



2023 VOLUME 1

March 31, 2023

# HOT Chapter Newsletter



> Heart of Texas

Advancing women  
Advancing transportation

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## BOARD MEMBERS

### PRESIDENT

**Tonia Norman**

Retired  
TxDOT

### VICE PRESIDENT

**Laura Friello, PE**

Project Manager  
Garver

### SECRETARY

**Adeliza Ramirez, PE**

Engineer  
Volkert

### TREASURER

**Seles Johnson, PE**

Senior Transportation Engineer  
Atkins

### IMMEDIATE PAST PRESIDENT

**Ashley Williams**

Research Administrator  
Center for Transportation  
Research/UT Austin



## PRESIDENT'S LETTER

Greetings! It is my honor to serve as the Heart of Texas Chapter President for 2023-2024. I look forward to all the fun, educational, inspiring, and supportive activities that our chapter will undertake and share with you in the coming months.

We have already had some wonderful events in 2023. We held our Annual Business Meeting in January to review the chapter activities from 2022, preview events coming in 2023, and celebrate the 2022 board members for their service to the chapter. Please join me in thanking Past President Ashley Williams for her dedicated leadership over the past two years. We also welcomed several new board members for 2023, including Secretary Adeliza Ramirez, Treasurer Seles Johnson, and Vice President Laura Friello, who, along with Ashley and me, comprise the executive committee. We are thrilled to have two men serving on the board this year; Stephen Johnson is co-chairing the Scholarship Committee and Max Hoffman is co-chairing our Student Liaison efforts. Welcome gentlemen! Check out the chapter website at <https://www.wtsinternational.org/chapters/heart-texas> to get to know all of our committee chairs on the 2023 WTS-HOT Chapter Board who we introduce in the next section.

Our February luncheon program provided an opportunity to collaborate with the Austin Chapter of the Conference of Minority Transportation Officials (COMPTO) to present a discussion on creating equitable and accessible transportation systems. In March we featured two new women professors at the University of Texas at Austin and a TxDOT recruiter to discuss the future of the transportation workforce. Next month, we look forward to hearing from Capital Metropolitan Transportation Authority President and CEO Dottie Watson. Look for your invitation to that and future chapter events in your inbox.

2023 also marks the reinvigoration of the chapter's mentoring program. Lynn Isaak and her committee have matched 9 mentees and mentors and will hold six monthly program sessions between now and October. We wish the mentor/mentee pairs success as they work together this year.

The WTS International Conference will be held May 10-12, 2023, in Atlanta, Georgia. The theme is The Great Intersection: Where Transportation and Equity Intersect. There's still time to register at <https://wtsannualconference.org/>. Read more on page 8.

Of course, we cannot forget this year's 19th Annual WTS Heart of Texas Foundation Scholarship and Awards Gala, scheduled for June 17th at the Austin Hilton. The theme is Boots and Bling! We look forward to seeing you all there to help us raise funds for the chapter's important



# COMMITTEE CHAIRS

## COMMUNICATIONS

### Cheryl Goodgame

Senior Marketing Coordinator  
Lockwood, Andrews, & Newnam, Inc.

## CORPORATE PARTNERSHIP

### Patty Trujillo, PE, MCE

Transportation Engineer  
Atkins

## GALA CHAIR

### Lisa Loftus-Otway

Research Scientist  
Center for Transportation Research  
UT Austin

## MEMBERSHIP CHAIR

### Kat Streff

Project Manager  
Kleinfelder

## MENTORING CHAIR

### Lynn Isaak, PE, MBA, PMP

Engineering Services Director  
Foresight Planning & Engineering

## PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

### Christen Eschberger, PE

Project Director  
HNTB

## PROGRAMS CHAIR

### Laurie Simmons, APR

Strategic Communications and Public  
Involvement Project Manager  
AECOM

## RECOGNITIONS CHAIR

### Andrea Bryant, PE

Transportation Project Manager  
Freese & Nichols

## REGIONAL COUNCIL

### Jackie Sartor

Business Development Director  
Foresight Planning & Engineering

## SCHOLARSHIP CO-CHAIRS

### Brittani Kaim

Communications Marketing Manager  
WSP

### Stephen Johnson, PE

Project Manager, Central Texas  
Transportation Leader  
Garver

## STUDENT LIAISON CO-CHAIRS

### Madelyn Krieger

Engineer  
Freese & Nichols

### Max Hoffman

Planner II  
HNTB

## TRANSPORTATION YOU CHAIR

### Dee Anne Vickery

Chief of Staff  
Central Texas Regional Mobility  
Authority

scholarship and TransportationYOU programs. We will recognize the 2022 chapter award recipients and present several scholarships to deserving young women pursuing coursework in transportation-related fields. Be on the lookout soon for the opportunity to register for the gala. Sponsorship opportunities are also open, so please plan to participate and support this important event.

I close with a call for volunteers and an invitation to become a WTS member. It takes a lot of work from many volunteers to conduct the chapter activities that benefit the Heart of Texas transportation community. Please contact me or any of the committee chairs if you are interested in helping to plan and execute our events. If you are not yet a WTS member, we welcome you to join. Our membership chair, Kat Streff, can assist anyone with the membership application process; contact her at [membership@wtshotchapter.org](mailto:membership@wtshotchapter.org).

Your chapter board is working hard to provide benefits and opportunities for all of you this year in pursuit of our mission to advance women and advance transportation. Please don't hesitate to contact me with any questions or feedback.

Best regards,



## 19TH ANNUAL GALA



**Save the Date**

WTS HOT Chapter 19th Annual  
Scholarship & Awards Gala

**BOOTS**  
& **BLING**

**Saturday, June 17, 2023**  
**Hilton Downtown**

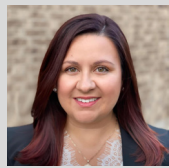
Registration and more information to follow.



Advancing women  
Advancing transportation  
> Heart of Texas

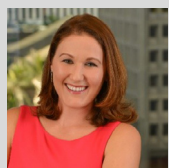


Each committee plays a crucial role in supporting the functionality of the chapter. This section offers a brief overview of what our committees do to advance our mission.



## MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEE

The Membership Committee takes ownership of the recruitment and retention of WTS members. The committee maintains the roster of members and actively seeks to enhance the membership experience for the HOT chapter. Want to learn more? Contact Kat Streff at [membership@wtshotchapter.org](mailto:membership@wtshotchapter.org)



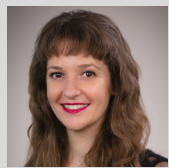
## PROGRAMS COMMITTEE

The Programs Committee is responsible for the coordination of all chapter programming, including the monthly luncheons held throughout the year. Want to learn more? Contact Laurie Simmons at [programs@wtshotchapter.org](mailto:programs@wtshotchapter.org)



## GALA COMMITTEE

The Gala Committee plans and coordinates the annual scholarship and awards gala which recognizes scholarship recipients as well as awards given by the chapter. The Gala celebrates our members with an evening of fun and fundraising. Want to learn more? Contact Lisa Loftus-Otway at [gala@wtshotchapter.org](mailto:gala@wtshotchapter.org)



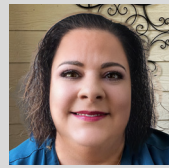
## RECOGNITIONS COMMITTEE

The Recognitions Committee plays a key role in ensuring that transportation professionals and their firms are recognized for their dedication to advancing women and advancing transportation. Want to learn more? Contact Andrea Bryant at [recognitions@wtshotchapter.org](mailto:recognitions@wtshotchapter.org)



## SCHOLARSHIP COMMITTEE

We are able to offer scholarships in the spring and fall each year. In the spring, Friends of WTS Scholarships are awarded to high school seniors. In the fall, WTS International awards scholarships for undergraduate, graduate, and junior college students as well as high school seniors. The committee maintains a database for high school and universities in the region and evaluates applications for scholarship awards. Want to learn more? Contact Brittani Kaim at [scholarship@wtshotchapter.org](mailto:scholarship@wtshotchapter.org) or Steve Johnson at [scholarshipcc@wtshotchapter.org](mailto:scholarshipcc@wtshotchapter.org).



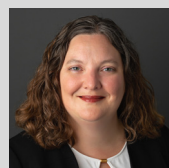
## COMMUNICATIONS COMMITTEE

The Communications Committee handles dissemination of all chapter information for members and non-members. Working with other committees, this committee promotes all outward and internal communication of news, events, and opportunities through the tools of Constant Contact, Facebook, Twitter, the quarterly chapter newsletter, and the chapter website. Want to learn more? Contact Cheryl Goodgame, at [communications@wtshotchapter.org](mailto:communications@wtshotchapter.org)



## CORPORATE AND AGENCY PARTNERSHIP COMMITTEE

The Corporate and Agency Partnership Committee works to secure corporate partners that will help financially support some of the chapter functions and create opportunities for events that otherwise the chapter would not be able to set up. The Committee also works to secure agency partners to help reduce the costs for public agency involvement with WTS. Want to learn more? Contact Patty Trujillo at [corporatepartnership@wtshotchapter.org](mailto:corporatepartnership@wtshotchapter.org)



## PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

The Professional Development Committee provides resources and training directly related to advancing your career in the transportation industry, often coordinating programs that provide certification maintenance credits. Want to learn more? Contact Christen Eschberger at [profdev@wtshotchapter.org](mailto:profdev@wtshotchapter.org)



## MENTORSHIP COMMITTEE

The Professional Mentorship Committee coordinates and oversees our program for leadership development through WTS in the Austin region. This program was created to help junior or beginning transportation professionals (mentees) to develop and hone their leadership skills. Each mentee will be paired with a mentor who is a leader in the transportation community. Want to learn more? Contact Lynn Isaak at [mentorship@wtshotchapter.org](mailto:mentorship@wtshotchapter.org)



## TRANSPORTATION YOU COMMITTEE

The Transportation YOU Committee directly supports the WTS Foundation's Transportation YOU initiative, which is a hands-on, interactive, mentoring program that offers students ages 13-18 an introduction to a wide variety of transportation careers. Want to learn more? Contact Dee Anne Vickrey at [transportationyou@wtshotchapter.org](mailto:transportationyou@wtshotchapter.org)



## STUDENT LIAISON COMMITTEE

The Student Liaison committee works to promote strong relationships between the Heart of Texas Chapter and local area students and encourage WTS involvement for these future professionals. Want to learn more? Contact Madelyn Krieger at [studentliaison@wtshotchapter.org](mailto:studentliaison@wtshotchapter.org) or Max Hoffman, at [studentliaisoncc@wtshotchapter.org](mailto:studentliaisoncc@wtshotchapter.org).



## Creating Equitable and Accessible Transportation Systems



Tracy Thompson, Esq.



Courtney Chavez



Martin Kareithi

More than 150 people attended the February luncheon program, with the WTS Heart of Texas Chapter partnering with the Austin Chapter of the Conference of Minority Transportation Officials (COMTO), to host the event. COMTO is a leading national advocate for employment diversity, inclusion, and contracting opportunities in the multi-modal, multi-billion-dollar transportation industry.

The event's theme spoke to the interests of both partners, Creating Equitable and Accessible Transportation Systems. Moderated by Tracy Thompson, Chief Administrative and External Affairs Officer with Austin Bergstrom International Airport, panelists included Courtney Chavez, Director of Equity and Inclusion with Austin Transit Partnership (ATP), and Martin Kareithi, Director of Systemwide Accessibility with Capital Metro.

The panel kicked off the meeting by defining the terms "equity" and "accessibility" to make sure everyone was on the same page. Courtney talked about building ATP's equity program from the ground up, and how her team weaves that important value into everyday operations.

As a blind man navigating the public transit system, Martin reflected on how far physical accessibility standards have come on Capital Metro's system. He shared personal anecdotes from his own experiences, as well as those of a former colleague, that demonstrate the significant accessibility achievements made in the last decade.

Courtney shared her thoughts on ATP's commitment to equity and accessibility, and how the young agency is balancing the need to move quickly to develop projects while also approaching system design with a methodical and comprehensive incorporation of design standards for equity and access.

The panel closed out the discussion with a call to action for all those in attendance, noting that the best solutions for equity and access will result from continued collaboration by both transportation agencies and their consulting partners as work continues to build out Austin's infrastructure system.

## Future of the Transportation Industry Workforce



Alexandra Clarà Saracho, Ph.D.



Sheila Brooks



Yunlan (Emma) Zhang, Ph.D.

In honor of International Women's Day, our March luncheon focused on recruiting young women to the transportation field. The panel of speakers included Dr. Yunlan (Emma) Zhang and Dr. Alexandra Clarà Saracho, both professors at the University of Texas at Austin, as well as Sheila Brooks, a recruiter with TxDOT.

The panel discussion was focused on the future of women leaders, along with the skills and attributes needed to succeed in transportation positions. The moderator, WTS Programs Chair Laurie Simmons, asked questions about the general decline in Civil Engineering graduates and why it is harder to recruit students into the transportation field. Reasons include:

- Civil Engineers are paid less than other types of engineers.
- Civil Engineering grads are being recruited to other higher paying industries like tech, aerospace, and biomedical.
- Students want to see their values reflected in the work they do.

Both Dr. Zhang and Dr. Clarà Saracho also provided insights between women and men in both academia and the workforce. For example, females are generally less confident than male students, they need more positive feedback on an ongoing basis, and they are motivated differently. Across genders, Gen Z students are very tech driven and embrace new ways of working. The panelists offered ways to draw more students into the civil engineering field, specifically in transportation:

- Offer hybrid work options and flexibility.
- Foster a close-knit family culture in the workplace.
- Provide mentorship opportunities and formal training programs.
- Show more representation of females in manager positions.

Brooks also talked about reaching out to students at a much younger age to endorse the profession, and talked about different K-12 programs TxDOT is working on bringing to local schools around the state. In order to get more younger people to move into the profession, education on the possibilities of civil engineering and transportation career paths needs to start at an early age. As an industry, the panelists all agreed that there should be a focus on the bigger picture issues and how transportation jobs can help drive change and create improvements in quality of life for future generations.



## **LYNN ISAAK, MENTORSHIP CHAIR**

In 2019 I was fortunate to have volunteered to mentor an Ann Richards School for Young Woman Leaders student through the Transportation YOU Mentorship Program with the WTS HOT chapter. It had been a while since I mentored a student because of the strong bond I had built with my foreign exchange student over the 10 months she lived with our family the year prior. But I was ready to return to positively affecting the life of a young girl interested in the STEM field.

Under the leadership of Mary Jo Galindo, the Transportation YOU program was an excellent way for me to get involved and meet a student who would be interested in having a mentor throughout the school year. Mary Jo and I went to Mr. Smith's Engineering Lab to speak with the students and encourage them to apply to be matched with a mentor. As luck would have it, Alexa Minchaca was responding to the opportunity. Alexa and I were matched and quickly learned about each other throughout the year. I was impressed with Alexa's project that she and another student constructed; a melody-playing hand sanitizing dispenser. Alexa learned all about my career path, education, and current position. I learned about Alexa's family, dreams, aspirations, and goals. It was incredible to meet such a young person who knew what she wanted to do and whom she wanted to become. We became fast friends, and as the year progressed, we realized we would continue our relationship into the summer and beyond.



Alexa and I were selected to be part of the Washington DC experience where Transportation YOU matches from around the U.S. came together to tour transportation-related attractions, learn about all the many ways that you are affected by transportation, and explore the many careers that one can take in the transportation industry. Our experience in DC made it evident that we wanted to be paired together the next school year! So, we resumed in the fall of 2019 just like we never left off. This school year was Alexa's senior year, and we worked through all the various college options for her and scholarship opportunities. Alexa became a household name (much to the chagrin of my Amazon Alexa at home).

As Alexa started to think about college, the pandemic hit, and we were forced to have our mentoring sessions via Facetime. It was a difficult time for everyone; however, Alexa was deeply impacted at home and school by the effects of the changing times. We may have shed a few tears together as it was trying times to navigate. As luck would have it, a past college coach helped Alexa with advice that I needed to be equipped to offer her. With Alexa's tenacity and perseverance, she was offered a full-ride scholarship to the University of Houston in Mechanical Engineering. I was floored and super proud!

Alexa may not know this, but with her applications underway, she motivated me to pursue a lifelong dream of returning to business school for my MBA. As she was applying, I was too, and we both started at our respective universities that fall.

Then as I understood that there were scholarships available to college students, I encouraged Alexa to apply for a WTS scholarship. And I did as well! As I sat on the virtual 2020 gala as a scholarship recipient, I realized that Alexa received a scholarship too. It's thrilling to be connected through Transportation YOU, and I highly encourage everyone to consider being a mentor, putting yourself out there to help others! You never know where it will lead and how it will turn out!



## **ALEXA MINCHACA, MENTEE**

Where do I begin? Joining the WTS Transportation YOU Mentorship Program is one of the best decisions I've ever made. I applied for a WTS HOT chapter scholarship a week before winter break, not really thinking much about it, only that it's a cool opportunity. Once I got accepted I never expected to experience what I did. I like to think of my experience in the WTS Transportation YOU Mentorship Program in three parts. Meeting my mentor, the gala, and a trip to Washington DC for the Transportation YOU conference.



To begin, I was paired with Lynn Isaak. I was excited to meet her, and once we did we scheduled a regular time to meet up weekly. It was always a good day when she came by my school and we would have lunch together. We would talk about her work and what she does. I would fill her in with any school projects I had at the time, which were many! But most importantly, we built a really strong bond with each other. She met my parents and we even invited her to my sister's quinceañera. My family and I appreciate her because she helped me navigate and learn a lot about the engineering field and applying to college, something my parents couldn't provide for me at her level.

The next big moment in this program was the gala. I never thought I would ever be part of an event like the gala which was just a big celebration for people who won awards. My dad and I got to dress up with the theme, attend the event, and enjoy ourselves. Being there with my mentor and being in that moment made me realize I had great potential. I just had to grow and work with the opportunities I was told about.

Lastly, one of my best experiences was the trip to the Transportation YOU conference in Washington DC. I was amazed that I was even offered the opportunity to go. I went with my mentor and it was amazing. We had the opportunity to meet other girls and mentors from across the country. We had good food and went into many federal buildings learning about transportation and the different aspects that go into it.

The WTS Mentorship program has been one of the best things I have ever done and has left one of the biggest impacts on my life. I will forever be grateful for my mentor and the opportunities I got to experience with her through this program.

## **MEMBERS ONLY NETWORKING EVENT**

In March the WTS HOT Chapter held our first in-person quarterly networking event in years at Celis Brewery in Austin, Texas. It was a chance to raise a glass and raise your career! This event was all about advancing women's careers in transportation by building new relationships while enjoying delicious craft beer in a fun and relaxed atmosphere. Attendees were able to connect with like-minded professionals, share their experiences, and gain valuable insights that will help accelerate their careers. Whether you're just starting out or already a seasoned pro, you won't want to miss opportunities like this to mingle with the best and brightest in the industry. So make sure you come out to the next networking event in July and cheers to your success!





## The Great Intersection

The 2023 WTS International Annual Conference, The Great Intersection, will be held on **May 10–12 2023**, at the Omni Atlanta Hotel at CNN Center, 220 Marietta St NW, Atlanta, GA 30303. Atlanta is a city known for its vibrant history and modern progress in equity and inclusion — in transportation and beyond. Get excited for springtime in Atlanta: check out the 2023 teaser video [here](#).

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## Agenda

[Click here](#) for the program at-a-glance.

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## Hotel Information

Omni Atlanta Hotel at CNN Center | 100 CNN Center, Atlanta, GA 30303

[Click here](#) to make your online reservation at the Omni Atlanta Hotel at CNN Center. The WTS group rate is \$249/night plus tax. To get this rate, please mention that you are attending the WTS International Annual Conference. The deadline for the group rate is Monday, April 17, 2023 (rooms may not be available at the group rate after the deadline, and rooms are on a first-come first serve basis). Check-in is at 4:00 p.m. ET; check-out is at 11:00 a.m. ET.





# 2023 Upcoming

## *events*

- April** 4/19 Monthly Luncheon
- May** 5/10-12 WTS International Conference  
5/17 Monthly Luncheon
- June** 6/17 19th Annual Scholarship & Awards Gala  
6/21 Monthly Luncheon  
6/25-29 TransportationYOU Summit  
TBD Lattes & Leadership
- July** TBD Lattes & Leadership  
7/12 Networking Event
- Aug** TBD Lattes & Leadership  
TBD CP/AP Members Only Event
- Sept** 9/15 Professional Development Seminar  
TBD Networking Event
- Oct** 10/18 Monthly Luncheon  
TBD Bike-n-Brunch
- Nov** 11/15 Monthly Luncheon  
11/15-16 WTS International Leadership Conference
- Dec** TBD Holiday Networking Event