

Linda Apodaca: One WTS-LA Scholarship. Four Beneficiaries.



Linda Apodaca (Manager of Community Engagement for Foothill Transit and 2015 WTS-LA Board of Directors Scholarship Recipient), Photos © John Livzey, 2019

Kindness knows no bounds. In fact, one never knows how far the benefits of a kindness—like a WTS-LA scholarship—can extend. Consider Foothill Transit Manager of Community Engagement Linda Apodaca.

An expert in community engagement, she handles virtually every public-facing element of Foothill Transit. From coordinating involvement in parades to conducting mock interviews at local high schools to sponsoring organizations, the scope of her work runs the gamut of Foothill Transit's interaction with the public. But it's her involvement with WTS-LA that serves as an example of how far WTS-LA's reach can extend through its scholarship program.

"I became connected to WTS-LA in two ways. Several years ago I attended some events, lunch-and-learns that Foothill Transit often sponsored. I became aware of the scholarship program when I was in my master's program [a Master of Science in Leadership and Management at the University of La Verne] and I won a scholarship, the WTS-LA Directors Scholarship Award for Professional Development. When I was considering doing a master's program, I didn't think it was possible because I had three children who were preparing for college. So, I figured my financial resources would be tapped. And I wasn't going to sacrifice their education for mine.



"But then I became aware of the WTS-LA scholarships and other scholarships as well and getting my master's became a possibility for me. The scholarship was actually the difference between doing a master's and not doing it. With it, I was able to get through the program without worrying that my education would supersede my children's. So, it not only made a difference to me, but to my kids. And while it was possible, it was still very hard. It took a little over two and half years. Going to classes after a full day of work, plus homework and papers. It was quite a lot of work."

Ms. Apodaca credits one co-worker that went through the program with her. Together, they all helped each other and held each other accountable. And she cites her husband for his boundless support. She also urges anyone considering applying for a scholarship to go for it.

“Apply more than once to a scholarship if you don’t get it at first. The first time I applied I didn’t get it. But the second time I did. I’m so glad I stuck with it.”

But Ms. Apodaca’s involvement with WTS-LA didn’t stop there. As she said, there were two ways she became connected to WTS-LA. And the second one continues today.

“I heard about Transportation YOU through a colleague. And I *loved* what it represented. I said to myself, ‘I’m volunteering for this for sure.’ The feeling of knowing that I could make a difference personally in a young person’s life was the key for me. That’s what brought me to the whole thing. Transportation YOU gives you the one-on-one time to interact with young people at local high schools. That’s a unique opportunity to reach young people and help them become the next generation of transportation professionals. And it’s exciting to be able to affect the future of the transportation industry that way.”

“I also like that Transportation YOU is reaching out to even younger people by going into middle schools. I like that we’re capturing that audience at an earlier age, so that they know about the possibility of careers in transportation. Transportation YOU cuts through it all and says, ‘Here we are!’ And it captures the kids’ imaginations, particularly if they weren’t thinking about a transportation career.”

It’s not always a simple process. But it also helps with her work at Foothill Transit.

“The most common question I get as someone who represents a bus agency is, ‘Well, I don’t want to be a bus operator, so what else can I do?’ And I tell them about all of the opportunities available in transportation, at Foothill Transit and other agencies. They’re always surprised when I tell them that we have everything from graphic designers to architects working for us. There are so many different disciplines in transportation and Transportation YOU really helps the students become aware of this.”

Kindness really does know no bounds. Having been on the receiving end of a kindness from WTS-LA in the form of a scholarship, Linda Apodaca pays forward that kindness through her work at Foothill Transit and her volunteering and promotion of the WTS Transportation YOU program.