by but if you knew Donna, you’d know the sincere, genuine and caring individual who truly believes that working together is the best way to work in Connecticut.
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