

Succeeding by Degree: WTS-LA Directors Choice Tina Backstrom



*Tina Backstrom (WTS-LA Transportation YOU co-chair and WTS-LA Directors Scholarship Recipient),
Photo © John Livzey, 2018*

An old management/performance adage advises that it's best to keep your feet on the ground and your head in the clouds. For WTS-LA Transportation YOU co-chair Tina Backstrom, that's just another day at the office. In her role as strategic planning manager for the Project Development and Coordination and Environmental Programs Group at Los Angeles World Airports (LAWA), Ms. Backstrom serves as the chief of staff for Samantha Bricker, one of LAWA's Deputy Executive Directors. So, she must monitor system integration applications that are relevant to the Land Access Modernization Program as well as develop and implement the policies, procedures, and programs consistent with the department's strategic plan. Though only part of her responsibilities, for many that's a career. But Ms. Backstrom always wants to accomplish more. She's driven. And those are not the only demands on her.

She's also a dedicated mom, wanting to be, "the best mom she can to her seven children...shuttling her sons around the western portion of the United States to baseball tournaments." So, with all of that on her considerably full plate, why take on another serious challenge? That's just who she is.

"Over the last twenty years, I have struggled with the idea of getting my graduate degree. There was never enough time or money and my children's needs came first. I decided that it was never going to be the right time and after twenty years, my children were going to always have needs...A number of people have asked me why get my masters? Why? Why not is what I say! Education is the key to success and I wanted to show my children that no matter what is going on in their lives, it is important and imperative that they continue the learning process. I waited until I was a 46 year old, married, mother of seven, fulltime employee with a very demanding-but-fulfilling job before I decided to undergo this challenge. But no one can take away what I have learned about perseverance, leadership, and developing people to be their best selves. This degree is one more step in my leadership process."

Today, Ms. Backstrom is a candidate for a master's degree in public administration from Grand Canyon University. She expects to receive her degree in May 2019. In many ways, she serves as a perfect ideal of what WTS-LA and its mission stands for. So much so, in fact, that the WTS-LA board convened and decided to name Ms. Backstrom as the winner of the 2018 \$5,000 WTS-LA Directors Scholarship.

Awarded each year to a woman enrolled in higher education, the WTS-LA Directors Scholarship acknowledges hard work, commitment, dedication, and accomplishment. But there's something else unique about this scholarship. Not only does the entire board vote for its winner, the scholarship is completed funded personally by the WTS-LA board members. So, in many ways this is the most personal scholarship WTS-LA awards. And as the board sees it, no one is more deserving than Ms. Backstrom.

Grateful in the extreme for the recognition, she is characteristically practical, succinct, and strategic about the honor. “As I continue on the path of continued personal development, this master’s degree will give me more credibility as a true transportation official with the knowledge and ability to change government at any level. This scholarship will help me pay off the debt I created for the honor of going back to school and finally obtaining my master’s degree.”

Top performers often are recognized for their ability to have their feet on the ground while their head is in the clouds. Tina Backstrom knows this. It’s been her working philosophy for some time. But now she looks to even improve on that by gaining her master’s degree. WTS-LA is proud to help by awarding her the 2018 \$5,000 WTS-LA Directors Scholarship.