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## JUNE 2023 | QUARTER 2

### President's Message



Hello Central Florida transportation community,

Your WTS Central Florida Chapter has had a productive second quarter, thanks to our dedicated leadership, members, sponsors and supporters.

Chapter leadership attended the 2023 WTS International Conference in May, held a new member's breakfast with the board, and continued our celebration of Juneteenth with our second quarter program.

**In other exciting news, at over 200 members strong, our chapter is once again certified **GOLD!**** The Chapter Circle of Excellence Awards honors outstanding WTS chapters. WTS International has been recognizing WTS chapter achievements since 2014. The criteria for earning an award includes achieving benchmarks in membership recruitment and retention, operations, communications and events, and professional development programs.

We are thankful for our chapter leaders, members and sponsors for their continued support. If you are feeling inspired to maximize your membership, there are plenty of opportunities to get more involved. Reach out to any [board member or committee chair](#) for more details.

We invite you to join us on this journey of advancing women in the transportation industry. You can support by [becoming a sponsor](#), [attending an event](#) or simply following and engaging with us on [social media](#).

We appreciate your support and look forward to seeing you at an upcoming event!

*Ivannia Bok*

Ivannia Bok  
2023 President, WTS Central Florida



# Welcome to our New Members!

## Joined May and June 2023

- Laura Alejandra Agudelo, HDR
- Natalia Barbour, University of Central Florida
- Dawn Curtis, Grassroots Impact
- Sasha Fernandez, FDOT District 5
- Kenna Henry, City of Casselberry
- Brittany Nesbitt, Protean Design Group
- Katherine Snodgrass, HNTB
- Lyndell St. Juste, WSP
- Erin Sterk, City of St. Cloud
- Jessica Sulistio, UCF Student + The Balmoral Group



› Central Florida

Advancing women  
Advancing transportation

CHECK OUT RESOURCES  
AVAILABLE TO WTS MEMBERS

Home-MyWTS Communities  
([wtsinternational.org](https://wtsinternational.org))





## Member Spotlight



### Francina Gil

Owner + Water Resources Engineer



Francina Gil is the owner/founder and Water Resources Engineer of Vortex. She graduated cum laude with a Bachelor of Science in Civil Engineering from Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey in 2011. Francina is a licensed Professional Engineer (PE) in the State of Florida and has served as Drainage Engineer of Record for numerous projects throughout her career. She is well versed in Interconnected Channel and Pond Routing (ICPR), drainage modeling in Open Roads Designer (ORD), Geopak Drainage, and drainage plans production. Her experience involves many aspects of roadway drainage design including storm drain systems, culverts, ditches, retention/detention facilities, bridge scour, permitting services, feasibility and PD&E studies. She is experienced in FDOT standards and local municipalities such as Volusia County, Osceola County and the City of Orlando.

Francina is active in various engineering organizations. She served on the Board of Women's Transportation Seminar (WTS) as the Scholarship Chair from 2019 to 2021 and is an active member. Francina is currently working with the Florida Engineering Society (FES) Central Florida Chapter's social media and fundraising committees.

We caught up with Francina to learn more about her professional journey.

#### ***What do you value most from your WTS membership?***

WTS offers the valuable benefit of access to a supportive community that advocates for diversity and inclusion in the transportation industry. WTS provides a forum for women in transportation to connect, share ideas, and support each other. Through this community, members can build strong relationships with like-minded professionals and gain access to a wealth of opportunities and resources that may not be available elsewhere. Whether it's through networking events, mentoring programs, or leadership development training, WTS empowers members to grow both professionally and personally, while making a positive impact on the industry as a whole.

#### ***What is the best career advice you have ever received?***

Building a strong professional network can help you discover new opportunities, gain insights, and advance your career. Attending industry events, joining professional organizations like WTS, ASCE, FES and others, and engaging with colleagues and mentors can have one of the largest impacts in your career.



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## Member Spotlight

**Francina Gil**

Owner + Water Resources Engineer  
Vortex

### *What is something that most people don't know about you?*

As an adventurous, daring and fearless individual, I am naturally inclined to explore new experiences and test the limits. Having a high tolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity allows me to take bold decisions and pursue new opportunities without being discouraged by challenges or setbacks. I really enjoy pushing the limits and taking risks. It can be very exciting to try new things without knowing the outcome. I have taken many risks in my personal life and professional career from jumping out of a 115-story building, starting a fully remote business in the transportation industry and many more. I cannot wait to see what the future holds for me.

### *How did you become interested in transportation?*

I always thought the transportation industry could be an exciting and meaningful field to work in for many reasons. For me, the most fascinating aspect is understanding how large transportation infrastructure projects are built and how they contribute to the growth and development of our society and economy. Transportation engineers play a vital role in connecting communities, improving accessibility, and enhancing the quality of life for people around the world. Our work has a profound and lasting impact on society, and the infrastructure we build will continue to benefit future generations. The prospect of contributing to society in such a tangible and significant way is what makes working in the transportation industry so appealing to me.

### *What is your favorite mode of travel?*

Many factors can influence someone's favorite mode of travel. For example, the location and distance of travel, the availability of different modes of transportation, and the circumstances of the trip. I was impressed by Japan's bullet trains, also known as Shinkansen. These trains are known for their speed, convenience, and comfort for long-distance travel. They have a low environmental impact due to their energy efficiency and emission reduction technologies. Overall, the Shinkansen is a great example of how transportation innovation can benefit both passengers and the environment.

### *How do you balance a successful career and other aspects of your life?*

Maintaining a healthy balance between a career and personal life can be challenging, but several effective strategies exist. One of the most impactful ways is by staying physically active. I have personally found that participating in various sports throughout my life has tremendously impacted my overall physical, mental, and emotional health. Engaging in physical activity can provide a much-needed break from work-related stress and allow us to recharge and refocus. I have trained and competed in multiple sports, including indoor and beach volleyball, swimming, CrossFit, Olympic weightlifting, bodybuilding, and most recently, golf, as a form of professional networking. Physical activity should not be underestimated as a key element in achieving a healthy work-life balance.





## Member Spotlight



**Mariam Nour**

PhD Student | Vice President of the  
WTS-UCF Knights Student Chapter



2022 WTS Memorial Graduate Scholarship recipient, Mariam Nour, graduated with a bachelor's degree in Network Engineering with honors from the German University in Cairo and a master's degree in Civil Engineering, Smart Cities Track from the University of Central Florida. She was awarded the Overseas Research Center fellowship for the duration of her PhD in the Civil Engineering Department, Transportation Track at the University of Central Florida, and is currently in her second year and the main researcher on an FDOT project focusing on safety in smart work zones.

She has worked on other exciting and cutting-edge technology projects including a SAFER-SIM funded project for analyzing the impact of connected autonomous vehicles on safety during hurricane evacuation events, and developing Advanced Driver Assistance Systems products as a data science intern in the company Connected-Wise. In addition, her work introducing a new traffic monitoring approach was published in the TRR Journal and presented in the 101st Transportation Research Board (TRB) annual conference.

We caught up with Mariam to learn more about her professional journey.

***What is your favorite mode of transportation?***

I find micro-mobility to be an efficient mode of transportation, especially in areas such as downtowns or campuses. Its eco-friendliness, affordability, and ability to solve the last-mile problem make it my favorite option. Using small, lightweight transportation modes like electric scooters, bicycles, and skateboards reduces carbon footprint and air pollution and proves to be a cost-effective alternative to traditional modes of transport. Moreover, it helps to bridge the gap between public transportation and one's final destination, especially in crowded urban areas where parking and traffic are significant challenges. Micro-mobility provides a convenient, efficient, and sustainable way of getting around.



## Member Spotlight

**Mariam Nour**

PhD Student - UCF

*How did you become interested in a career in transportation?*

Even though my background is in computer networks engineering, I became interested in transportation when I took a graduate-level class on vehicular networks. I soon realized that efficient, reliable and safe transportation is what I wanted my career to be focused on. Developing technologies such as connected vehicles and smart mobility has become a great interest of mine. As a result, I applied for a Master's in Smart Cities and then a PhD in transportation engineering at UCF to pursue this career further.

*Congratulations on being the founding president of the UCF chapter! What challenges have you faced establishing the chapter and how have you overcome them?*

Thank you! As the vice president and one of the founding members of the WTS UCF chapter, my journey has been a remarkable experience filled with invaluable lessons and personal growth.

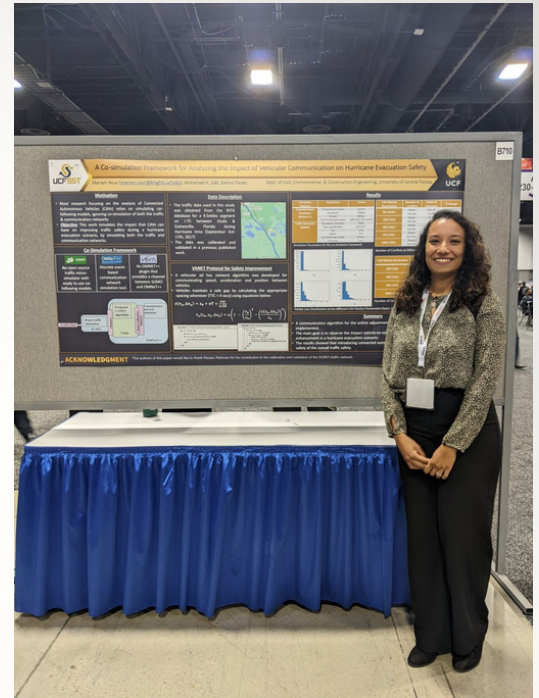
Working on a student activity from the ground up comes with many challenges, but I consider myself fortunate to collaborate with an exceptional group of individuals on the WTS UCF chapter board, all of whom share a common goal of making this chapter a success. The launch of our first event was particularly challenging as we were trying to figure out the different university processes and regulations. Fortunately, we received guidance from our advisor, who helped us overcome these challenges and execute a successful event. Additionally, promoting the chapter and attracting new members posed its own set of challenges. The Central Florida WTS chapter provided invaluable support and guidance in developing different advertising strategies and incentives to attract more students to join our chapter. Their support was instrumental in achieving our goals.

*What advice do you have for other students interested in transportation?*

I think surrounding oneself with people with the same goals and passion is very important. Being part of an organization such as WTS has helped me greatly in being motivated in my work while networking and learning more about the advances in the transportation industry. I highly recommend students to be engaged in such organizations.

*What are your plans after graduation?*

After graduation, I'd like to directly apply what I have learned throughout my master's and PhD journey and make transportation safer and more efficient. I'd like to join a passionate team working towards these goals, whether in the industry or academia.



Mariam showcasing at the  
2023 Transportation Research Board



# Upcoming Events

Register at [wtsinternational.org/chapters/central-florida/events](https://wtsinternational.org/chapters/central-florida/events)

## REGISTRATION OPEN

[HTTPS://CVENT.ME/32OABY](https://cvent.me/32OABY)

**13 TRANSPORTATION SHOWCASE**

**JULY 31 - AUG 3, 2023**

**HILTON ORLANDO, ORLANDO, FL**

**"INTELLIGENT INFRASTRUCTURE: INVESTING  
IN THE TRANSPORTATION WORKFORCE"**



**FLORIDA'S  
TRANSPORTATION  
SHOWCASE**



PROGRAMS

## BUILDING A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE

Transportation Innovation and Regional Partnership

Join SMPS at our Annual Transportation Breakfast Program featuring representatives from **Central Florida Expressway Authority (CFX)**, **FDOT District 5**, **Florida's Turnpike Enterprise**, **MetroPlan Orlando**, **Beep**, and **LYNX** to discuss building a sustainable future through regional partnership and innovation. During the fireside chat, our moderator, Cynthia Lambert, APR, MetroPlan Orlando, will guide the conversation with questions highlighting innovation in design and construction projects, EV charging, autonomous mobility, and transit to create more sustainable, connected, convenient, and environmentally friendly transportation options for the public. A Q&A with the audience will follow the panel discussion.

**THURSDAY, AUGUST 3, 2023**

**THE COUNTRY CLUB OF ORLANDO**  
1601 Country Club Dr., Orlando, FL 32804

**8-11 a.m.** Member - \$55 | Non-member - \$65  
Member rates extended to all partner organizations.

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**SAVE THE  
DATE**

## 2023 SCHOLARSHIP AND AWARDS BANQUET

September 28, 2023



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Advancing transportation  
Central Florida

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# Recent Activities

## Emerging Professionals Program Update

by Lilli Smith, WTSCFL Professional Development Chair

Every year in the Emerging Professionals program, the protégés are challenged to reach out to a transportation leader in their company (higher than their direct supervisor), in their professional network, or even in their local community to interview them.

The interview is based on professional and personal growth, and includes questions like

- *"If you had to start over, what skills and experience would you have focused on?"*
- *"How do you define success?"*
- *"What is a current goal you are working on and what steps are you taking to achieve it?"*
- *"What traits do you admire most in entry level professionals?"*

After the interviews are completed, we come together as a group to discuss what the leaders said – especially which answer surprised them the most.

My favorite part is asking them: "Did you find this exercise to be beneficial? Do you think you're better for having the opportunity to interview this person?" and the answer is always the same - **YES!**

Testimonies range from:

- "I developed a new relationship with someone at another firm who I can rely on for questions."
- "I interviewed someone in another field of transportation and now I have a huge interest in what she does and am looking forward to learning more."

The one I thing I've heard the most:

"I interviewed someone higher up in my company who I never would have had the opportunity to talk to about these topics. Now, when they come to my office, they make a point to say "Hi" to me – I have a relationship with senior leadership I never would have had without this experience."



*Mentors and Proteges meetup dinner*



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# Recent Activities

## Quarter 2 Program Celebrates Professional Resilience

This year's Juneteenth program on June 15, challenged attendees to take the bold steps toward their limitless potential. Through personal stories of tenacity and continued self-discovery, our panel of both esteemed and emerging transportation professionals certainly inspired.

Thank you to our panelists, Gail Woods, Dawn Curtis, Shemania Accema, and expert moderator, Virginia L Whittington.

Shout out to program coordinators, Rebecca Bess and Heather Roberts, P.E. for executing an impactful event.





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# Recent Activities

## #WTSCFL Takes Atlanta for "The Great Intersection"

WTS Central Florida was well-represented at the 2023 WTS International Conference in Atlanta. WTS's conference is the premier transportation experience, bringing together diverse professionals from across North America to discuss the industry's cutting-edge conversations and most pressing issues.

The experience offered our chapter leadership engaging learning and peer-to-peer networking opportunities designed to elevate professional and career development, leadership, and business development for these professionals and their organizations.





# Recent Activities

## 2023 A Walk in Her Shoes See Highest Attendance



This year's A Walk in Her Shoes proved to be a memorable evening featuring dynamic women in transportation. This year's A Walk in Her Shoes event was the most well-attended in the event's history!

Expertly moderated by Mary Hamill, APR, our panelists, Rachel Frédérique André, P.E., Tiffany Homler Hawkins and Michelle Maikisch inspired through their stories of persistence and resiliency.

Our chapter was honored to once again partner with Dress for Success Greater Orlando through our donations.

Thank you to this year's event committee Barbara Stiles, FSMPS, CPSM, Heather Roberts, P.E., Annie Cancel, Kelli Muddle and Nicole Jeffers for organizing a successful event!



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## New Members Breakfast with the Board



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## Self Defense Training with the Winter Park Police Department





## 2023 ASCE Florida East Central Branch's Icebreaker Event



Check out more chapter event photos on our [Photo Gallery](#)

*Special Thanks to our*  
**2023 ANNUAL SPONSORS**

**PLATINUM** HNTB **WSP** TRANSYSTEMS ATKINS VOLKERT vhb

**GOLD** CTS Stantec BURGESS & NIPLE Dewberry Jacobs

**SILVER** RS&H FEHR PEERS Inwood CDM Smith TRANSORE DRMP TMC WGI

**BRONZE** PROMATECH KSM GPI Kimley Horn CMT Ardaman TopoDOT KN RK&K

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# Join WTS

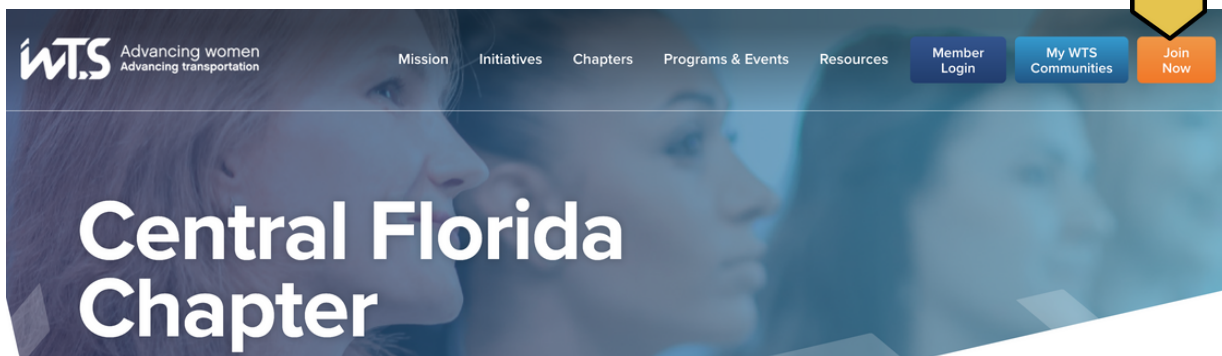
We would love to have you join us! To start your membership with WTS, go to our website using the QR code or URL below.

## SCAN QR CODE OR USE URL:

<https://www.wtsinternational.org/chapters/central-florida>



CLICK ON JOIN WTS BUTTON  
(UPPER RIGHT CORNER)



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# Follow us on Social Media

Stay connected with all things WTS Central Florida by following us on all social media. Be sure to use the hashtag #WTSCFL in any of your chapter- related posts! We love to see and share your WTS content.

- WTSCFL Facebook Page: <https://www.facebook.com/wtscentralflorida>
- WTSCFL Facebook Group: <https://www.facebook.com/groups/55161918824>
- WTSCFL Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/wtscentralflorida/>
- WTSCFL Twitter: <https://twitter.com/wtscentralfla>
- WTSCFL LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/company/wtscfl>