

## Amanda Smith Heinke: A Woman on the Move

### MEMBER PROFILE



*Amanda Smith Heinke (Chapter President of WTS Los Angeles), Photos © John Livzey, 2015*

If Amanda Smith Heinke's professional and personal responsibilities don't keep her busy enough (she just got married!), she can focus on her new position as chapter president of WTS Los Angeles. As with her career, she reached her new role with a combination of planning and opportune guidance.

After serving as a Los Angeles chapter Programs committee member, she has become Programs co-chair, winning plaudits and the 2014 Member of the Year award with fellow Programs co-chair Lisa Karwoski of Hatch Mott McDonald.

The award recognized strategy *and* results, honoring Amanda and Lisa for

- Shaping outstanding monthly programs featuring hard-to-get federal and regional public sector executives.
- Attracting 80 new members through a single "members only" program and 15 new members through the membership drive.
- Enhancing outreach to college students by obtaining additional funding for their event attendance.
- Creating "career path" board advancement opportunities for volunteers.

When the first vice-president had to step down, Ms. Heinke stepped up. After serving as the interim first vice-president, she took the reins as president for 2015-2016.

"It's been quite a ride," she says.

Growing up with a natural aptitude for math and supportive parents, Heinke decided to study engineering at the University of the Pacific. But by her senior year, she still had not identified a technical specialty or career path. Fate (and her college curriculum) stepped in, and she took a required semester away from

campus to work full-time in an internship position. Placed in a land use development office, she met someone who worked in transportation.

Inspired by this encounter, she enrolled in a night class at California State University, Sacramento: Introduction to Transportation Engineering. She was immediately intrigued, particularly by the psychological reasons why transportation systems are designed the way they are.



“The way the professor framed that class really spoke to me,” she says. “I always say that if I wasn’t in transportation, I would be in psychology.”

Her intention set, Ms. Heinke decided to pursue a master’s degree in civil engineering with an emphasis on transportation planning, which she earned from the University of Southern California in 2009.

After five years with AECOM, she joined Fehr & Peers as a transportation planner and engineer. Her work is fulfilling, she says, because the objective isn’t simply to finish a project.

“We try to improve the communities that we work in,” she says.

Ms. Heinke sees her service to WTS as an opportunity to give back to those who have helped her as she began her career. A recipient of a WTS-Sacramento scholarship as an undergraduate, she feels the support and education she has gotten from fellow members has been more valuable than money.

“I feel very valued in the WTS family,” she says.

“One of the most valuable benefits I’ve received as president—and it’s a benefit the Board offers our members—is gaining access to industry leaders who are not particularly accessible,” she says. “For some people, those might even be executives within their own companies.”

“Another crucial benefit for our members—particularly our Board members—is the opportunity to sharpen their leadership skills with real-world challenges,” she says. “Our members might not be given those opportunities as part of their daily jobs.”

Working in a field dominated by men can have its challenges, Ms. Heinke finds, but WTS-LA is a place where women can present ideas and be heard, something that doesn’t always happen in the workplace. Ms. Heinke has felt the benefit of the experience of the women who came before her and hopes to provide support to others moving into the field.

“As a woman in transportation, I really love the idea of creating opportunities for other women in transportation, so that we can all work together to lift each other up. *Paying it forward* is a phrase that really resonates with me.”

Heinke is prompt to acknowledge the role the Fehr & Peers support has played in her opportunities on the WTS Los Angeles Board. The firm supports internships, continuing education of its employees through professional education, organizing professional development opportunities including technical webinars, and internal and external training and mentoring.

While many companies are participating in formal initiatives to help advance women in transportation, Ms. Heinke feels there's more that can be done. She hopes to contribute to a cultural shift with informal, organic mentoring, like she finds in her colleagues at WTS-LA.

"Every leader's job includes advancing young talent," she says. "WTS offers that opportunity on a large scale."