

WTS-LA Member of the Year Todd Nguyen: Revolutionizing Outreach One Student at a Time



Todd Nguyen (2018 WTS-LA Member of the Year), Photo © John Livzey, 2018

Being named WTS-LA Member of the Year means different things to different people. In fact, it's as individual as the people who earn it. But one thread runs throughout every winner—an unyielding commitment to the betterment of the chapter and to WTS-LA's mission. This year's winner, Todd Nguyen, is no exception. In his day job, Mr. Nguyen excels as a transportation and environmental planner for WSP, a WTS-LA Platinum Corporate Partner. In that capacity, he also serves as a deputy project manager on the Burbank-Los Angeles-Anaheim segment of California's high-speed rail project. But the chapter's recognition for his work focuses mostly on what he's done for WTS-LA, its members, and in his case area college students interested in transportation. Tireless, devoted, highly effective, he has almost singlehandedly transformed college outreach within the chapter. And in the coming year, he'll turn his considerable energies and ingenuity to his new challenge, leading the WTS-LA Mentorship Committee. But he sees his contribution as simply the right thing to do.

“Being named 2018 WTS-LA Member of the Year is the first professional award I've ever received in my career. I will always remember it as the coolest and the best. But my role as College Outreach chair is really an award in itself. Through the chapter, I have had the unique opportunity to inspire the lives of hundreds of students throughout the region and help them find their passion and place in the world of transportation. So, being Member of the Year is truly an honor and I'm humbled to be in the company of past winners and all of the scholarship and co-award winners!”

A chapter veteran of five years, Mr. Nguyen has served on the board for four of those five years, including chairing two separate committees. His chapter start, however, was humble. He volunteered to help with event registrations. Though he transformed the Transportation Resume Book Committee into the more broad College Outreach Committee, again his focus is much more on benefiting the chapter and area students than any potential accolades.

“As a young professional growing in a career, I wanted to take an inclusive approach to listening and engaging students and future chapter members. So, after trying out different ideas with everyone, I implemented what I thought would be most effective and would bring the greatest value to students, as well as easy access for career development within the transportation industry. For me, when I was in their position I didn't know what was available to me, and my hope now is that these students can easily access any career development tool or other help they need to take them to the next level. But, of course, outreach also cuts two ways. In addition to benefiting the students, our outreach efforts also bring the best and brightest young professionals to the immediate attention of our WTS-LA Corporate Partners, providing students for internships, early career hiring, etc. Successful college outreach is a win-win for everyone.”

Noted for his innovation, Mr. Nguyen advanced the College Outreach Committee in myriad ways. In addition to mixers, workshops, and numerous other events, he has also reached out to other WTS-LA committees, collaborating on flagship programs like the International Tour and Workforce Development program. And his accomplishments in that regard are notable as well. But Mr. Nguyen will next turn his energy and creativity in another direction when he takes over as chair of the Mentorship Committee. And he looks to continue in much the same fashion.

“Building on the excellent work of what Mahsa Pan has done, I look to establish a diverse set of programs and events that promote ongoing knowledge, experiences, and opportunities across all levels from early career professionals to executive management leaders. I want the Mentorship Program to provide an opportunity for all career levels to engage in exciting and meaningful dialogue while developing lasting connections. To date, the program has done an amazing job of providing interesting and engaging programs and I look forward to injecting a bit of my own flavor through workshops and events.

“Mentoring to me is also a two-way street, with a constant flow of conversation wherein both parties learn from each other. In my experience, I found that throughout the years of working with students, there would always be a point where they would ‘graduate’ and progress far enough that mentoring became unnecessary. Then, they become mentors. I’m excited to make that happen within WTS-LA and I look forward to further integrate universities and colleges into the Mentoring Program and help them, perhaps, develop a young professionals network of their own.”

While his efforts to further WTS-LA’s connection to area students is most certainly noble, Mr. Nguyen also pursues his quest so fervently for another reason.

“I’ve always believed in the mission and vision of WTS-LA. And I will continue to support it whenever I can, wherever I am. That mission and the organization are particularly close to me, as I’m an older brother to my sister, Jackelyne. She recently graduated from Cal (University of California, Berkeley) with a degree in mechanical engineering. Although she didn’t pursue transportation specifically, I’ve always wanted her to have a level playing field and equal opportunity. But I also wanted her to have the same support and perspective that WTS-LA provides. Fortunately, she’s blossoming in her current job and loving each day of it. But perhaps it’s my fraternal instinct that drives my role as College Outreach chair, hoping to inspire others like my sister to find their passion within transportation and run with it. I feel like WTS-LA has given me the platform to do just that. But that’s not all.

“WTS-LA has been an essential and amazing part of my own career. And my passion for the organization and its mission will continue as I advance and as I turn my focus to mentorship and professional development programs for the chapter. I’ve now had the unique opportunity of seeing a full cycle of university students—from freshman to graduate students. I want to continue these relationships and career development for early career professionals. The great thing about working with this particular cohort is that their energy and enthusiasm feeds our creativity. So, I’m looking forward to developing new ideas and injecting them into programming for WTS-LA.”

Being named WTS-LA Member of the Year means different things to different people. But one thing remains the same, a steadfast devotion to the chapter and its mission. College Outreach chair Todd Nguyen has that and he deserves the accolade. But being named the 2018 WTS-LA Member of the Year isn’t about an award or recognition for him. For him, it’s about finding new ways to better the chapter and the lives of emerging professionals within it, first as a member, then as the Outreach Committee chair, and next as the leader of the Mentoring Committee.