

2020 WTS-LA Woman of the Year: Jeanet Owens, PE



Jeanet Owens, PE (WTS-LA Woman of the Year Award Recipient), Photo © John Livzey, 2020

If the WTS-LA Woman of the Year award is about leadership—and it is—then Jeanet Owens redefines the award for the 21st century. Each year, WTS-LA names a woman who is a “leader in transportation and has made an outstanding contribution to the transportation industry...someone who has directly contributed to the advancement of women and minorities through programs or opportunities in the transportation field.” In essence, that’s a description of Owens and her career.

Today, Owens, a registered engineer, is the senior executive officer for Program Management and Regional Rail at Metro. She manages a program of \$5+ billion in capital improvement projects—from the \$3 billion LINK Union Station project (that will transform community and intercity rail in Southern California) to the \$120 million Metro Center Street Facility (that will make way for new rail capacity and improve current safety and security technologies). For any transportation professional, that alone is an enviable résumé. For Owens, that’s only part of the story.

For more than 25 years, Owens has amassed a wholly unique record of experience in working with both public and private capital, public projects and private developments, and projects on both sides of the table that often venture into the millions and billions. That is an outstanding accomplishment. And yet, that’s not the whole story either.

In addition to being a registered engineer, Owens is an accredited LEED professional, and an 8-year veteran of the U.S. Navy Reserve Civil Engineering Corps, where she achieved the rank of lieutenant. She holds a bachelor of science from CalState, Los Angeles, a master’s degree in the science of civil engineering, and a construction management certification from UCLA. Surely, that’s the entire story. No, that hardly covers it.

Owens believes in giving back, in helping others take advantage of the trails she blazed. For example, Owens is a member, regular speaker, and active participant in Metro’s Women and Girls Governing Council (WGGC). Established in 2017, WGGC analyzes how Metro’s programs, services, and policies affect the lives of women and girls in LA County. It looks to find opportunities to remove barriers to success and expand opportunities at, within, and on Metro, as 29% of Metro’s 10,800 fulltime staff are female and 51% of Metro’s transit riders are female. Owens adds, “I am very proud of the WGGC and their significant contributions, including changing Metro’s hiring policy of implementing blind screening where candidates are selected based on their merits and qualifications and names are only revealed once selected for interviews.” On a more personal level, she is also devout Catholic and has served as

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Catechism kindergarten teacher. She currently serves as a lector and has been a Eucharistic minister for over 30 years. She credits her strong Catholic faith and family for her inner strength and the center core of her foundation that has shaped the person she is today.

In addition, Owens also devotes considerable time, energy, and effort to WTS-LA. Owens co-hosted the 2017 WTS-LA Annual Scholarship and Awards Dinner, an event attended by more than 500 transportation luminaries who witnessed the chapter award a record \$71,000 in scholarships. She's also served as a program speaker numerous times, including the chapter's annual regional rail panels, and routinely helps the chapter with its workforce development efforts. But Owens's selfless efforts don't stop there.

Owens also contributes her wisdom to the National Association of Women Business Owners, serving as a speaker for such events as Women of Color Who Lead. She has also been a member and speaker for other organizations, including WTS-OC, the American Society of Civil Engineers, Asian American Architects/Engineers Association, the Construction Specifications Institute, the Society of American Military Engineers, and several more.

For many, that is a CV that they would shout out from the highest mountain top. Not her. Instead, Owens prefers to focus completely on the task at hand, rather than plaudits. "If you are considerate, humble, and you work hard, you can't imagine what kind of doors are opened."

Each year, WTS-LA recognizes one woman above all others in Southern California for her leadership, career, and character, one who has made an outstanding contribution to women and the transportation industry. This year, the WTS-LA Woman of the Year, Jeanet Owens, embodies those ideals, redefining them for the 21st century.