

## March Brings Us Women in Construction Week, International Women's Day, and an Opportunity for You to Make a Difference as We Celebrate!



*Lisa Karwoski PE, WTS-LA President (Mott MacDonald), Photo by John Livzey*

Nothing is more satisfying than a victory lap. You've run the race. Bested quality competitors. And now it's time to celebrate by acknowledging effort and the adulation of the fans. Women in transportation have made tremendous strides. If you look at the industry today as compared to when WTS was founded, things are very, very different. Women lead public agencies and private firms. Women PEs and PMs lead large-scale projects. And women help plan infrastructure at the highest levels. According to a 2016 Bureau of Labor Statistics report, women accounted for 42.2% of all fulltime workers in STEM fields. So, we've made it. It's time to celebrate a full victory. Right? Well, not exactly...

That same report breaks things down further to reveal that women in architecture-and-engineering occupations account for only 14% of fulltime workers, and women comprise only 9% of the construction workforce. While great gains have been made, it seems we still have more work to do.

So, what makes this a pressing issue at the moment? What is the "why now?" as they say in the film industry? This week is Women in Construction Week, an event that highlights "women as a viable component of the construction industry...to raise awareness of the opportunities available for women in the construction industry and to emphasize the growing role of women in the industry." This is important and often neglected. In WTS-LA, while we focus greatly on transportation and infrastructure, unfortunately we tend to give certain areas like construction short shrift. The same is true for other vital aspects of transportation like freight, railroads, and even airline pilots. It's no one's fault. We do not actively seek to avoid certain disciplines or professions in our outreach. We have just fallen prey to staying within the well-worn grooves that others pioneered before us. So, it's time to take a step back and really look carefully at the transportation industry and its many facets. We need to expand our vision and application of the WTS-LA mission and see where we can really make more of a difference - and WTS-LA needs your help to make that happen! Here's what I would like us to do.

While continuing WTS-LA's outstanding outreach to fields like transit, aviation, and commuter rail, we're also putting our money where our mouths are. First, WTS-LA is expanding recognition and awareness through targeted programs and events. But we're also launching a series on women in construction in the bimonthly e-newsletter. So, stay tuned. And while that's a very good start, that's what we're doing collectively. Now, it's time to turn our attention a little more inward.

I would like each and every WTS-LA member to try and identify someone in a discipline that is *not* so well represented in the chapter. In addition to areas like freight, railroads, and pilots, expand your horizons to consider construction, logistics, bus/train drivers, shipping companies, trucking, the military, marine transportation, and community outreach. Even the sky isn't the limit, as we could also reach out to the burgeoning space exploration sector. It, too, is part of the transportation industry. So, I want each WTS-

LA member to identify and reach out to at least one person in a sector that deserves greater representation in the chapter (or if you don't know anyone personally, ask me how you can help the chapter as we find ways to reach out to these industries). As we've learned personally and from the stories of so many others, it only takes one person to light the spark of interest in WTS-LA and our mission. Be that spark. Bring someone to a chapter event as your guest. Introduce them to other WTS-LA members and other WTS-LA programs and events. Help them know they have real support and opportunity in the greater transportation industry.

Naturally, this is somewhat of a self-serving endeavor. By doing this, WTS-LA members will help expand the chapter. But that expansion will serve to help us engage a greater portion of the transportation industry while expanding WTS-LA's mission. So, essentially, it is doing well by doing good. And there's another reason why this effort is so timely. Today, March 8, is also International Women's Day (IWD). First celebrated in 1911 (!), IWD is a global event celebrating the "social, economic, cultural and political achievements of women." Obviously, that syncs perfectly with WTS-LA and our mission. But the IWD website also points out that, "Gloria Steinem, world-renowned feminist, journalist and activist once explained, 'The story of women's struggle for equality belongs to no single feminist nor to any one organization but to the collective efforts of all who care about human rights.' So make International Women's Day your day and do what you can to truly make a positive difference for women." I couldn't agree more.

Victory laps are great. Few things than sports show the absolute joy of overcoming challenge and celebrating hard work and extraordinary effort. While we certainly have earned the right to celebrate our victories, for women in the transportation industry it is a little too soon to take that victory lap. Yes, the women and men of the transportation industry have made great strides. And WTS-LA has been very instrumental in many of those advances here in Los Angeles. But we're not done yet. So, let us use this time—Women in Construction Week and IWD—to start a new push to expand WTS-LA's mandate to areas of the transportation industry that deserve representation and support. Let's make March 2019 a great month for *all* women in transportation.