

Andrea Conant: Walking the Talk for WTS-LA



Andrea Conant (WTS-LA Communications Committee member and Consensus Vice President), Photos by John Livzey, 2018

Famed American businesswoman Estée Lauder said, “I never dreamed about success. I worked for it.” WTS-LA Communications Committee member and Consensus vice president Andrea Conant shares that philosophy. Specializing in community relations and communications strategy, Ms. Conant has more than 15 years of real-world experience as a public affairs professional. But from the start, it wasn’t easy.

“I’ve been fortunate to cut my teeth working on iconic projects and with iconic agencies. When I started my career, one of my first big projects was the Port of Los Angeles San Pedro Waterfront Project. Then I worked for the Metro Gold Line Foothill Extension Construction Authority, helping to see that campaign through from start to finish. We were working on the construction authority side, and we helped the authority earn around \$800 million through a support-building campaign. We organized and mobilized people to go and attend the Metro board of director’s meetings and really fight, to tell the board that the San Gabriel Valley wanted its fair share in terms of transit. And we really helped keep that ball rolling.

“But that’s very indicative of what we do. Much of our mandate is public awareness, but it’s also quite a bit about advocacy, too. It’s about empowering and working with community members to build consensus between communities and agencies around transportation issues. It’s very challenging. It’s very rewarding. But equally important, it’s fun.”

Ms. Conant also cites the LAX Master Plan as another foundational project for Consensus. Founded in 1986 by Julie Gertler, and now led by her son Josh Gertler, Consensus is a Burbank Media District-based, award-winning public relations, marketing, and community-engagement firm distinguished by its innovative communications programs. Currently for Consensus, Ms. Conant is ramping up for a new active transportation and traffic safety project.

“The next wave isn’t only what we do with rail and our freeways, but what we do with our streets, how we make them safer for cyclists, pedestrians, and, naturally, vehicles. It’s a really big project and I’m very excited about it.”

But for her, excitement about work is never in short supply. She’s also inspired to be working on the joint development project for the Metro Red Line in North Hollywood with Trammel Crow, the real estate development, investment, and property management company. “It is awesome because it is helping LA County realize a future vision of more transit-oriented and sustainable communities.”

In addition to helping communities realize their transportation visions, Ms. Conant also gives back in another meaningful way. And for her and Consensus, WTS-LA has a particular meaning.



“Our founder, Julie Gertler, was one of the only women in the industry back in 1986, when she founded Consensus. She was close friends with one of the founders of WTS-LA. And our companies did a lot of business together in the early days. They were kind of like a one-two punch in the industry. They really understood that women had a lot to offer the industry and organized to make that a reality. I learned about WTS-LA through Julie.

“I wanted to get more involved and I thought, ‘What was the best way to get started?’ Liz (Ramirez, WTS-LA vice president for Membership and Communications) approached me about putting together the annual report. I thought that was perfect for me. I knew it would be a lot of heavy lifting, but it would also be a good way to immerse myself into the organization. You can learn quite a lot about the ‘who’s who’ and what the organization has to offer from the annual report. And I really appreciate that Liz made it a very collaborative process. She made it easy for me to contribute creatively to the process, including letting me set the theme, ‘Measuring Our Success,’ in celebration of the success of Measure M. My hope is that the annual report will become an important document for the chapter in a historical context.”

Ms. Conant believes that WTS-LA plays a vital role in today’s transportation industry, despite the many advances that women have made.

“The camaraderie and commitment to working with each other helps us all advance. And that is truly wonderful. It’s refreshing. In my career, I was always taught to hold the door open for women behind me. So WTS-LA was a natural fit for me. And I see that WTS-LA really walks the talk. It’s real here. There’s so much authenticity. There’s a real character to the people that are a part of it, those who participate regularly and meaningfully in the programs. That’s very important to me.”

While the substance of the chapter was an instinctive draw for her, she also credits Liz, Eileen Ryder (Communications Co-Chair) and the Communications Committee with another vital attraction to the chapter.

“I was really impressed with how the chapter is presented. The writing is great. The photography is great. I think it really stands out in terms of other professional service organizations in Los Angeles. That’s really important, as the presentation is the introduction to the chapter for many people, if not most. The commitment to excellence makes me want to contribute more. It’s inspiring. For example, I would like to help develop more content including online webinars and webcasts, and other ways to connect to people that might not be able to make it to a meeting or a program. It could really help us expand our message.”

Estee Lauder said, “I never dreamed about success. I worked for it.” In her dual role at Consensus and with WTS-LA, Andrea Conant has made that her working philosophy as well.