



# MONTHLY NEWSLETTER

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## A MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

BY TONYA SAXON

We are getting close to the end of an unforgettable year. From the recent Tropical Storm Zeta to COVID-19 and everything else in between, I am sure I am not the only one ready to ring in the new year. WTS Atlanta continues to closely monitor the information being provided by federal, state and local officials regarding COVID-19. We look forward to getting together in person. In the meantime, we will continue to host inspiring and informative webinars. As always, I encourage you to join the WTS Atlanta Facebook, Instagram and LinkedIn pages so that you can stay up to date with WTS Atlanta. WTS Atlanta continues to be a resource for you as we navigate through the rest of this year. Thank you for your continued trust, loyalty and patience. **#WeAreWTS**

WTS  
ATLANTA

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# MEMBERS ON THE MOVE

## **Helen McSwain**

Helen McSwain, Senior Vice President and National Transit Director for Rohadfox Construction Control Services Corporation, was recently selected to serve as vice-chair of the Clayton State University Foundation. The Clayton State University Foundation has appointed leaders in legal counsel and construction management to head the university's efforts to increase financial support for student retention and academic success.

Helen is also an alumna of Leadership Atlanta and the American Public Transportation Association Leadership Programs. Her recent awards and recognitions include the 2020 ACEC 100 Influential Women in Georgia Engineering; 2020 WTS Atlanta Top Women to Know; and 2020 COMTO National Women Who Move the Nation. Helen currently serves as a Director at Large on the WTS International Board of Directors.



## **Claudia Bilotto**

Claudia Bilotto, Vice President of WSP USA's Atlanta office was appointed to the ACEC Georgia Board of Directors. In this role, she will be a voice for the business of engineering in Georgia, focusing on the organization's value proposition: leadership development, business resources, business development, and political advocacy for policies that positively impact the interests of the engineering industry.

Claudia, who was president of Atlanta's WTS chapter from 2007-2009, has successfully led pursuits and delivered projects for clients such as the Georgia Department of Transportation, Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority, the State Road and Tollway Authority, the Georgia Regional Transportation Authority, the Atlanta Regional Commission, Atlanta Beltline, the City of Atlanta, and many counties. As area manager, she will continue to engage with clients while leading WSP Atlanta transportation operations.



# HAPPY THANKSGIVING FROM WTS ATLANTA

For many of us, Thanksgiving is going to look a lot different from what we are used to. I think it is safe to say that we all miss being able to gather with family and friends, but that does not mean that we don't have things to be thankful for. Here at WTS Atlanta, we are thankful for every, single one of you. Every member. Every friend. Every supporter. Every corporate sponsor. Every guest speaker. Every panelist. Every scholarship recipient. You all are an integral part of making WTS Atlanta the amazing chapter that it is. We are thankful to everyone who stuck with us as we switched our programs from in person to online. We are thankful for the amazing feedback and encouragement that you all provide. We know that 2020 has been a challenging year, but even with those challenges, we are choose to give thanks. Happy Thanksgiving.



## 2020 VIRTUAL SCHOLARSHIP AND CHAPTER AWARDS RECAP

For the first time in WTS Atlanta history, the Annual Scholarship and Chapter Awards Celebration was held virtually. Although we may not have all been side by side at the Georgia Aquarium, make no mistake, it was a fabulous event. Our co-hosts, Tonya Saxon (WTS Chapter President) and Ashley Frasca (WBS Traffic Reporter), made viewers feel as if they were audience members for a very special edition of a daytime talk show. Not only did Tonya and Ashley announce this year's scholarship and chapter award recipients, but they also made a very special announcement--Corporate partner benefits for all 2020 corporate partners are being extended through 2021. This extension is just a small way of thanking all of our generous sponsors for their support during what has been a most unusual year. Congratulations to all of the winners and thank you to all of our corporate sponsors.



# 2020 SCHOLARSHIP RECIPIENTS

WTS Atlanta congratulates all of its 2020 scholarship recipients. We are so incredibly proud to have each and every one of you in this year's cohort and cannot wait to see how you will contribute to the field of transportation. Congratulations, ladies.



**Melissa Holder**  
Kennesaw State University  
2020 Molitoris Leadership Scholarship



**Yangjiao Chen**  
Georgia Institute of Tecnology  
2020 Helene M. Overly Memorial Graduate Scholarship



**Lawonna Stevens**  
Kennesaw State University  
2020 Leadership Legacy Scholarship for Graduates



**Kicerna Turpin**  
Clark Atlanta University  
2020 Sharon D. Banks Memorial Scholarship for Undergraduates

# PRESENTING SPONSORS



The employees of HNTB's Atlanta office are proud to create a stronger, more connected region through infrastructure solutions. HNTB serves as the Program Management Consultant of Georgia Department of Transportation (GDOT)'s Major Mobility Investment Program (MMIP), which will be delivered through innovative methods such as Design-Build and Public-Private Partnerships, allowing GDOT to accelerate construction schedules. HNTB also supports the GDOT in roadway design, bridges, planning, traffic, communications, geospatial technology and environmental services. The firm provides planning and support services to MARTA on the Authority's largest investment program in over 40 years, MARTA 2040, which will rehabilitate the existing system and expand transit in the region.

Partnering with WTS Atlanta aligns with HNTB's dedication to building the future of transportation through the advancement of women. Through WTS, HNTB employees are provided with opportunities to expand their professional networks, develop lifelong career skills and provide mentorship to the next generation of female leaders. HNTB Atlanta is proud to have many employees that are members of WTS Atlanta including Charlotte Weber, Board member and VP of Programs, Iris Ortiz, Mentor-Protégé Program co-chair, and Jennifer Schultz, Transportation YOU co-chair.



WSP is one of the world's largest and fastest-growing engineering professional services firms. We foster a work environment of equal opportunity where all employees experience a true sense of belonging, recognition, value and purpose. WSP is working to ensure that our leadership team, employees, work environment and strategies continue to inspire an inclusive and diverse culture across the organization. WSP has undertaken this mission to strengthen our values as not only the right thing to do, but also a business imperative.

Dedication to fostering diversity in the workplace and support for the efforts of WTS have been hallmarks of WSP for many years. WTS International Chair, Paula Hammond, is our Transportation Market Sector Lea, and WSP is an Atlanta Chapter Diamond Sponsor and a Platinum sponsor of WTS International. We believe in the WTS mission and the opportunities it provides to its membership. WSP sees the benefits of the WTS network in developing its female employees professionally and encourages membership and participation in WTS. WSP also supports the WTS Executive Leadership and Mid-Level Career Leadership programs, where women can learn leadership skills, interpersonal communications, and network with other women from across the nation. WSP women have served in significant leadership positions within WTS, and the firm and its employees have been recognized by WTS with numerous awards.

WSP has 43,000 talented people in more than 550 offices across 40 countries, including engineers, technicians, scientists, architects, planners, surveyors, program and construction management professionals, and various environmental experts. The Atlanta office provides professional services for clients including the Georgia Department of Transportation, the Georgia State Road and Tollway Authority, MARTA, the City of Atlanta, Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport and other local jurisdictions and municipalities.



# OUR SPONSORS

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- State Road and Tollway Authority

## AN IN-DEPTH CONVERSATION WITH JANNINE MILLER

Earlier this month, WTS Atlanta Secretary, Leanna Pierre, sat down with Jannine Miller, Director of Planning for the Georgia Department of Transportation.

**Leanna:** Thank you so much for making the time to chat with me today. I have been looking forward to this. Before we jump into the questions about your career and the twists and turns you’ve taken along the way, I want to ask you what it has been like working during the pandemic.

**Jannine:** Everyone has experienced their own challenges and benefits over the past seven months. What I have found at the Planning Division of GDOT is how productive we all have been, while predominantly working from home. I am able to take so many more meetings because they are being held virtually. And we can be present for important meetings and discussions virtually, which is much quicker than having to drive more than two hours to attend. We can simply click in and interact with people from all over the state instantly and that has been a huge benefit. That said, I wish I was able to walk around the office to talk one-on-one with our Planners and technical staff, and I do miss the in-person fellowship. And, if I might add, as we continue efforts to progress and advance, I think it’s a good idea to be mindful to maintain an online presence in a professional way, allowing our talents, skills, and personality to come through.





**Leanna:** Yes, it sounds kind of like branding, both professional and personal and being sure that brand continues to be established over time. It is not something that happens overnight. You've certainly firmly established your brand in the transportation field, but tell me, how did you get into transportation? Everyone has a story. Some people fell into it. Others always knew that it was their path. What is your transportation story?

**Jannine:** My story started when I was young. I didn't know transportation was an actual career. But I knew that I loved toys related to transportation! I played with matchbox cars instead of Barbie dolls. I can distinctly remember being at my grandparents' house and my grandmother gave my sister and me a big white sheet and a pack of markers, to keep us busy and let us be creative. Well, I took that sheet and those markers and drew a city of dream homes and three car garages, police stations and fire stations, complete with streets, traffic lights, and railroad crossings. Then when I was about nine years old, I wanted to design my own car. I called it the Lady Bug. I thought, why don't women have our own car? So, I drew one up with a pencil and a piece of paper.

While there was always something around transportation that I just gravitated to as a child, I didn't have the foresight or exposure to that universe of options. So, I went to undergraduate school and started figuring out what I wanted to do. My undergrad degree is actually in nutrition. I was a dietician and I enjoyed that, but it wasn't my passion. I decided to get a Masters in Public Administration at Georgia State University. I can remember standing at a MARTA station, headed to class when I looked over and saw the Gold Dome and said to myself, "That's where I want to work; that's where I can make a difference."

**Leanna:** I had no idea that you were a dietician. We often have this idea in our heads about the steps that must be taken to be successful and it is often very sequential and deliberate in our minds. But in practice, I have found that very rarely is the path linear. There are many twists and turns and roundabouts along the way.

**Jannine:** Absolutely. Wherever and whenever we can, as professional adult women, we need to encourage young women to expand the horizons of their mind about what a successful career can be. Whatever you want to do, whatever you love to do, whatever you're good at, there is a job. You don't have to follow the straight and narrow path. Clarity comes as you do things, as you jump in, as you perform, as you engage. The key is to get started – you never know what you'll find!

**Leanna:** Wise words from someone who has actually walked the talk. You were recently appointed by Governor Brian Kemp as GDOT's Director of Planning. When you first received the call from the Governor for the appointment, what was your reaction?

**Jannine:** Well, it was far more than just a phone call! The Governor had a pool of truly excellent candidates and he went through a deliberate process. He was very discerning about how he is building out his team, considering the multiple facets of State government that he leads. When the Governor did call to let me know I was his choice, I was so thankful for the appointment and his trust in me. I was really excited and elated. First, knowing I would get to serve our State government again is very exciting, and it's amazing to be on his team and be a part of his vision for how State government should support business and help improve the quality of life for citizens. Plus, now I'm able to be a part of the leadership team at GDOT. I'm just so thankful. I love State government. It's the place where big stuff happens that is also meaningful to citizens and businesses at the community level. And state government comes with responsibility for both the rural and urban areas. At the federal level, there are a lot of big policies that matter so much to the whole country, but the real, near-term impact can sometimes be hard to see.

**Leanna:** That human element is such an important piece of decision making. It is so easy to get caught up in the immediate problem that you are trying to solve and lose sight of the person at the end of the line who is directly impacted by and has to live with those decisions. It is so refreshing to hear you include the quality of life for citizens in how you think about the work that you do and why it matters so much. Tell me, what have been the most challenging and most rewarding aspects of your new role thus far?

**Jannine:** Going back to the question about starting a job during these times in the midst of a pandemic and working remotely, not being able to get to know my staff face-to-face has been one of the biggest challenges. My experience throughout every job is the value – tangible and intangible – of spending time in the same space together with the team during the best hours of our day. Starting during remote working situations has been a challenge. And it's also been a challenge to fully learn about and understand everything that GDOT does. Yes, our responsibility is construction and maintenance of the State's roads and bridges, but it's so much broader and deeper than that. From collecting, publishing, and analyzing traffic data to responding to natural disasters or keeping construction going during the summer months this year when so many companies were shut down—it is a lot. There is substantial strategic, financial, and project planning we do, as well as environmental impact review and permitting, including understanding and responding to a wide variety of social, historic, and community impacts while we comply with volumes of Federal laws and regulations that come along with more than half of the funds we invest. We have to constantly stay abreast of policies and procedures as we improve our transportation infrastructure and consider all options for synergy in the planning process.

The good thing is that GDOT has an amazing group of experts doing incredible work for Georgians. It is a privilege to be working alongside Commissioner Russell McMurry, shoulder-to-shoulder with his leadership team and the State Transportation Board. The Commissioner is one of the best State DOT leaders, if not the best in the country. His devotion to doing the right things the right way is why we have one of the best transportation agencies in the U.S. It is rewarding to be able to be in a place where I get to do the planning work that I love. We are working right now on our Statewide Strategic Transportation Plan, which will also be the Federally-required statewide long-range plan.

And we are about to get started next year on the refresh of our State's freight plan. I'm looking forward to bringing all of this together in an impactful way. Truck traffic on our interstates and state routes hardly blipped from last year to this year. Cargo movements at the Port of Savannah only dipped by about one percent, in the midst of one of the greatest upturns in global trade America has ever seen. Our world is continuing even if we are not in the office or gathering at large events. Many aspects of life are carrying on, that require the purchase and consumption of commodities and goods – food and groceries, clothing, building materials, electronics, home furnishings, and on and on. So decisions about where and how to invest in transportation infrastructure impact our day-to-day lives more than ever. The better that we can build out for efficient movement of trucks, trains, planes, and ships that carry freight, the lower the cost of transportation, the lower the cost of the goods, and the less we have to pay for these vital things.

**Leanna:** Absolutely. One of the things we focus on at WTS Atlanta is mentorship, both formally and informally. Who are some of the mentors in your life, professionally or personally, and what have those relationships meant to you?

**Jannine:** There are various gradients of mentorship and people who are influential at various points in your life for various reasons. I am going to start with personal mentorships. As I was growing up, my mom would consistently tell me, "There is nothing you can't do!" As a child, as you think about that notion, it's about what's in front of you. You can ride this bike. You can do well in math. You can play tennis. You can get that first job at the local fast food restaurant. It starts with small things, this idea of what you are capable of, and then it just builds – it transitions well with age. My mom persevered through all kinds of things in her personal and professional life and still kept us together and developing. "Whatever is happening, we are going to get through it," she would say. That was her attitude and I carry that with me, including realizing that a young woman can grow to be a leader and become a successful professional.

My grandmother was also influential in me thinking about what my life can and should be. Not in a way that was overly prescriptive, but consistently saying, "You are going to college, you are going to get a bachelor's degree." So I told myself, you're going to college, so you better figure out how to get good enough grades to make that happen. Then once I graduated, next was, "Alright, great job – now, you are getting a master's degree." It's that expectation that I could and would achieve; my grandmother set that expectation for me, and so did my mom.

Professionally, I have been privileged to work in three Governor's administrations and the offices of two Cabinet Secretaries at the Federal level. Even though it was less of an interpersonal hands-on mentorship, just being in the room with these Chief Executive Officers of government on a regular basis, knowing I needed to respond with what is required to make big and effective decisions has probably been some of the best mentorship that I've had. To

provide a little more insight on that, in order to help executives through myriad options to feel good about their vital decisions, you have to be very disciplined about getting accurate and precise information from the best sources and deliver findings and recommendations in the most efficient format at the right time. Also, I've been privileged to observe and work for other women doing truly transformative things, such as Jane Hayes at ARC - Jane was my first female boss. Plus, working so closely and at the behest of Georgia Regional Transportation Authority Board Members was so beneficial for disciplined decision-making, especially Sonny Deriso, Charlotte Nash, Martha Martin, and a dozen other devoted public servants who are looking out for what's best for the Atlanta region's transportation future. One GRTA Board member and close mentor of mine was Dick Anderson, who is now the Fulton County Manager. Not only did I inherit a high-performing organization when I followed him as Executive Director of GRTA, but for years before then, I learned from him how to distill volumes of data and package it in a way that could be syndicated to key stakeholders, tells the real narrative of the issues and opportunities, and brings forward the best, outcomes-driven options to executive leaders.

**Leanna:** I remember when I first started working at GRTA. At the time, you were the Executive Director and I was fresh out of law school. You probably don't remember this, but as I was preparing abstracts for my very first Board presentation, you told me to make sure that I don't just make it about the details of the contracts. You encouraged me to find a way to tell a story—why do we have these contracts, why do we need the services, what is the value they provide. We talked about knowing when to fly at 60,000 feet and when to get down to the ground level. It was a very important lesson that has served me quite well over the years.

**Jannine:** I am so glad you mentioned that. I would say to anyone looking to advance professionally, find a way to be in a position where you get to present to a governing Board, on a regular or ad-hoc basis. It will give you so much experience and discipline about how to prepare and present a problem in a very short span of time to people that have such expansive responsibilities.

**Leanna:** It was certainly a huge benefit for me. Speaking of professional advancement, how do you feel GDOT supports and encourages growth and leadership in female employees?

**Jannine:** It starts with GDOT being an equal opportunity employer and taking that seriously. Meg Pirkle (Chief Engineer), Angela Whitworth (Treasurer), Kathy Zahul (District 7 Engineer), Carol Comer (Director of Intermodal Programs), and Hiral Patel (Program Delivery Engineer) are incredible leaders, brought to their vital roles based on merit and accomplishment. Nearly 30% of leadership and management positions at GDOT are held by women, and GDOT also has women in positions of importance throughout the whole department, in the District Offices, in Administration, in Finance, and in Planning, of course! I think that's probably the most telling. We are walking the talk.

**Leanna:** Last question. What advice would you give young, female planners who are now entering the workforce? If you could give your younger self advice, what would you say?

**Jannine:** Learn how things work and constantly think about how things might be able to work better. That applies at the day-to-day level, whether it's the way the office functions, all the way up to bigger picture challenges. You need to understand current practices to be able to apply creativity and innovation to punch through the standard way of doing things. But in thinking about ways the world can be better, understand that it is going to take a while to get there to your vision. Be patient and perseverant. We often say, "This is such a problem. Why doesn't everyone else see it this way? If we just did this new thing, everything would be so much better." But the only way to really be successful is to observe and evaluate through the lenses of others, especially your customers, constituents, clients, as well as your supervisors and their supervisors. It's necessary to translate your vision into a message - with a narrative and compelling numbers - that's meaningful for your audience. And don't go it alone. Find like-minded colleagues and peers, whether they are inside or outside your organization, depending on what problem you are trying to solve. Even if you have a vision for a better world, seeing any of it come to fruition requires that you perform and deliver superbly today to carry out responsibilities of your current position, to find your allies, and to earn your next promotion. You have to nail it today, walking in faith that every day you do your best will bring you one step closer to the impact you intend from your career and your personal life.

**Leanna:** That is great advice and a fantastic note to conclude our interview. Thank you again for sitting down with me today and on behalf of WTS Atlanta, congratulations. We have every confidence that you will continue to do amazing things for Georgia and its citizens.

## UPCOMING...

### Annual Membership Survey

Be sure to look out for an email later this month requesting your feedback on this year's WTS Atlanta programs and overall experience. Your feedback is critical and an important piece of the planning process for next year's event. We encourage all members to take the survey.

## APPLY NOW...

### The Washington Center: Summer Transportation Internship Program for Diverse Groups

Visit the following website to apply

<https://twc.edu/programs/summer-transportation-internship-program-diverse-groups>



## STAY CONNECTED

### A CALL FOR WEBINAR TOPICS AND LEADERS

WTS Atlanta invites its members to submit ideas for webinar topics and/or offer to lead a webinar or panel. We have a tremendous amount of expertise among our members, so let's stay connected and share valuable information with one another! If you have a webinar topic idea or are interested in leading a webinar, please email Charlotte Weber, [chweber@hntb.com](mailto:chweber@hntb.com).

## SOCIAL MEDIA



Stay up to date with the latest happenings from WTS Atlanta by following us on all of our social media channels.

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