

## House Rule: Being President Was Just the Beginning

PRESIDENTS 30TH ANNIVERSARY SERIES



*Sunnie House (AECOM Vice President and Former WTS-LA Chapter President), Photos © John Livzey, 2015*

AECOM Vice President Sunnie House, PE, views her WTS-LA chapter presidency as critical to her career.

“The LA chapter presidency was my launching pad. I probably had a bigger impact and legacy as president of WTS International, but I would never have been international president if it wasn’t for the LA chapter.”

At AECOM, House serves as the market sector leader for the Transportation Business Line for Greater Southern California and Southern Nevada. She’s a registered civil engineer in California and has managed and designed numerous complex transportation and public works projects in California for nearly three decades. She believes much of that success can be traced back directly to her time as WTS-LA and WTS International President.

“Both presidencies raised my profile. But when I joined the LA chapter, I was just a simple project manager working on transportation projects. The notoriety and exposure I got as WTS-LA President raised my profile to local industry leaders. That was very helpful. The access and the network I established through the years was the biggest advantage for my career. Just being a WTS member gives you access. You don’t have to be president to take advantage of that. Being president, though, afforded me even greater access and enhanced my reputation even further.

“For example, I would never have dreamed in a million years that as a project manager I would get to meet the Secretary of Transportation, in my case Norman Minetta. Sitting with him in his office and discussing the state of US transportation was a huge highlight of my career. I wouldn’t have met him otherwise. Another amazing opportunity was going to London to address transportation professionals there. Even though I was with a big company, I would never have had the opportunity to do that. As president, I traveled to Canada and England and was able to speak in different forums and meet different, high-ranking people. That helped me get to where I am today. I was the one standing up and giving the speeches. If I just went to these functions as a WTS member, it would not have had the same impact on me or my career.”

House points out that being WTS-LA president offers a great education in addition to access and networking.

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“The most valuable lesson I learned was how to manage a diverse team. When I joined WTS, I didn’t have much experience managing a team, particularly one comprising volunteers. I learned how to work with everyone and create a team environment. Learning to delegate was also an important lesson. Early in your career, you learn to do things yourself. But as chapter president and as a leader, you have to learn how to engage your team and empower them. Learning these things in WTS, though, provides a more nurturing environment, an environment where everyone was encouraging and supportive. Everyone wants you to succeed.”



As international president, House put her enhanced knowledge and experience to good use. During her tenure, she raised membership from the low 3000s—where it had stalled for a decade—to more than 4000 members. She believes that’s one of the best measures of her success.

“We know our members have a choice. Creating value helps them choose WTS.”

Though she gave to WTS unselfishly, House believes that her commitment to WTS-LA and WTS International was an investment. And she got a bargain.

“WTS helped me increase my confidence in many ways. For example, it motivated me to go to Toastmasters to learn how to speak publicly. I used to be so nervous about public speaking. Being LA chapter president really helped me practice that. Serving as WTS-LA President was a great way to launch my career.”

*This article is one of a series of profiles of past WTS Los Angeles presidents developed in celebration of our 30th anniversary.*