

## Ports to People: Elizabeth Warren Is a Vital Link in Southern California's Supply Chain



*Elizabeth Warren (Executive Director of FuturePorts), Photos © John Livzey, 2016*

Few people get to use their full array of skills and talents in their work. Elizabeth Warren does exactly that as the executive director of FuturePorts. A membership-based, nonprofit organization that provides, “regional leadership to achieve superior performance of the Ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach,” FuturePorts mobilizes business, community, and government leaders to join together in an integrated planning approach to resolve port, industry, and community concerns. Naturally, it would take someone with great fluency and command in diverse areas to lead such an endeavor. Warren fits the bill perfectly.

“This job is the culmination of everything I’ve done for the past 20 years. I worked in civil engineering at global consulting firms (CH2M and Jacobs) and developed specific expertise on national port, railroad, and transportation projects. I’ve managed projects and business development efforts. I’ve worked in government relations and community involvement activities. And right before joining FuturePorts I was the public policy manager for transportation and environmental issues for the Los Angeles Area Chamber of Commerce. So you can see, I’ve had almost perfect training for what I do now.”



Elizabeth embodies the persona of the “Renaissance woman.” She has been fearless in her decisions to take risks trying different paths along the road of her career. “If I found an opportunity that interested me, I went for it. What was the worst that could happen? If I didn’t like it, I could always go back to doing whatever I did before.” That outlook required many sacrifices but led to many great opportunities.

That’s not all. Her education and experience come together ideally for her work. Warren holds a BA in business management from Pepperdine University and she studied architecture and engineering at both Purdue and the University of Florida. She also received the Global Logistics Specialist designation from CalState University, Long Beach and a certificate in international studies at Oxford University in England.

“I look at local, state, and federal issues. I know how ports and cities operate. I know how international issues affect our ports. I know how shipping, trucking, trade, warehouse and distribution facilities, and construction factor into our members’ concerns. And I also have very close ties to the labor community, which is rare for many people in the business community. But I also actually live near the port. So I’m stakeholder in that regard, too! Everything I do is about the ports and finding the best possible outcomes for everyone concerned.”

Warren takes that mandate most seriously. She wants everyone to understand what ports do, why they’re important, and why ports must be responsive to their communities. And to communicate all of that effectively, she stretched her purview even further.

“The Port of Long Beach (POLB) invited us to exhibit at their *Green Port Fest*. They said we had to have something interactive that would engage the community. It couldn’t be just a table with brochures. Now I had been studying the supply chain for a long time. And when I first visited the Port of Los Angeles I saw the supply-chain vision in my head come alive. I stored that in my memory, holding onto it for when I could use it. When this opportunity came up, I jumped on it. I went to our graphic designer and explained that I wanted to create a supply-chain game. I met with some industry folks, got feedback, and created the Ports to People (PTPÔ) Game. My vision came to life! And it’s been wonderful. We’ve received national attention for the game and we’ve exhibited it to more than 50,000 people. It’s really the best way to communicate what ports do and why they’re so important.”

Warren is not exaggerating. The game has generated tremendous interest, as it can be customized for any port.

“After the game’s debut, the Port of Los Angeles used it in conjunction with its mobile education exhibit, the TransPORTer, and the game became an integral part of the exhibit’s educational program. They won an award with it. The Port of Hueneme also licensed it, and it became an integral part of their community outreach strategy. CalState Long Beach and the Center for International Trade & Transportation also use it, as does Caltrans. We’re also in discussions now with software developers.”

Though Warren credits many sources for her well-rounded preparation for her work, she believes there is one organization that deserves special mention.

“When I was younger, one of the mentors I looked up to was Stacey Jones. She brought me into WTS. She and many other women provided essential career guidance; they were role models. Some of the women didn’t even know they were mentoring me! Their presence and their place in the industry *showed me* that I deserved to be there. So I owe a lot to WTS. And being part of WTS-LA and WTS Orange County for so many years made a huge difference in my career. The relationships, the knowledge—it’s all part of the process for learning and knowing your career. There’s no other organization I’ve been involved with—actively—for 20 years. And there’s a reason for that. Having a foundation like WTS is invaluable. But think of it this way. I probably get 100 newsletters a day. There is no way I can read them all. WTS is the *only* one I always read. And I tell everyone I come in contact with that if you can only join 3 organizations, make sure that WTS is one of them.”