

Christi Fu: Making a Name in Construction Claims



Christi Fu (Arcadis operations manager for Contract Solutions Practice, WTS-LA Treasurer), Photos © John Livzey, 2019

Christi Fu, PE, CCM, LEED AP, ENV SP, is the Arcadis operations manager for the Contract Solutions Practice in the Western United States and the WTS-LA Treasurer. She is a registered civil engineer with a bachelor's and master's degree in civil engineering from the University of California, Berkeley.

After graduating, Ms. Fu began work with a contractor as a project engineer on commercial and residential projects. Her employer quickly recognized that she was exceptionally well organized and detail oriented, qualities which are ideal for claims analysis and preparation. They invited her to join the claims group, but she demurred. "I knew that even though I can write letters and create time-impact analyses, I really like interaction with people and being out in the field. So, they put me back on the jobsite and I was really happy to learn how things get built. I even became a superintendent for one project." She then moved on from working for a general contractor to an Assistant Project Manager position with an owner's representative firm building pharmaceutical research and development campuses.

When the 2008 recession hit the engineering and construction industry, Ms. Fu moved on to Arcadis as a claims analyst. "When the economy is bad, there are a lot of claims. But when the economy is good, well, there are still a lot of claims. Whenever you have a big project with so many stakeholders, there are almost always disputes and claims. Different interpretations to contract provisions are simply a reality of the business. And my time in the field served me very well, as it gave me greater understanding of how claims evolve and what they mean in real terms. Now, I just love my job." This field allowed Ms. Fu to work on a variety of projects, from highways, bridges, light rail, airports, and ports, to wastewater treatment centers, court houses, college campuses, etc., that range from \$30-million projects to \$1.2-billion programs.

In addition to her considerable workload, Ms. Fu is also pursuing an Executive MBA at UCLA's Anderson School of Management. But she's not earning the degree to switch to a business career. She has a very specific agenda for her MBA pursuit. "Sadly, they don't teach enough management in engineering school. They don't really teach you how to manage conflicts and staff, how to read a financial statement—all of the things that make operations successful. Fortunately, Arcadis has been very, very supportive of me getting my degree. They see great value in it, and they really invest in their people. My supervisor, Joe Seibold (Arcadis EVP), has been particularly supportive."

Ms. Fu also likes to return that support with loyalty and altruism. With Arcadis for more than 10 years, she gives back to the industry in another way.

"I have mentored high school students through the ACE Mentor Program since 2006. It means a lot to me because I did not know about engineering in high school and wanted to educate students about it. I also



enjoy telling parents that it is great and wonderful when their daughters want to go into engineering. So, on a bi-weekly basis I go to a high school or bring students to our offices and talk to them about what we do.”

“Caltrans also has a mentoring program where big businesses mentor small businesses. I’ve been doing that for the last five years. It’s a year-long program, and we meet every month about proposals, winning projects, business development, marketing plans, etc. When I can, I include the protégés as

subconsultants on pursuits. That way, they get the hands-on experience and it’s experience they can’t really get anywhere else.”

So, why does Ms. Fu give so much back? Why does she spend so much time mentoring young people and small businesses?

“Role models are very, very important. When I was introduced to WTS-LA, it was just amazing to see all of these women in leadership positions, to see them all in one place. As a minority woman, there was just no place else like this. WTS-LA provides great programs, of course, but the chapter is also changing the industry.

So, I looked at this group of very powerful, successful women and I knew I needed mentoring from them. So, Pattie Antich brought me in as her assistant treasurer. I had worked on a project with her about 10 years ago. In fact, she was the first project manager that I worked for when I moved to Los Angeles. She knew I could handle the tasks for treasurer and that’s how I got introduced to WTS-LA. So, now, through my work, my mentoring at ACE and Caltrans, and through WTS-LA, I look to learn from the role models I have and serve as a role model for young minority women rising through the ranks.”