

Scholarship & Awards Evening Brings Out Stars, Raises \$25,000

By Erika Grotto



High School Scholarship Recipients, Photo © John Livzey, 2014

It was a night of high honors for jobs well done at the WTS-LA 28th Annual Scholarship and Awards Dinner, held at the Omni Hotel & Resort in downtown Los Angeles on November 13, 2014. Attended by 350 supporters, including executives from the aviation, transit/rail, highway, and marine sectors, this moving and inspiring event raised \$25,000 for scholarships. Our thanks to the individuals, agencies, and consulting firms who, each year, augment the dinner funds raised to enhance the following year's scholarship awards.

"Co-emcees Stephanie Wiggins (Metro Executive Director of Vendor/Contract Management and 2013 WTS-LA Woman of the Year) and Hasan Ikhata (Executive Director of the Southern California Association of Governments) wrapped the evening in charm, wit, and enthusiasm," says Lynda Bybee, 2013-2014 President of WTS Los Angeles Area Chapter.

Six awards were presented for exceptional work, highlighting the talent and drive of members and local transportation leaders.

Gwiin Correa of Caltrans received the Diversity Leadership Award for her outstanding work promoting diversity, inclusion, and multi-cultural awareness as the Chief of the Office of Equal Employment Opportunity for Caltrans District 7.

The Innovative Transportation Solutions Award went to the Port of Los Angeles for its Berths 142-147 Backland Redevelopment Project. The \$207



Mary McCormick (MBI Media) and Lynda Bybee (2013-2014 President of WTS Los Angeles Area Chapter), Photo © John Livzey



Gwiin Correa (Chief of the Office of Equal Employment Opportunity for Caltrans District 7), Photo © John Livzey

million automated container project is the first of its kind on the West Coast. Port of Los Angeles Chief of Design and WTS Los Angeles Director at Large Dina Aryan-Zahlan accepted the award.

Amanda Smith of Fehr & Peers and Lisa Karwoski of Mott MacDonald were named Members of the Year for their commitment to the growth and goals of WTS. Smith, (who will be the chapter's 2015-2016 president) recruited more new members than anyone in the US, Canada, and the UK during this year's membership drive, and together, the two brought in many influential speakers.

Amy Grat, Chief Executive Officer of International Trade Education Programs, Inc., was honored as our Educator of the Year. She was recognized for her work preparing career- and college-prepared high school students. WTS-LA has supported ITEP's mission of expanding career horizons for students since its founding in 2000.

Our Employer of the Year was Foothill Transit, honored for its exceptional work in environmental responsibility, continuing education, community involvement, and internship opportunities as well as its commitment to hiring women and minorities. Under the leadership of Executive Director Doran Barnes, who accepted the award on behalf of Foothill Transit, nearly 40% of all Foothill employees are women, including half the managers and 40% of the directors.

Presentation of the coveted Woman of the Year Award was capped with a moving speech by honoree Gina Marie Lindsey.

Chapter President Lynda Bybee comments, "2014 Woman of the Year Gina Marie Lindsey, Executive Director of Los Angeles World Airports, eloquently characterized the complexity of her management domain and served as the visible representative for the committed people at LAWA who carry out their extraordinary responsibilities day and night. Although she was the final speaker for the evening, her message resonated for all of those who had previously accepted awards — each exhibiting the stature and gracious acknowledgments that made clear why they deserved to be honored."

Bybee took time during the evening to thank two other special friends of WTS-LA as well. David Schroer, president of Loudmouth Graphics, and nationally acclaimed photographer John Livzey have been essential to presenting the chapter's marketing and overall identity for 16 years, and the look they've provided has been echoed by other chapters, she said.



Dina Aryan-Zahlan (Port of Los Angeles Chief of Design and WTS Los Angeles Director at Large)



Amanda Smith (Fehr & Peers) Lisa Karwoski (Mott MacDonald), Photo © John Livzey



Amy Grat (Chief Executive Officer of International Trade Education Programs, Inc.), Photo © John Livzey



Gina Marie Lindsey, Photo © John Livzey

Another highlight of the evening was the moving video interviews with the scholarship recipients, created as a gift by MBI Media. Ten scholarships were presented this year, totaling \$32,500. High school recipients included Bianey Mercado, Addy Ortiz, and Daisy Jauregui, all students at Phineas Banning High School in Wilmington, California. University recipients (shown below with emcees Stephanie Wiggins and Hasan Ikhata and Scholarship Chair Elisabeth Rosensen) included: Rachel Lindt (UCLA), Camilla Guiriba (UCLA), Anne Brown (UCLA), Kelcie Ralph (UCLA), Hilina Gudeta (USC), Danielle Thomas (USC), and Ileana Acosta (USC). Special thanks to Southern California Association of Governments, Parsons Brinckerhoff, and AECOM, who expanded the number of scholarships we were able to give by sponsoring additional awards totaling \$6,500.



The raffle and silent auction were a great success, raising over \$5,000 for scholarships. The auction was chaired by health coach Jihyoung "Allison" Kim, PE, who received a free ticket to the awards dinner at WTS-LA's recent volunteer appreciation event and gave back by pinch hitting as the raffle/silent auction chair, assisted by an enthusiastic cadre of volunteers. (Allison is pictured with her winning ticket on the left.)

Raffle donors included: FMG Architects, Group Delta, Hatch Mott MacDonald, HDR, Meyers Nave, MNS Engineers, Nossaman, Port of LA, Stantec, and Alexandra Spencer. Silent auction donors included: Caltrans District 7, POLA, POLB, LA County DPW, USC, Exposition Metro Line Construction Authority, LA DOT, AECOM, John Livzey Photography, Stone Art Frameshop, HDR Michael Schneider, Transpo Group, and Weidlinger Associates. Prizes included gift cards, coffee or lunch with executives, and items such as gift baskets and jewelry.



Allison Kim (Health Coach),
Photo © John Livzey

Much credit for the event's success goes to awards dinner chair Natasha DeBenon, Business Development Manager, PMCM Division of ARCADIS US (right). She has chaired three WTS-LA awards dinners and is the most successful scholarship fundraiser in the chapter's history.

"Despite the intense pressure of producing these awards dinners, they are the most rewarding projects," says DeBenon. "There is something so affirming and inspiring about seeing these bright-eyed high school and college scholarship recipients and knowing that they will be shaping the nation's infrastructure in years to come—and that one of them will be a Woman of the Year."



Natasha DeBenon (Business Development Manager, PMCM Division of ARCADIS US and Awards Dinner Chair), Photo © John Livzey