

All of WTS-LA owes a debt to this Doner...



Ava Doner (Former WTS-LA board member), Photo © John Livzey

Diamonds are prized because they're tough, resilient, and dazzlingly bright. But it is a slight to describe Ava Doner simply as a diamond among us. She was more than that. She possessed something diamonds cannot—moxie. Former WTS-LA board member, business owner, pioneer, Ava Doner had many descriptors, all well deserved. But what many remember most about her was her undaunted courage in being herself, of being a strong woman in what was very much a man's profession. Long before WTS-LA existed, she started her own drafting business in Southern California. And she made it a phenomenal success. Her first two clients—Pacific Bell and Southern California Edison—remained her clients for more than 40 years, until the day she died. But at first, most of her clients didn't realize she was the boss. Most polite—she was always polite—she would simply get coffee while her hired male manager would meet and greet the client. Appearing to be a nosy secretary, she would look over shoulders during the discussions so that she could figure out the bid for the job. But for her, this was just a way to get things done.

She had a storied upbringing. She learned to deal with men when as a little girl she accompanied her father on tugboats out of San Pedro. Naturally, the old salts loved her and took her under their wing. She could not have had better mentors for the rough and tumble world of transportation. And she credited them, "They helped me in business because I knew how to deal with men after that." Though schooled by men, Ava Doner never lapsed in her commitment to fighting for a woman's right at the table. In fact, she was tireless in her advocacy and dedication to WTS-LA and its mission. And her work did not escape notice. In fact, she won virtually every major women's and civic award one can win in Southern California. To honor that dedication and the trail she blazed for other women, each year at the WTS-LA Annual Scholarship and Awards Dinner, WTS-LA recognizes two deserving young women with the Ava Doner Memorial Scholarship Award. Here is one of this year's winners.