



Advancing women Advancing transportation

February/March 2022 Newsletter

PRESIDENT'S COLUMN

Dear WTS Members and Friends,



The first quarter of my Presidency started off with a whirlwind of Board transitions, hosting multiple great programs, meeting with the Advisory Board, and working through our 2022 strategic actions. I've been bogged down in the minutia and haven't taken time to reflect on the impact our chapter has on our members. I was reminded of this impact recently when I connected with three retired women who were active WTS members during their careers. They were all on vacation together this winter. While I am (unfortunately) years from retirement, it was

amazing to hear from these women who formed such strong relationships through WTS that now have transformed into a support network in their post-professional life. Hearing the story of their vacation together gave me the reminder I needed about the life-long impact WTS can have!

One of the many benefits our chapter provides is great monthly programs. Keep an eye out for announcements for a METRO Orange Line tour on April 26 and the annual Scholarship and Recognitions event on May 25. We are particularly excited to host the Scholarships and Recognitions event in-person again this year. This is such a wonderful event that we wanted to do it justice with an in-person celebration. Details for that event will come out shortly but we hope all our members and friends will be able to join us for that amazing day.

2022 is shaping up to be an active year of reconnection and reactivation. In that spirit, I look forward to welcoming you all to bring that energy to WTS this year and your connection with one another.

Lyssa Leitner
President WTS MN Chapter

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WTS is committed to advancing women and advancing transportation in Minnesota. In honor of Women's History Month, all new members can register for 15% off in March. Use promo code "WHM2022."

Sign up at wtsinternational.org/



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Greetings from the 2022 WTS MN Board!

We're happy to serve our members to advance the inclusion & participation of women in the transportation industry! Our 2022 Board members are:

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Lyssa Leitner, Washington County

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The Journey of WTS Founder, Sherri Alston

By: Brenda Thomas, KLJ—Featuring Sherri Alston

As WTS Minnesota celebrates its 40th anniversary the Diversity and Inclusion committee pays tribute to those that started WTS. Four women Sherri Alston, Kim Hughes, Laurie Kent, and Carolann Sharp were the founders. Their efforts continue to have impacts in advancing women in transportation.

In the late 60's jobs for women were hard to come by. Sherri Alston, was just happy to have one, working in a secretarial position for the Southern Railway System in Washington D.C. and not only was she one of the few women she was also the only African American. She became a research assistant where she worked side-by-side with the three other founders of WTS. "At the time, we weren't thinking of ourselves. We were four women, that worked for the same company, same department and we wanted to reach out to other women particularly in Washington," explained Sherri. What initially started to connect with other women, to better educate themselves, and listen and learn from one another. She never imagined that there would be thousands of women involved today. "We were happy that we had this idea, and with the help of Laurie, Kim, Carolann and others in the late 70's, it took off!" said Sherri.



As Sherri's career continued at Southern Railway System, she took full advantage of the tuition reimbursement program offered and got her law degree. She worked full-time Monday – Friday and went to school in the evenings. Then one day she was approached by an acquaintance from her home state of Iowa offering her a job for the newly formed Department of Transportation in Iowa. She served on the transportation regulation board to oversee regulatory issues. A short two years later she was recruited to the Minnesota Department of Transportation to serve as Assistant Commissioner of Public Transportation from 1977 – 1982. "I had a law degree but wasn't practicing law. I found a way to move forward with my degree – just like a modern-day MBA – use it to advance whatever field you're in," Sherri said.

In 1982 Sherri found herself back in Washington D.C. working for the District's Public Works agency. Her office worked with the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority (WMATA) on the planning and construction of Metro. In 1996 she joined the Federal Highway Administration and became the Director of Transportation Policy Studies until she retired in 2009. Sherri never had the intention to have a career in public service. Through her years in private, public, local, state, and federal agencies she paved the way for many. She never thought about how her evolution in each job continued to expand her role as a leader. "I was just trying to do it (my job). I wanted to be effective, and people had a positive perception of the work I was doing. I had a lot of support even from my first job as a research assistant all the way to department heads and commissioner."

The Journey of WTS Founder, Sherri Alston (Continued)

Sherri is just one example of how women have progressed in the transportation industry. "As more opportunities open women need to be willing to look around for other women to bring along, suggest for positions, encourage them, be mentors to them. The climate is changing, and women are being recognized for their contributions to be effective leaders." Sherri continues with listing women like Carmen Turner, Nuria Fernandez, Gloria Jeff and Elizabeth Dole that have/had prominent roles in government. "Women have to be willing to get outside of their comfort zone, if you have the opportunity to learn something or do something different, take advantage of that!"



Ever wonder how it all got started? Where that name came from? Who were the movers and shakers (and instigators) of the Women's Transportation Seminar? We take you back to the good old days of the early 1970s, when the world was young, and the founders were younger...

The time: Late 1972/early 1973.

The place: The offices of Southern Railway, Washington, DC.

The cast: Four women, research assistants all, including Sherri Alston, Kim Hughes, Laurie Kent, and Carolann Sharp.

Next month, Sherri will celebrate a birthday and hopes her choral group in Washington will resume so she can continue singing. She's been singing since 1968 when she had the opportunity to perform in front of First Lady, Lady Bird Johnson, at the White House in the "Wizard of Oz" as one of the munchkins.

CORPORATE PARTNER SPOTLIGHT:



MN OFFICES:

MINNEAPOLIS, DULUTH

TRANSPORTATION SERVICES OFFERED:

Environmental, Planning, Design, ITS, Project Controls and PM/CM Services for Roads, Bridges, and Transit.



TRANSPORTATION SERVICES OFFERED:

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WHY AECOM SUPPORTS WTS MN:

AECOM is focused on creating integrated transportation systems to sustain a better world in which people can live and work. AECOM believes in the transformative power a diverse and inclusive culture can have upon the transportation industry. We are committed to creating a diverse and inclusive culture that is dynamic, active and intentional to increasing individual and organization performance. We support organizations like WTS Minnesota because they are essential to advancing both the transportation industry and the women who are part of creating it!

MN OFFICES:

DULUTH, HIBBING, MANKATO, MINNEAPOLIS, ROCHESTER, ST. CLOUD, ST. PAUL

WHY BRAUN SUPPORTS WTS MN:

Braun Intertec is an employee-owned firm with a rich history in transportation. Our team is focused on building trust-based relationships working with clients through every phase of the project lifecycle. We are focused on growing our diversity while also striving to provide a supportive environment for all of our employees. Through this initiative, we created the Empower Women group which is dedicated to creating a community, attracting, developing, and retaining women leaders. We also encourage and support our employees to become active members in various external professional organizations, such as WTS Minnesota.

PROGRAMS UPDATE

JANUARY PROGRAM RECAP—BRIDGES TO PROSPERITY: LEARN ABOUT THE POWER OF CONNECTION



Many WTS MN members have dedicated their careers to improving transportation access, services, and infrastructure for the communities we serve and we were pleased to showcase the work of Bridges to Prosperity (B2P). B2P envisions a world where poverty caused by rural isolation no longer exists. They work with isolated communities to create access to essential healthcare, education, and economic opportunities by building and promoting the installation of trail bridges over impassable rivers. To do so, They partner with local communities and governments and - to date - they have helped construct 380 bridges that connect over 1.3 million people.

Nico Turrini, Manager of Global Corporate Partnerships and East Africa Marketing, shared information about this non-profit organization. Nico presented about his experience with B2P; B2P's approach, community impacts, elevating women in their organization and communities; as well as cooperate sponsorship and volunteer opportunities.

In addition, Tara Olds, Acting Executive Director of MnDOT's Connected and Automated Vehicles Program shared about her previous involvement with B2P as a university student in South America and as an employee working in Central America. She presented about her experiences with the organization and highlight how her experiences have shaped her work throughout her career in Minnesota.

FEBRUARY PROGRAM RECAP—JOINT PROGRAM WITH NCITE – ETHICS: THE HEART OF THE ENGINEERING PROFESSION

Technology has advanced engineering, as a profession, over the past 40 years. While technology has changed, people have not, and we continue to face the same ethical dilemmas we faced 40 years ago. This presentation, "Ethics - The Heart of the Engineering Profession", discussed why ethics is a core principle of our industry, while outlining some of the ethical issues that engineers encounter over their careers using pertinent case studies. We discussed the gamut of issues; reviewed the engineering code of ethics applicable to professional societies, professional licensing boards, and our places of employment; and introduced tools and resources that will help engineers and planners stay on the right path, professionally.

James (Jim) T. Johnson presented an engaging training where he drew on his own experiences as an engineer and shared some real world ethical decisions he's been faced with. Jim is a Senior Consultant with Verdantas. His career has spanned over 40 years in both the public and private sectors. While in the public sector, Jim served as the Chief Engineer for the Delaware Department of Transportation and was the Executive Director for the Delaware River & Bay Authority, a bi-state transportation agency. He conducts lectures on ethics for engineering students at the University level, State Department of Transportation's and for Professional Engineers licensed in mid-Atlantic region. Jim is a registered Professional Engineer in Delaware and Maryland. He was recognized as Delaware's Engineer of the Year in 2004. Jim received a BSCE from Virginia Tech and a MS in Strategic Leadership from Neumann University.

MARCH PROGRAM—LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT/ACTION PLAN BREAKFAST

Join the WTS MN Diversity & Inclusion (D&I) Committee Wednesday, March 23 from 8-9:30am at Rani Engineering for a discussion to begin the development of a WTS Land Acknowledgment Statement. Tribal Nations and Native people are important contributors to the economic and human environments in Minnesota and land acknowledgement is one of many ways to recognize that contribution. A Land Acknowledgement is a formal statement that recognizes and respects Indigenous Peoples as traditional stewards of this land and the enduring relationship that exists between Indigenous Peoples and their traditional territories. The acknowledgements of land rights are and have been an important first step in understanding the past, present, and future of the land in Minnesota.

Are you interested in learning more or sharing ways in which Tribal Nations and Native people are impacted or benefited by our work in the transportation field? Would you like to see the contributions of Native people, communities, and Tribal Nations recognized by our industry? For more information and to register, click [HERE](#).



CALL FOR VOLUNTEERS: We are growing as a chapter and have so many ways to get involved. See what opportunities are available [here](https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/PHYKBD) (<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/PHYKBD>)!

MEMBERS AND

FRIENDS ON THE MOVE

Celebrating milestones for our members and friends. Have member news to share? Send in snippets about job changes, life milestones, and other accomplishments to [Emily Bowen](#) so we can recognize our colleagues!

Brian Funk— Promoted to Deputy General Manager—Chief Operating Officer at Metro Transit.

Caroline Miller— Promoted to Transportation Planning Section Manager at HDR.

Jackie Nowak - Promoted to Transit Analyst III at SRF.

THANK YOU TO OUR 2022 SPONSORS:

We appreciate your support! You make all our programs, scholarships, and outreach possible .

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