

## High School Crucible: Leveraging the Value of Transportation for Young Women



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Not everyone remembers their high school years fondly. High school can be awkward, challenging, and anxiety-inducing, particularly when contemplating life *after* high school. While WTS-LA can't address all of the difficulties inherent in growing up, the chapter can do something to help enterprising young women turn their attention to their futures, their education, and the transportation industry. Through two committees—Transportation YOU and the Scholarship Committee—WTS-LA is providing much-needed funding and support to help young women stay focused on gaining a college degree and entering the transportation industry.

“At first, a lot of the girls we interact with think transportation is just about driving a bus, but through our programs we show them that it’s so much more,” explains Tina Backstrom, Transportation YOU co-chair and a strategic planning manager for Los Angeles World Airports (LAWA). “We open their eyes to the fact that the transportation industry encompasses just about every discipline they can imagine. For example, at [Susan] Dorsey [High School], one of the girls said she wanted to be a politician. So, we showed her how incredibly important transportation is to politics. From that moment on, she was hooked on learning about transportation.”



“When we visit the schools, we don’t just drop off applications and leave,” adds Transportation YOU co-chair and director of Facilities at Foothill Transit Sharlane Bailey. “We talk to the guidance counselors and work with the young ladies to help them with their scholarship applications, their college applications, and even their grades. It’s very much a substantive mentoring role.”



At a recent example of one of their programs, the Transportation YOU Committee held an Empowerment Day at Caltrans District 7 Headquarters in downtown Los Angeles, where they brought transportation leaders, including KDG Construction’s Lydia Kennard, Foothill Transit CFO Michelle Lopes Caldwell, Metro Deputy Executive Officer for Community Relations Yvette Rapose, and LAWA Deputy Executive Director Cynthia Guidry. Students from the Dorsey and Westchester schools both participated, finding the program invaluable. Backstrom and Bailey point out that they inherited both the Dorsey and Westchester schools from the former WTS-LA Adopt-A-School chair Dr. Amy Shimshon-Santo, who had

established an excellent relationship with both programs. But Backstrom explains why they've been able to take those relationships even further.

“Amy developed a great partnership with both schools. So, we had a great foundation to build on. One important thing is that both schools are close to LAWA, so that means that it's very easy for us to get to them and to bring the students here. Westchester already had a relationship with LAWA—they've got an aviation academy. Dorsey also has a history connected to aviation, but they've also been surrounded by transportation construction for quite some time now. We helped give that transportation construction more meaning. So, our involvement with both schools has gone beyond simply awarding scholarship money. We've helped put transportation into a meaningful context for students from all of the programs.”

Doubling the number of scholarships this year from three to six, WTS-LA has awarded nearly \$20,000 to high school students this year at the annual scholarship and awards dinner. And while we won't name the specific high school winners—as they are minors—we would like to credit either the scholarship sponsor or its namesake. All of the scholarships, however, were awarded to academically successful high school seniors with supporting recommendations and completed applications. It was a highly competitive process with much-coveted financial awards. And here are this year's winners.

- **CM Solutions Scholarship.** A student from Westchester High School won the \$2,500 CM Solutions Scholarship. CM Solutions is a certified small, woman-owned business that specializes in project controls for large, complex construction projects. Margrit Lehman, Business Manager for CM Solutions is on the WTS-LA Scholarship committee. [Robyn Coates](#), founder and CEO CM Solutions is the WTS-LA Small Business Outreach/TBAC Chair.
- **Berg & Associates Scholarship.** The \$2,500 Berg & Associates Scholarship went to a deserving high school student from the Math/Science Magnet Program at Dorsey High School. Berg & Associates provides award-winning construction management to cities and agencies across Southern California. It, too, is a woman-owned business and a longtime supporter of WTS-LA. Berg & Associates is also a WTS-LA Silver Corporate Partner.
- **WSP Bright Futures Scholarship.** The \$2,500 WSP Bright Futures High School Scholarship recognized a deserving young woman from the Westchester Enriched Sciences Magnets School. With 40,000 professionals in 500 offices in 40 countries, WSP delivers professional services around the globe. A staunch supporter of the chapter and WTS, WSP is a Platinum Corporate Partner of the chapter and a Trailblazer Corporate Partner at the international level.
- **AECOM Richard G. Newman Scholarship.** A student from the Susan Miller Dorsey High School took home the \$2,500 AECOM Richard G. Newman Scholarship. Named after AECOM's legendary chairman Richard Newman, the scholarship honors his commitment to fairness and equality throughout AECOM and the transportation industry. AECOM is a global professional services firm with 90,000 employees on nearly every continent. Also a longtime supporter of WTS-LA and WTS, AECOM is Platinum Corporate Partner of the chapter and a Trailblazer Corporate Partner at the international level.



- **WTS-LA Marilyn J. Reece Memorial Scholarship.** A Caltrans engineer, Marilyn J. Reece was the first woman in California to earn her PE license. Naturally, the \$4,500 Marilyn J. Reece High School Scholarship recognized an outstanding student for her accomplishments and the promise she embodies to the transportation industry. The 2018 \$4,500 Marilyn J. Reece High School Scholarship went to a deserving young woman from the Westchester Enriched Sciences Magnets School.
- **WTS-LA Joan G. Wood Memorial Scholarship.** The final high school scholarship honors former Adopt-A-School co-chair Joan G. Wood, who also served as a transportation-planning manager for Metro. Believing devoutly in the power of education, Ms. Wood would have been very pleased to learn that a deserving young woman from the Susan Miller Dorsey High School won this year's \$4,500 Joan G. Wood Memorial High School Scholarship.

Not everyone remembers high school fondly. And while WTS-LA can't solve all of the problems of late adolescence, the chapter can help by supporting young women and making them aware of careers in transportation. And through Transportation YOU and the Scholarship Committee, WTS-LA is doing exactly that by awarding nearly \$20,000 in scholarships and providing ongoing support.