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HOT Chapter Newsletter



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PRESIDENT’S LETTER

As we wrap up our first quarter of 2022 things are finally beginning to feel and look a little more normal in the HOT Chapter. We are already off to a great start with our three in-person lunches and have more exciting speakers and events planned for the rest of the year. We will have lots to celebrate this year as we continue to revitalize our programs and get reacquainted with everyone.

We kicked off this year with our Annual Business Meeting and introduced our two Honorary Members, Shuronda Robinson, President, Adisa Communications and Casey Burack, Esq., General Counsel, Austin Transit Partnership. These individuals were selected by our Board of Directors as this year’s Honorary Members due to their exceptional leadership in our transportation community and their outstanding support of the WTS mission. We welcome them to our WTS membership!

As I look back on 2021, I would like to thank everyone in the Chapter who helped us with another successful year under not so normal circumstances. From our virtual monthly program meetings to (hopefully our last virtual) Gala, from our Professional Development Seminar to our first back-in-person CP/Member Event, we could not have done it without our amazing committee chairs and members who volunteered their time and expertise to help make our events a success.

I would like to encourage all of you who are not involved yet to join this amazing organization. Information on how to join can be found at <https://www.wtsinternational.org/mission/membership>.

Be sure to take a look at our many different committees, reach out, and get involved. Don’t be shy! Our committees are always looking for new members and innovative ideas.

As always, if you have any questions about WTS or the HOT CHAPTER, please do not hesitate to contact me or anyone else on our board. I look forward to seeing everyone in person again at one of our next events. I wish everyone a continued happy, healthy, and safe 2022!

All the best!

Ashley Williams

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Open Position

BECOME A WTS HEART OF TEXAS MEMBER



Advance your career in transportation. Become a WTS Heart of Texas Member! The WTS HOT Chapter is committed to advancing women and advancing transportation in the Central Texas area. Take advantage of all our great networking, professional development, and continuing education opportunities.



For more info and to register: <https://www.wtsinternational.org/events/2022-wts-international-annual-conference>



ANNUAL BUSINESS MEETING

In January we welcomed everyone back with our Annual Business Meeting. We recapped what we accomplished in 2021 and laid out the calendar for 2022. We also announced our 2022 Honorary Members, Shuronda Robinson, President, Adisa Communications and Casey Burack, Esq., General Counsel, Austin Transit Partnership.

INTRODUCTION OF 2022 HONORARY MEMBERS



Shuronda Robinson
President, Adisa Communications

Since Shuronda Robinson founded Adisa Communications in 1995, the firm has garnered a reputation for creative professionalism by providing a full spectrum of public involvement and communications services. Now serving clients in Austin, Dallas, Houston, and San Antonio, Adisa offers an array of creative and intuitive communication solutions from branding to communications training. Adisa means “one who makes himself clear,” and creating clarity is the hallmark of the organization.

Shuronda has successfully implemented communications programs for the City of Austin, Association of Black Cardiologists, Travis County Hospital District, Austin ISD, Round Rock ISD, the Central Texas Regional Mobility Authority, San Antonio River Authority, City of Arlington, and Richmond, VA. Private sector clients rely on her level-headed approach to public relations and include Frost Bank, Lenovo, and Wal-Mart. She likes to say, “Call me after you’ve made all of the easy decisions!” Additionally, Shuronda has been privileged to engage and support the leadership and communications skills development of groups, including the Texas Association of Community Educators, Leadership Austin, Start Wherever You are Tour, Women in Transportation Seminar, and the eWomen Network.

She is a third-generation entrepreneur who grew up in a newspaper publishing family. She spent her teen years covering news stories, photography, graphic design, and layout. The family business gave her an opportunity to hone her entrepreneurial spirit and her ability to communicate effectively across multiple mediums. In 2009 she launched her second dream, a national executive coaching and training practice called “The Joyful Living Center,” where she works with entrepreneurs, leaders, and executives to support them in achieving beyond their goals.

She is actively involved in the community with the Boys & Girls Clubs, the Paramount Theater, YMCA East Communities Branch Board of Managers, and Zachary Scott Theater. Shuronda and a college buddy started Austin’s City-Wide Martin Luther King Celebrations, which have generated crowds of more than 20,000 annually. She currently serves on the Board of Directors for the Architecture Foundation of Austin.

Shuronda lives in Austin, Texas, and is the proud mother of three boys, Adisa, William Alex, and Jordan.



Casey Burack, Esq.
General Counsel, Austin Transit Partnership

Prior to joining Austin Transit Partnership, Casey Burack served as General Counsel and VP of Government Affairs for the Downtown Austin Alliance, which manages the Austin Downtown Public Improvement District and represents over 900 downtown property owners. She specialized in mobility policy at the Downtown Alliance, and has served on the board of Bike Share Austin, as chair of ULI Austin’s Transportation Strategic Council and as a member of ULI Austin’s Advisory Board.

Prior to joining the Downtown Austin Alliance, Casey practiced real estate and infrastructure law here in Austin and in Los Angeles. She earned her J.D. from Loyola Law School and an M.A./B.A. in Latin American Studies at UCLA. She is a member of the Texas, California, and New York Bar Associations.

When away from the office, Casey enjoys international travel and playing with her six-year-old son, Everett.



FEBRUARY LUNCHEON

Natasha Harper-Madison, City of Austin Council Member

For the WTS HOT Chapter's first regular luncheon of 2022 we were excited to welcome City of Austin Council Member Natasha Harper-Madison. She was the 2021 Mayor Pro-Tem, being the second black member to hold this role. She represents Austin's District 1, the part of town where she was born and raised. She presented broadly about how diversity in the industry can lead to more equitable outcomes.

Natasha spoke very charismatically regarding her goals to get people involved. "Making change happen is hard to get done," she said, "and we all have to do it together."

Born and raised in East Austin, Natasha shares the strengths and struggles of her community. After overcoming the challenges of childhood poverty to become a successful small business owner, she turned her attention to her true passion: Community advocacy. Her service as president of the East 12th Street Merchants Association inspired her to run for public office, which she did successfully in 2018. In her first term representing District 1, Natasha has been an outspoken champion for affordable housing, progressive mobility, and expanded economic opportunity.

During her talk, Natasha spoke of the unique perspective women bring to transportation with their ability to be collaborative and in building strong relationships. She spoke about how women must fight for everything and how women know how to get things done through tenacity and grit. On the other hand, men have more value just by being in the room.

Natasha explained how she speaks plainly and to the point with her constituents. She doesn't try to pull any punches and when businesses must close due to community improvements such as roadways and transit, she will tell them that 50 businesses have to close and not try to avoid the issue. It is obvious that Natasha wants to build trust with her community and is successful in her endeavors.

The hardest issues Natasha has tackled are housing economic options and mobility. She said that, since she is the only black council member, she gets the black people's issues. She stated that she understands when a family can't afford to own a car and must rely on public transportation, and how public transportation is failing the lower income communities.

Natasha concluded her talk by explaining that while transportation is a major factor for all of Austin, we can't talk about transportation and not talk about housing. It's a major economic issue and needs to be addressed. As the city continues to grow it will be an ongoing issue for many of Austin's residents. However, she challenged the audience to consider if, when it doesn't seem to affect you, will you care? Will you do anything to help? As Natasha said, "we all have to do it together." Transportation affects everyone, so step up and be part of the solution.

Natasha is also a proud mother, wife, and a thriving breast cancer survivor. The WTS HOT Chapter thanks her for her wonderful talk and for facilitating a thought-provoking discussion as our speaker.



MARCH LUNCHEON

Laura Ryan, Texas Transportation Commission

WTS HOT welcomed Laura Ryan as our guest speaker for the March luncheon. She is a member of the Texas Transportation Commission, which oversees statewide activities of the Texas Department of Transportation. Governor Greg Abbott appointed Ms. Ryan to the commission on July 11, 2016, to fill a vacancy and reappointed her on March 2, 2017 for a six-year term.

Laura's presentation focused on the unfortunate fatalities Texas has on its roads. According to the data that TxDOT tracks daily, it has been 21 years since Texas had a death free day on its roadways. Texas has averaged about 10 fatalities a day since November 2007.

Laura is out there trying to encourage and promote #EndTheStreakTX with the goal of reducing the number of deaths in half by 2025. She has unfortunately been told "that will never happen." For example, during the pandemic there was a 40% reduction in driving but an increase in fatalities. There were 12.3 fatalities a day in 2021 due to speed issues and reckless driving. Last year was the second deadliest year since 1940.

Top causes of death in 2020 were impaired driving, speeding, and distracted driving. Put those phones DOWN y'all! In 2021 the top causes of deaths were speeding and not wearing seatbelts.

To try and improve roads in an effort to decrease fatalities, TxDOT has allotted \$600 million to the cause, and they have spent every dollar on safety items.

A TxDOT/MPO Safety Task Force was created to work with districts, MPOs, and law enforcement. For the purpose of using data to design safer roads and provide education and communication to the driving public to encourage safer driving.

Laura finished her presentation with a discussion on the supply chain issues facing Texas and the rest of the nation. She said, "Texas is a vital link in the supply chain." With Covid causing a decrease in international trade, domestic production, and consumer spending, we've seen major decreases in trade. For example, Texas-Mexico trade decreased 17.5% in 2020. There were fewer truckers available on the road for moving products, which also affected the U.S.-Mexico trade by 13.5% in 2020.

Laura spoke on how the pandemic has made people angry and they are taking out their frustration on others from behind the wheel. She said there is a simple and easy way to negate this--"Be intentional and kind behind the wheel." Laura explained how when people have actually changed their driving habits it was because they were concerned about hurting someone else but not themselves or their families. She asks us all to "change your thinking. Be as concerned for yourself and your family as you would for a stranger."

Commissioner Ryan ended her presentation with an update on the Texas Clear Lanes initiative. With mobility being a major issue in getting goods moving across the state, the commission, at the request of Governor Abbott, established the Texas Clear Lanes initiative. This initiative aims to get people moving and reduce congestion with non-toll projects and it's all about connectivity. "Better connected roadways and highways mean connecting communities, and that's important," she said. \$10 billion for maintenance and preservation is being invested to connectivity over the next 10 years.

The WTS HOT Chapter was thrilled to have Laura speak during our luncheon and provide our attendees with valuable information on the issues that we face everyday on our roadways regarding fatalities and supply distribution. We hope our attendees heeded her message and found themselves being a little bit nicer behind the wheel on their way back to their offices. Next time let that guy in on the freeway. He's really not going to slow you down as you're both moving at the same rate of speed, which hopefully isn't over the posted speed limit! As Laura said, "be nice. Drive safe."





Advancing women
Advancing transportation
> Heart of Texas

SCHOLARSHIPS

Removing barriers
to transform the
industry.



The WTS HOT Chapter is excited to announce that we are awarding multiple local scholarships to graduating high school seniors. These scholarships have been made possible through generous contributions from our Friends of WTS donors.

Every year, the scholarships are competitive and based on the applicant's specific transportation involvement and goals, job skills, and academic record. Minority candidates are encouraged to apply. Past applicants have backgrounds in civil, mechanical, electrical, and environmental engineering, as well as urban planning, public policy, public safety, and emergency response. Any students that may be eligible for the scholarships should apply.

Go to <https://www.wtsinternational.org/chapters/heart-texas/scholarships-0> to download the application.

Completed applications must be received electronically no later than 11:59 p.m. CST on April 6, 2022.

Submit by email to:

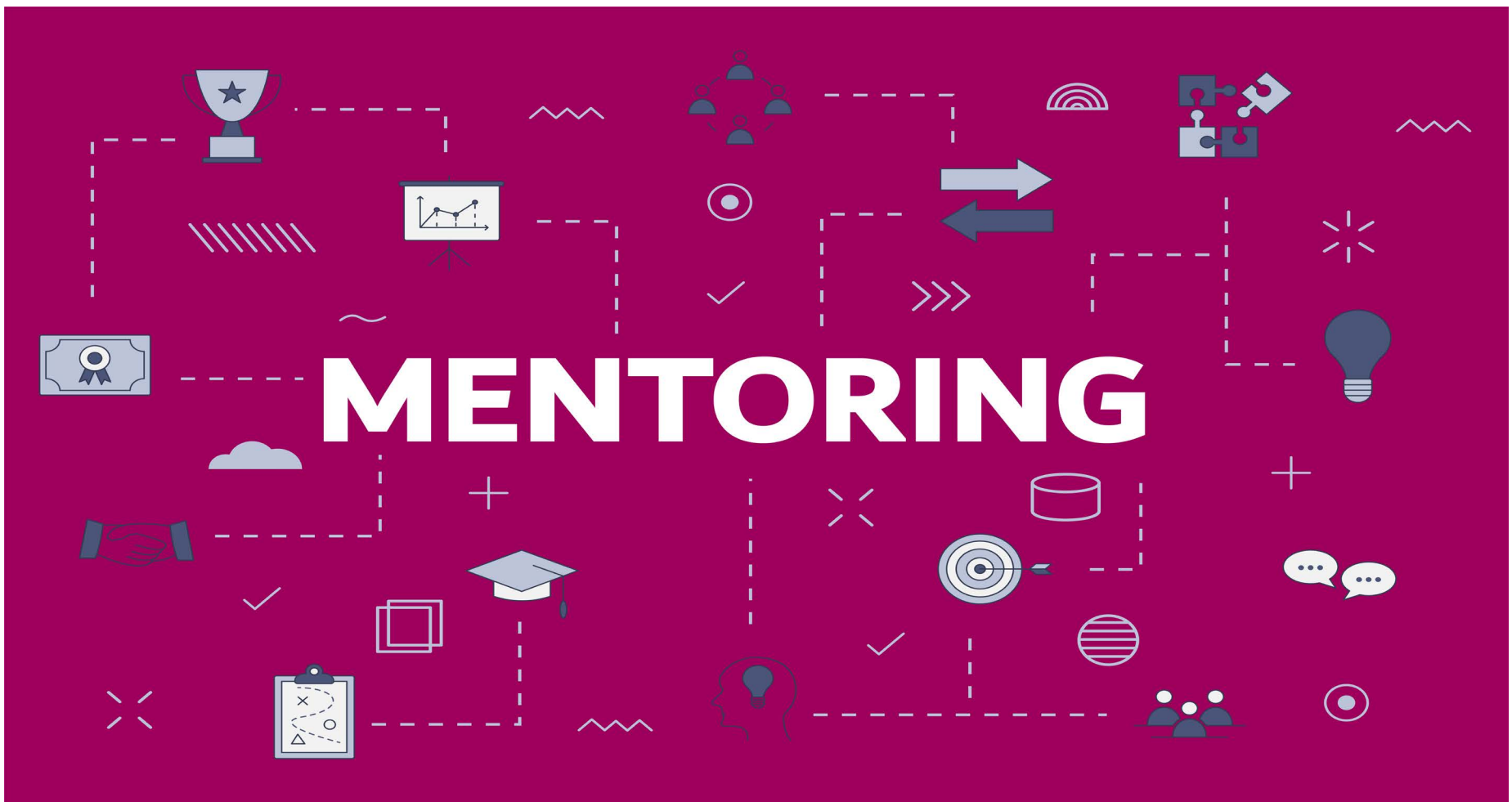
scholarship@wtshotchapter.org



WE NEED YOU!

We have a few committees that could use some extra hands. We are currently seeking people to help out with our Gala, Mentorship, and Transportation YOU committees.

If you are interested please let Ashley Williams, president@wtshotchapter.org know!



The WTS Heart of Texas chapter is preparing to begin our fifth year of the WTS Mentorship program. Our chapter board would like to continue the program's efforts with a focus on professional development skills and career growth.

The Mentorship Committee will pair each mentee with a mentor who is a leader in the transportation community. We will hold a kickoff event once we finalize the mentorship pairings to introduce mentees and mentors and review the full program agenda. We will hold monthly mentorship program luncheons with leadership development speakers at different venues in Austin. And mentees will have the chance to “graduate” with a celebration in October. In addition to the monthly luncheons, we would expect the mentees to commit to connect with their mentors on an informal basis, as it works with the schedules for individual pairs.

Requirements for mentee participants are (1) to be a member of WTS Heart of Texas Chapter and (2) availability and commitment to participate in the program as described above. Additionally, the committee will select only one mentee per agency/company each year.

There is no out-of-pocket cost for any participants of the program. We estimate a commitment of 2 to 3 hours per month from May through October for full participation in all program events and outside meetings for the mentor/mentee pairs.

If you are interested in applying for the 2022 Mentorship Program as a mentee, please contact Vice President Tonia Norman at vicepresident@wtshotchapter.org and she will send you the Mentee Intake Form to complete. The information that you provide on the form will help us pair mentees with the program's mentor volunteers. **The deadline to submit your completed Mentee Intake Form is April 15, 2022.**

Please feel free to contact Tonia Norman at vicepresident@wtshotchapter.org with any questions about the Mentorship Program.