



# *Legacy of Progress*



## WTS SAN DIEGO ANNUAL AWARDS & SCHOLARSHIP GALA

MARINA  
VILLAGE



THURSDAY  
OCT 26, 2023



# President's Message

Good evening and welcome to the WTS San Diego Annual Awards Gala! It is truly an honor to join you tonight as the current chapter president, surrounded by the remarkable individuals who make up our dynamic and thriving transportation community. And tonight, we gather not only to celebrate our collective achievements but also to commemorate a significant milestone in our chapter's history—our 30th anniversary.

Our theme for this year's gala is "Legacy of Progress," a phrase that perfectly encapsulates the three decades of dedication, innovation, and advancement in the field of transportation right here in San Diego! It's a remarkable journey that we have embarked upon, and it's a testament to the enduring commitment of our organization's members, partners, and supporters.

Our 30th anniversary is not just a marker of time; it's a celebration of the enduring impact we've had on the San Diego region and the broader transportation community. It is proof of the power of collaboration, mentorship, and advocacy that has shaped the legacy of progress we stand upon today.

Tonight, we extend our heartfelt gratitude to the chapter board members, volunteers, members, and corporate sponsors who have been the driving force behind WTS San Diego's remarkable legacy. Without your support, we would not be the well-respected organization we are today! Thank you for all you have contributed!

Over the years, we've seen our membership grow and diversify. We've watched as pioneering women have risen to leadership positions, making their mark in an industry where their voices have often been underrepresented. We've witnessed the transformation of our industry, with innovative projects and sustainable initiatives that have set new standards for excellence.

Over the years, we've seen our membership grow and diversify. We've watched as pioneering women have risen to leadership positions, making their mark in an industry where their voices have often been underrepresented. We've witnessed the transformation of our industry, with innovative projects and sustainable initiatives that have set new standards for excellence. And we've awarded scholarships to open new doors for the transportation leaders of tomorrow.



**CECILY TAYLOR, TE PhD**  
SENIOR REGIONAL PLANNER | SANDAG

The scholarships awarded this evening not only help ease the financial burden of education but also serve as a vote of confidence in the remarkable young women who receive them. It sends a clear message: we believe in your potential, and we are here to support your journey towards a rewarding career in transportation.

And tonight, we not only celebrate our past achievements, but also look forward to the incredible potential that lies ahead. Each one of us plays a vital role in shaping the legacy of progress within our organization and the broader transportation community. Whether you are a seasoned professional, a rising star, or a dedicated supporter, your contributions matter. Your dedication to our shared mission is what propels us forward and leaves an indelible mark on the transportation landscape. You are the heart and soul of WTS San Diego, and your contributions are the legacy we are proud to celebrate.

Thank you for your dedication, your passion, and your unwavering support. Thank you all for being part of this incredible legacy of progress, and congratulations to all of our award and scholarship recipients.

Here's to the past, present, and prospects of WTS San Diego, and to the bright future we will create together! Enjoy the evening and let the celebration of our Legacy of Progress continue!



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Claudia Brizuela, City of San Diego  
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**STUDENT CHAPTER LIAISON**  
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**TRANSPORTATION YOU CHAIRS**  
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## 2023 WTS San Diego Chapter Board



# Program

## WELCOME

Cecily Taylor, President WTS San Diego

## EVENING TOAST

Bethany Garretson, Mott MacDonald

## INTERMISSION / RAFFLE

## FOUNDING MEMBER

Risa Baron, Republic Services

## TRANSPORTATION YOU

Eric Meisgeier & Shannon Gonzales

TransportationYOU Co-Chairs

Mentees: Syra Walia & Keren Delgado

## FOUNDING MEMBER

Linda Culp, Retired

## SCHOLARSHIPS PRESENTATION

Marissa Thomas & Jenny Vick

Scholarship Co-Chairs

## INTERMISSION / RAFFLE

## FOUNDING MEMBER

Chili Cilch, Caltrans

## AWARDS PRESENTATION

Claudia Brizuela & Amy Restelli

Recognitions Leads

Olivia Lincoln & Melina Pereira

Diversity & Inclusion Committee Members

## CLOSING REMARKS / RAFFLE

## 2023 ANNUAL AWARDS GALA COMMITTEE & VOLUNTEERS

The Annual Awards Gala Committee is a dedicated team across multiple committees who spend a full year planning and coordinating every part of this evening's event. We appreciate their selfless dedication to the little details that make this gala a special event for our award winners, scholarship recipients, and guests. Thank you to all our committee members!

### COMMITTEE CHAIRS

Dawn Wilson, Michael Baker International

Diane Vermeulen, Caltrans

Julie Froelich, Jacobs

### EXECUTIVE BOARD LIAISON

Eleanor Gonzalez, Caltrans

### RECOGNITIONS LEADS

Claudia Brizuela, City of San Diego

Amy Restelli, Kimley-Horn

### SCHOLARSHIP CHAIRS

Marissa Thomas, TYLin

Jenny Vick, HDR

### COMMUNICATIONS CHAIR

Diana Barreto, PRR

### REGISTRATION & HOSPITALITY

Liza Galon, Caltrans

### COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Seana Urquhart, Caltrans

Melina Pereira, Caltrans



### GALA VOLUNTEERS

Brian Pecos, Caltrans

Megan Cunningham, Dokken Engineering

Ashley Wiley, SANDAG

Anita Draa, Gannett Fleming

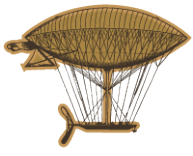
### SAN DIEGO STATE UNIVERSITY STUDENT VOLUNTEERS

Klara Adwer  
Rwzan Adwer  
Tareq Alsharif  
Fadi Atesha  
Virginia Butrus

Jerome Jay Cabanganga  
Nicole Gee  
Chelsea Gutierrez  
Tejaswini Hegade  
Kyle Leja

Viviana Martinez  
Ole Gustav Morstad  
Alhondra Saucedo  
Miguel Suarez  
Eyra Zuniga





# Founding Member



## Risa Baron, Republic Services

Risa Baron is an award-winning professional with more than 25 years of experience in public affairs, community relations and communications. With expertise is in community outreach, strategic planning and project management, she excels in forging partnerships and building productive relationships.

She joined the Republic Services team in March 2021 working closely with the City of Chula Vista, City of San Diego and the County of San Diego. She leads outreach and education efforts with the community, elected officials, and stakeholders on policy impacting solid waste, recycling, and organics. Her prior experience includes work at the San Diego County Water Authority, SDG&E and Caltrans. In her various roles she worked closely with local municipalities, state and federal government agencies, school districts, and non-profits, business communities on environmental programs.

Risa holds a Bachelor of Science degree in Political Science and Public Administration from San Diego State University (SDSU) and has been an instructor for the UC San Diego Extension Sustainability Certificate program for many years. She is past President of the SDSU Alumni Association and I Love a Clean San Diego, and currently serves on the executive committee of the South County Economic Development Corporation and Living Coast Discovery Center. She is active in the Chula Vista Chamber of Commerce and many other local business organizations throughout the region. She contributes much of her success serving on boards due to her time forming and serving in a leadership capacity for the San Diego WTS chapter many years ago.

## WHAT IS YOUR BEST MEMORY OF WTS?

*I value and love the friendships I formed while in WTS. Even though many years have passed, I treasure the friendship, support we gave to each other and fun we all had together. I am so grateful for the leadership skills and confidence the chapter developed in me that has guided me throughout my career. I am also very proud of the local chapter hosting the national WTS conference in San Diego in 1998. It was an extraordinary accomplishment to host the conference and we shared San Diego with WTS members throughout the country.*

## HOW DID YOU GET INVOLVED IN WTS?

*Being in a male dominated industry, a group of young women in the early 1990's felt that we needed to start an association to support each other professionally. Myself, Linda, Julie, and Chili learned about WTS and wanted to create a group to support women in the transportation industry. We held meetings at the SANDAG office and after several months and many meetings we were able to create a chapter.*

## WHAT IS YOUR ADVICE FOR YOUNG PROFESSIONALS?

*Build a professional reputation by honoring your obligations; always communicating professionally; be genuine, trustworthy and loyal and give credit where credit is due. Be patient, building a good reputation takes time and effort.*





# Event Sponsors

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# Transportation YOU

Transportation YOU (TYOU) is a hands-on, interactive mentoring program that offers students ages 6-18 an introduction to the wide variety of careers in transportation. The mission of the TYOU program is to develop the next generation of the transportation industry by growing the involvement and interest of girls and young women in STEM studies.

In 2023, San Diego WTS TYOU committee built on the momentum established in 2022 by attending more events at elementary, middle, and high schools across San Diego County, including career fairs, student mixers, and classroom presentations. If you are interested in volunteering for the TYOU program or know of an organization, school, or program that may be interested in connecting with us, please reach out to the TYOU co-chairs Shannon at [sgonzales@kleinfelder.com](mailto:sgonzales@kleinfelder.com) or the committee co-chair, Eric Meisgeier, at [emeisgeier@stacywitbeck.com](mailto:emeisgeier@stacywitbeck.com).

This year, our greatest accomplishment was implementation of our mentor/mentee program and the ability to send more than one representative to the 2023 WTS Capital Summit in Washington D.C.. We are proud to report that we received a record number of student applications and sent two amazing high school students with a mentor to the Summit! Applications are always open for our mentor/mentee program, and the 2024 Capital Summit applicants will be selected in February 2024. If you are interested in helping shape future leaders in transportation by being a mentor, please fill out the form by clicking [HERE](#). High school students may fill out the application to be a mentee by clicking [HERE](#).

**A HUGE THANK YOU TO WOOD RODGERS INC., ALL OF OUR VOLUNTEERS, AND COMMITTEE MEMBERS!  
TYOU WOULD NOT BE POSSIBLE WITHOUT YOU!**



The outstanding Transportation YOU programs this year would not have been possible without the help of our sponsor, Wood Rodgers Inc. Support included volunteering at career fairs, providing student presentation props like a roadway features visual aid and an informational board highlighting four transportation engineering career paths, and providing a scholarship to one lucky high school student. Thank you, Wood Rodgers Inc. for supporting the WTS San Diego Transportation YOU program!



Syra Walia  
Scripps Ranch High School



Keren Delgado  
Gompers Preparatory Academy



Danielle Zhang  
Contract Manager &  
Landscape Architect  
Caltrans District 11

The 2023 WTS Capital Summit was held at the University of Maryland during the last week of June. Mentor Danielle Zhang, and high school students Syra Walia and Keren Delgado attended as representatives of the San Diego WTS chapter. They were able to meet and collaborate with other mentors and high school mentees from across the country, representing an array of WTS chapters and careers in transportation.

The student mentees attended panels and presentations by transportation professionals and government officials. They toured the U.S. Capitol, the USDOT, BWI Airport, the Port of Baltimore, Amtrak, and FHWA. They learned about hydrologic engineering, artificial Intelligence in vehicles, how Amtrak trains are operated, how concrete is made, and how shipping ports impact our country.

The mentees had the opportunity to convene with current college students and counselors during a Q&A panel, and were able to discuss concerns about college applications, how to build their resume, and how to apply for scholarships.

The final event was a networking and awards dinner held at Busboys & Poets, where mentees received certificates, and everyone was able to learn more about each other. Syra and Keren received awards for Best Dorm Decorations and Top Social Media Contributors due to their artistic creative abilities and friendly nature!

TYOU is so pleased to have sent such hard working and deserving young women to this year's Summit. We look forward to reviewing applications for the 2024!



*DC Summit*





# Founding Member



## Linda Culp, Retired

Linda Culp built a career in transportation spanning 30+ years before retiring from SANDAG in 2021, after 29 years at the regional planning agency. During this time, she led teams whose focus was on advancing transportation in the San Diego region through planning and building rail improvements along the LOSSAN Rail Corridor and planning and building active transportation projects like segments of the Coastal and Inland Rail Trails and several urban bike projects in the City of San Diego.

She is a founding member of WTS San Diego and served in several roles including chapter president, member of the international scholarship board, and international conference co-chair. She holds degrees in Geography and Public Administration from West Virginia University (Let's Go Mountaineers!). Linda now spends her time hiking, riding her bike, traveling, and volunteering.

## WHAT IS YOUR BEST MEMORY OF WTS?

*So many great memories over the years. One that stands out to me is hosting the international conference twice, the first one in 1998 when the chapter was only a few years old. One great aspect of our chapter is that people just put their heads down and go. And that's what made the conferences such a success. Being able to have a part in showcasing both our chapter and San Diego transportation, gave a special sense of accomplishment.*

## HOW DID YOU GET INVOLVED IN WTS?

*I was fairly new to SANDAG and I had a co-worker who came into my office one day, said there was a group of women thinking about forming a local chapter of transportation professionals aimed at promoting women in the field and asked if I was interested in attending an organizational meeting. I went to the first meeting, such a high energy, go-getter group, and I was hooked!*

## WHAT IS YOUR ADVICE FOR YOUNG PROFESSIONALS?

*Don't get too busy at work that you don't have time to promote yourself, whether it's joining a professional organization like WTS or finding a colleague that can help you as a mentor. Work/Life Balance can get difficult. Throughout my career, I found that people were always willing to help in this role and in turn, I enjoyed helping later in my career. Work is important but the relationships you build as you're building your career can also help you keep your balance.*





1993  
2023



*Cheers to 30 Years!*



**WTS San Diego's  
Annual Scholarship & Award Gala**  
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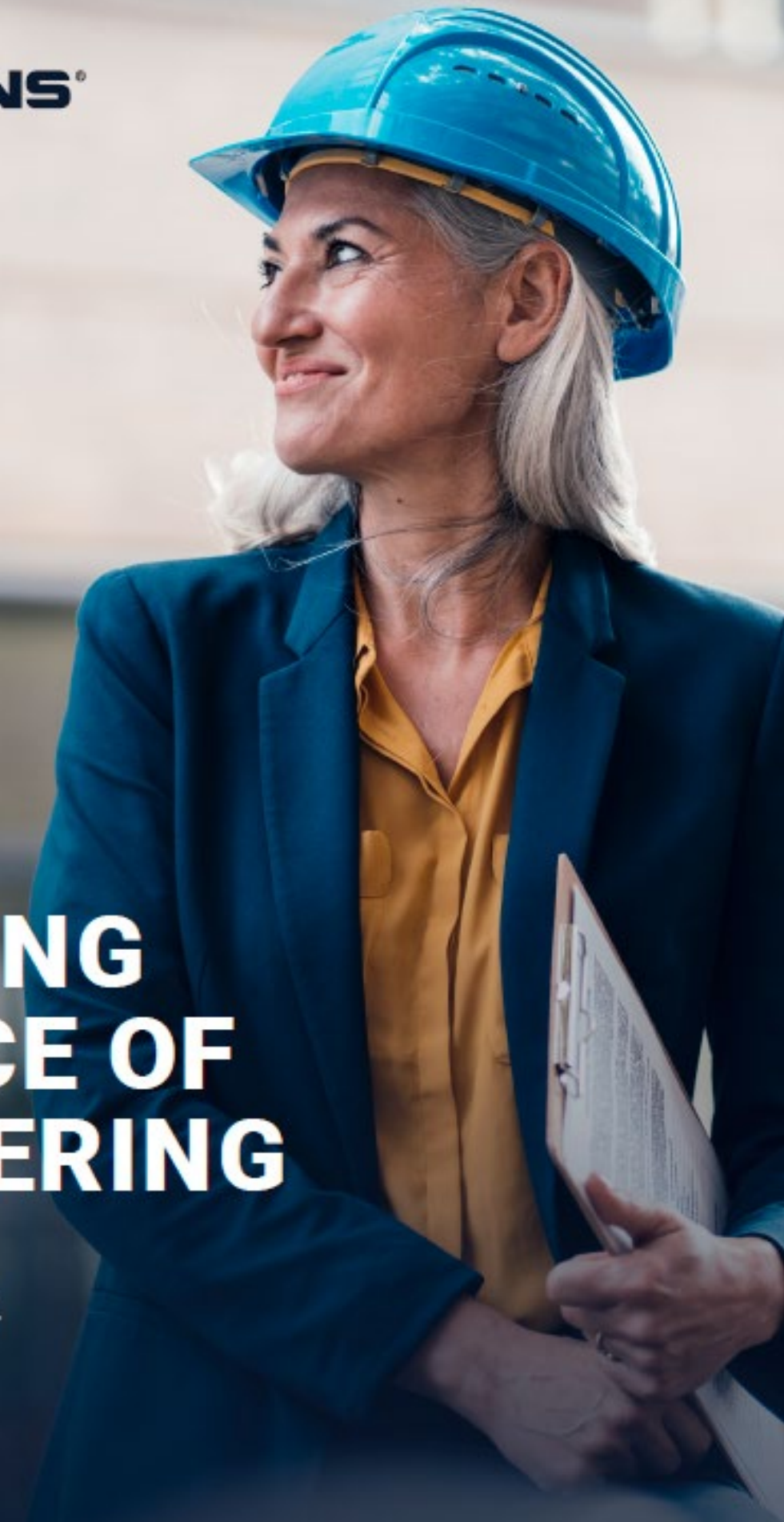




# CHANGING THE FACE OF ENGINEERING

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2023 Award Recipients.

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### KAREN JEWEL, PE

#### CALTRANS

Karen Jewel, PE is currently the Corridor Project Director for the Central Corridors at Caltrans District 11, San Diego. She has over 34 years' experience in the transportation industry and is responsible for the Capital Projects development through construction on four major freeway systems in the San Diego Region. Prior to her current roll she was a Project Manager, a Branch Chief in Traffic Operations, and the District Hydraulics Engineer. She started at Caltrans as a student intern before graduating and has built a successful career with the agency.

She holds a Bachelor of Science Degree from San Diego State University in Civil Engineering and a Project Manager Certification from Sacramento State University. Karen is a member of San Diego WTS and ITE.

### EILEEN MAHER

#### PORT OF SAN DIEGO

Eileen Maher (Director, Environmental Conservation, Port of San Diego) manages the natural resources of San Diego Bay and is responsible for all Port Capital Development in-water construction permitting including compliance and mitigation and environmental education for local students. She is also responsible for ensuring the success of pilot projects including nature-based solutions, habitat friendly shoreline structures, fisheries enhancement, ecosystem restoration, and environmental monitoring. Ms. Maher manages the Port's Environmental Advisory Committee and the Port's Wildlife Advisory Group to implement a natural resources management plan for the Chula Vista Bayfront development.





## **AGNES WEBER**

### **GANNETT FLEMING**

Agnes Weber has 37 years of experience in the civil engineering field with emphasis in construction management of roadway, highway, bridge, and water facilities. She began her career in San Diego for the California Department of Transportation. Over the past 26 years, she has served in the private sector starting with Vali Cooper & Associates, Inc. where she held a myriad of positions ranging from Contract Manager, Chief Operations Officer, President, to Chief Strategy Officer and including Secretary of the Board. She is currently working for Gannett Fleming Inc. as a Senior Consultant supporting the Construction Services West Division.

She earned her Bachelor of Science degree in Civil Engineering from San Diego State University in 1985. She is a registered civil engineer in California, Colorado, Nevada, and Texas and is a Construction Management of America Association Certified Construction Manager.

Agnes has been an active member of the CMAA since 1996 serving on local and national boards including being elected the 2020/2021 CMAA National Board Chair. She served as a board member on the California Transportation Foundation. She is currently serving as a Governor on the American Society of Civil Engineering Construction Institute National Board of Governors. She is an active member of WTS and was recognized by San Diego WTS as 2016 Woman of the Year.

## **BRUCE URQUHART**

### **SDSU ADJUNCT PROFESSOR**

Bruce Urquhart Professional Land Surveyor, has over 38 years of experience in the land surveying and management disciplines. His last position at Caltrans was the Division Chief for Land Surveys in District 11 (San Diego.) For the past 32 years, he has also been an adjunct professor at San Diego State University (SDSU) teaching Surveying for Civil Engineers.

Since retirement, Bruce's focus has been on teaching at SDSU. In addition, he's been an active member of the San Diego Chapter of Women's Transportation Seminar (WTS) for the past eleven years. He's been a mentor in the Mentor Program, served as a judge for the WTS Annual Awards and Scholarships, and continues to participate in WTS activities and events on a regular basis. As a faculty member at SDSU, he is a strong supporter of the Student Chapter of WTS.





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women leaders







# Scholarship Recipients.



**ABIGAIL HAWN**



Abigail Hawn graduated from Dimensions High School in Escondido, receiving the Presidential Award and was a Cord Winner. She is currently attending Mira Costa College in Oceanside where she is focused on math and science. Her goal is to transfer to San Diego State University where she plans to pursue a degree in Environmental or Civil Engineering. Abigail grew up in the construction industry, which taught her problem solving and quality control from a very young age. Through her construction experience she learned that "any job worth doing is a job worth doing right"! Congratulations on a job well done Abigail and for receiving the 2023 High School Scholarship.

HIGH SCHOOL

**MARIAM ABDU** UC San Diego

UNDERGRADUATE

Mariam Abdu is a third-year student at the University of California San Diego where she is studying Structural Engineering with a minor in Urban Planning. She was born in Nairobi Kenya and immigrated to the US with her parents. She attended San Diego High School where she developed a passion for AutoCAD and design using 3D printers. Mariam loves the interconnected and innovative nature of engineering – so much so that she's has developed a vision for her enterprise DichoDesigns, which she envisions will "blend her transportation expertise with her ties to her African heritage providing interconnected green networks in developing countries". She aspires to continue her education with a Masters degree in planning to further prepare her for this ambitious goal. We are pleased to award Mariam with the 2023 Undergraduate scholarship!



18



UNDERGRADUATE



## AMY KIM Northeastern University

Amy Kim is a third-year student at Northeastern University where she is pursuing a degree in Civil Engineering with a minor in Sociology. She is passionate about sustainable transportation, equitable mobility opportunities, and walkable cities – a passion that evolved through her roadway and transportation co-op program with Parsons. Post-graduation, she is eager to link her interests in civil engineering and sociology to work on transformative community projects that “alter the way people travel and re-write the way towns and cities are lived in”. Amy aspires to get her PE and pursue a career in transportation engineering. When not studying, she enjoys rock climbing, digital scrapbooking, reading and vegetarian cooking. Congratulations Amy on receiving the 2023 Undergraduate scholarship.

## ARIEAL SWINDELL SDSU

Arieal Swindell is a fourth-year student at San Diego State University majoring in Mechanical Engineering. She is blending her engineering education with her role in the Engineering Learning Community as a Resident Advisor. In her role as a Resident Advisor she enjoys incorporating her creativity with resident programs that encourage engineering students to connect, collaborate and celebrate their shared experiences. She is passionate about future innovations in the engineering field, including advancements in roadways and transit, such as maglev trains and hyperloop. She hopes that one day that her creativity and engineering knowledge will “spark endless trails, journeys and pathways to be traveled by the curious and courageous”. We wish you all the best on your journey Arieal and congratulate you on receiving the 2023 Undergraduate scholarship!



UNDERGRADUATE





# Scholarship Recipients.



## **BITITA ETAATI SDSU**

Bitita Etaati is a masters student and graduate research assistant at SDSU and is a transportation analyst intern at C2 Consulting Collective. Having grown up in Iran, she witnessed the devastating impact of traffic accidents and fatalities in her country. Road accidents ranked as the third leading cause of death in Iran (and fourth in the US). These incidents not only claim thousands of lives annually but also hinder the widespread adoption of active transportation, which has the potential to promote health benefits, alleviate traffic congestion, and reduce air pollution. Her genuine interest in this field led her to discover the STARLAB, a transportation-based research lab specializing in transportation safety, and intelligent transportation systems. Upon graduation, she plans to continue conducting research with a specific focus on pedestrian and bicycle accidents, utilizing artificial intelligence to enhance traffic safety. She firmly believes that expertise in understanding pedestrian-involved crashes will become increasingly vital. We applaud your passion and congratulate you on receiving the 2023 Graduate scholarship!

GRADUATE

## **KATIE PERSONS UC San Diego**

As someone who has worked in the transportation industry for seven years, Katie has seen firsthand the impact that public transportation has on a community. Throughout her time at the North County Transit District (NCTD), she has been fortunate to work with and lead a talented team of four service planners, who are dedicated to creating mobility resources that meet the needs of all stakeholders. As Director of Service Planning, she has made it her mission to foster and grow her team, so that they can develop innovative solutions that drive efficiency, customer satisfaction, and safety.

Katie is pursuing a Masters in Business Administration (MBA) at the University of California, San Diego's Rady School of Management. Through this program, she has gained valuable knowledge in areas such as finance, marketing, and operations management. As an emerging female leader in the transportation industry, she is acutely aware of the unique challenges that women face in this field. Women often prioritize transportation and mobility differently from men, with a greater emphasis on personal safety and security. It is essential for women to ascend through all levels within the transportation industry in order to drive innovation and foster inclusivity to address these issues. We encourage Katie to continue to pave the way for a more inclusive future and congratulate her on receiving the 2023 Graduate scholarship!



GRADUATE



## NELL AHANGARFABRIK SDSU



Nell is a first-year student in the City Planning program at San Diego State University who is passionate about social, transportation, and environmental issues. She has gained valuable experience in organizing data and generating reports for numerous active transportation programs, which includes gathering and analyzing geospatial data to identify project locations and trends in California. The objective of this project is to create a tool to evaluate ATP project success in encouraging individuals to use public transportation and bicycle. Nell also works with houseless individuals' everyday by creating cognitive maps to illustrate how they navigate life in the city and the challenges faced by each individual in urban environment. The greater her understanding grows she has realized the important role of urban planners in ensuring the safety and resilience of cities for all individuals, particularly those who are vulnerable. After graduation, she aims to become a sustainability project manager, developing sustainable, and people-friendly communities where everyone feels acknowledged and has access to high-quality public facilities. We wish you all the best on your journey and congratulate you on receiving the 2023 Graduate scholarship!

## SILVIA CROFT

## SDSU

Silvia is a third year Master of City Planning student, who is passionate about sustainability and transportation. She is committed to improving access to transportation and believes it is one of the most valuable fundamental human rights. Silvia currently spearheads outreach initiatives to educate people about mobility options in our region as well as works with local government agencies to ensure that the transportation needs of students and individuals alike are being heard and acknowledged. She understands that many people cannot afford to live closer to work/school and recognizes that transportation ranks amongst the highest living cost for many people, including herself. Many people face financial hardships and often must use affordable, less efficient transportation options that take time away from their families, care, and selves. In her role as a mother with two young children and an emerging transportation planner, she acknowledges that affordable, safe and efficient transportation options are tremendously important to quality of life. Outside of student life, Silva enjoys quality time with her husband, their twin three year olds, gardening, and biking. Congratulations Silvia on receiving the 2023 Graduate scholarship!







# Founding Member



## Chili Cilch, Caltrans

Chili took a circuitous route, from art school to Caltrans and retired February 2020 after a 30-year career as a Senior Transportation Planner. It started when her friend Gable recruited her to help with launching San Diego's first Bike to Work week in 1987. Soon after she took a job with Commuter Computer promoting ridesharing to San Diego County commuters. It was during those early years at Commuter Computer where she worked with Risa Baron and many other women to form the San Diego Chapter of WTS.

Most of her career she managed the Caltrans District 11 Value Analysis (VA) Program, where she worked with teams to enhance the value of projects, products and business processes. Over the course of her career she championed teams that reduced cost without no or little impact on performance and/or implemented strategies that increased the performance. WTS San Diego Chapter awarded her the 1996 Pursuit of Excellence in Transportation Award for her work with the VA program.

She's currently and happily back at Caltrans District 11 working part-time to develop a training seminar on cultivating excellence discussing themes on customer service, collaboration, and continuous improvement. She plans to get back to full-time retirement next year to pursue her interests in writing, painting, finding fosters for rescue dogs and traveling the globe.

## WHAT IS YOUR BEST MEMORY OF WTS?

*Watching my friends/colleagues blossom in taking on WTS leadership responsibilities and going to a conference in WTS Conference in Tucson and getting a yellow convertible rental because they had run out of sedans. It was also an honor and super cool to receive the Excellence in Transportation Award for my Value Analysis work.*

## HOW DID YOU GET INVOLVED IN WTS?

*Risa! She found out about WTS and I stood by as a cheerleader!*

## WHAT ADVICE DO YOU HAVE FOR YOUNG PROFESSIONALS?

*Stay classy! If your gut tells you yes, that it's the right path to take, be patient and persistent. Eventually doors and windows will crack open.*



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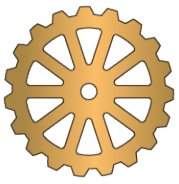
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# Awards.

## JURY PANELISTS

**SHARON COONEY**

*San Diego MTS*



Sharon Cooney (Chief Executive Officer, San Diego MTS) began her career with MTS in 2005 and was appointed CEO in 2020. Her roles at MTS included Deputy CEO and Chief of Staff and supervisor for several functional areas. She serves on the American Public Transportation Association's Access Committee and CEOs Coordinating Council, and is Vice Chair of the California Transit Association. She is a past recipient of WTS San Diego Chapter's Woman of the Year (2010) and Member of the Year (2019).

**MARISA MANGAN**

*SANDAG*



Marisa Mangan (Senior Mobility Strategist, SANDAG) has led various mobility hub planning efforts including development of a regional hub network for the 2021 Regional Plan. She is currently leading the update of the Regional Active Transportation Plan while supporting regional vision zero planning and policy initiatives, all of which strive to transform walking, biking, and rolling into much safer options in our communities.

**NATHAN SCHMIDT**

*City of Carlsbad*



Nathan Schmidt (Transportation Planning and Mobility Manager, City of Carlsbad) is responsible for planning citywide bicycle and pedestrian facilities, roadway improvements, detailed monitoring of citywide travel patterns, and the city's Transportation Demand Management Program. Prior to his position at the City of Carlsbad, Nathan worked as a consultant on transportation planning projects throughout California and Hawaii.

**TERI FENNER**  
AECOM



Teri Fenner (Vice President, AECOM) currently leads the Environmental Planning practice for southern California and Hawaii. Her career spans more than three decades in San Diego where she has worked on SANDAG and Caltrans D11 projects that entire time. She currently leads the AECOM team that is providing on-call environmental services for SANDAG and Caltrans D11. During her UCSD college days, she was an intern at the City of San Diego Transportation department (under Arnold Torma), manually counting cars/bike/pedestrians at various city intersections.

**KATHLEEN GARCIA**  
Retired, UCSD Lecturer



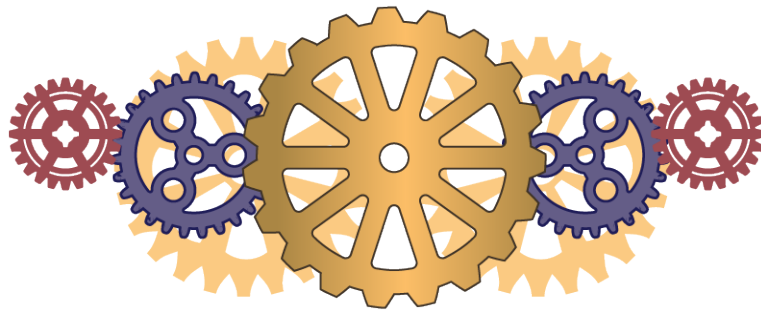
Kathleen Garcia (lecturer, UCSD) is a retired Landscape Architect and Planner with over 40 of experience in design and planning. Her experience includes serving as the Planning and Community Development Director for the City of Del Mar and Partner at Wallace Roberts & Todd. Kathleen's served for eight years on the City of San Diego Planning Commission, was a previous APA-CA Board member and a past president of the Landscape Architecture Foundation.

**PATRICIA MCCOLL**  
HNTB

Patricia (Tricia) McColl is Vice President and Project Director for HNTB. Prior to joining HNTB, Trish owned and managed her own small firm for over 20 years and worked on some of the largest infrastructure projects in the region. In her current role she continues to promote small businesses through a variety of mentoring programs. She was the first woman president of ASCE San Diego Section, led the ASCE Report Card, and was responsible for outreach that was instrumental in passing the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act (IIJA). Trisha received the inaugural WTS San Diego Lifetime Achievement Award in 2023 recognizing her long standing contribution to WTS and the transportation industry. Outside of her involvement in WTS, Trisha is an active member in the community including participating in a variety of non-profit organization roles that providing assistance to underserved members of the community.







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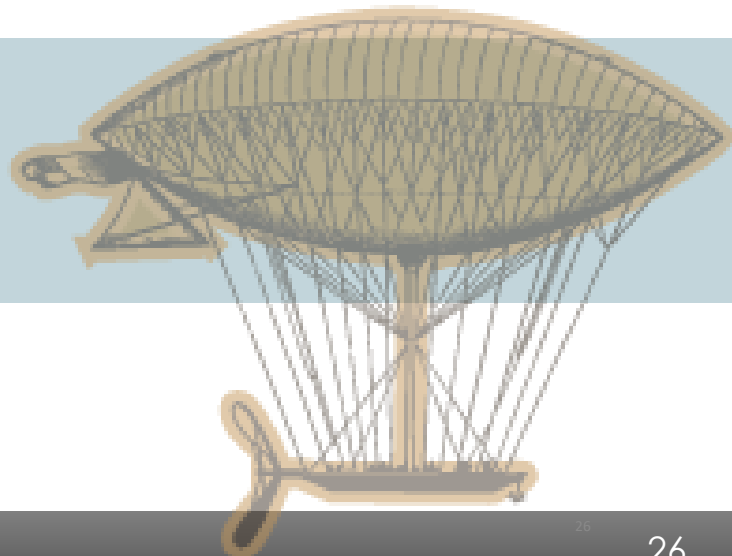
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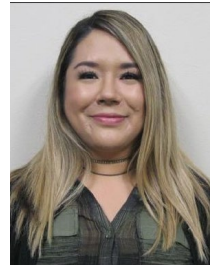
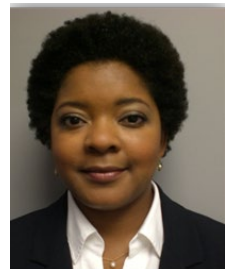
# Diversity & Inclusion

**Mission Statement:** Enhance the benefits of our Chapter by ensuring diversity is always at the forefront of all members, program panels and topics in an inclusive and accepting atmosphere. WTS San Diego County is a professional organization chapter whose membership includes all transportation industry professions, representatives of public, private, and academic organizations, and people of various backgrounds; whose programs cover diverse subjects and panels, and whose recognition awards and scholarships reach diverse applicant pool.

**Achievements:** In 2023, the Diversity and Inclusion Committee participated in Programs, Events, Memberships and WTS Board/Committee meetings to ensure equity and inclusion within the SD Chapter was impartial and at the forefront of this Chapter's objectives. In honor of Women's Equality Day, the Diversity and Inclusion Committee held a reception aligning with the California Transportation Commission's yearly meeting planned for San Diego.



## COMMITTEE MEMBERS:



**Top Row Left to Right:** Cecily Taylor, Danielle Zhang, Melina Pereira, Latosha Hardage,

**Bottom Row Left to Right:** Kena Teon, Brianna Pilkinton, Olivia Lincoln, Carla Perez



# 2023 Award Winners

## **MEMBER OF THE YEAR AWARD**

Shannon Gonzales, Kleinfelder Construction Services

## **EMPLOYER OF THE YEAR AWARD**

AECOM

## **ROSA PARKS DIVERSITY LEADERSHIP AWARD**

Talin Espinoza, Flatiron Construction

## **HONORABLE RAY LAHOOD AWARD**

Samir Hajjiri, City of San Diego

## **INNOVATIVE TRANSPORTATION SOLUTIONS AWARD**

SR-67 Pavement Rehabilitation  
Caltrans

## **ALTERNATIVE MODES & ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION AWARD**

Bayshore Bikeway – Barrio Logan Segment  
SANDAG, City of San Diego, Port of San Diego

## **TECHNOLOGY FOR TRANSPORTATION**

I-805 / SR-94 Bus on Shoulder  
Demonstration Project  
SANDAG, Caltrans, San Diego MTS

## **PURSUIT OF EXCELLENCE AWARD**

Melissa Gomez, Wood Rodgers

## **WOMAN OF THE YEAR AWARD**

Laura Mellizo, Caltrans District 11







## MEMBER OF THE YEAR

# *Shannon Gonzales*

As San Diego WTS Transportation YOU Co-Chair, Shannon has consistently demonstrated her commitment and passion for spreading knowledge about the transportation industry as a career pathway to girls and young women of San Diego County. In the time Shannon has served as TYOU Co-chair, the program has gone from zero events to 19 and counting, with Shannon leading, organizing, and attending.

Shannon's exceptional leadership skills and passion for advancing women in transportation within the TYOU committee are instrumental in fostering a vibrant and inclusive community within the organization. As the Transportation You Chair, she has consistently demonstrated her commitment to empowering the next generation by organizing educational materials, speaking events, and networking opportunities tailored to their specific needs. She is always ready and able to volunteer at TYOU events, while also stepping back to give other WTS members opportunities to volunteer whenever possible.

After hearing Shannon speak about the TransportationYOU program at the Annual Awards Dinner in 2022, multiple industry professionals approached her and other WTS board members to say that the impact that the TYOU program continues to make, is a critical and inspiring aspect of the WTS organization. Her excitement for the transportation industry and advocacy for the mission to introduce young women to the industry early and often is commendable.

Shannon, along with her co-chair, had to rebuild and establish new school and youth organization contacts. She also believed that the program could do more than just focus on DC summit submissions. They believed that the program could spread the word about Transportation as a career to students in elementary, middle and high school. She continues to express and encourage others to get involved. Shannon and the TYOU committee have successfully attended over 19 events and continue to make new contacts to further spread the impact and transportation knowledge. She developed powerpoints and other educational resources that can be used for years to come.

The results speak for themselves, for the 2023 DC program application year, a record-breaking 17 young female students across the county applied to participate. The board



unanimously approved to send two students in lieu of one, including one student who has never left San Diego. The transportation industry needs passionate industry professionals who believe in the next generation of the industry.

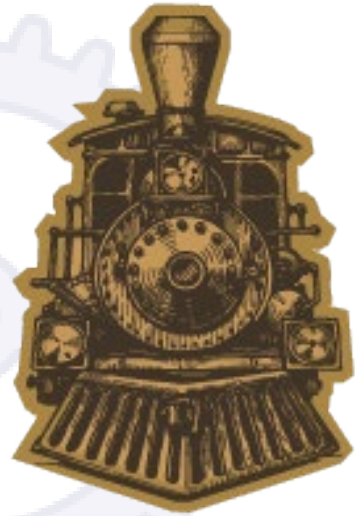
Shannon has been instrumental in promoting the reputation of WTS within the transportation industry through her relentless dedication and strategic efforts. Her passion for the organization's mission, combined with her strong leadership skills, has led to significant advancements in raising awareness and establishing WTS as a respected and influential entity in the industry.

Shannon's professional achievements as an office engineer and construction inspector on the \$120 million West Mission Bay Drive project exemplify her expertise and exceptional work ethic. She has played a pivotal role in the successful completion of this significant infrastructure endeavor, ensuring the project's adherence to strict quality standards and timelines. Her keen attention to detail, problem-solving skills, and ability to effectively collaborate with multidisciplinary teams have been instrumental in the project's success.

Beyond her professional accomplishments, she actively engages with students and young professionals, sharing her experiences and insights to encourage their curiosity and consideration of the transportation industry as a viable career path. Her willingness to invest her time and energy into supporting others reflects her genuine commitment to nurturing the next generation of leaders in the transportation industry.



## ROSA PARKS DIVERSITY LEADERSHIP AWARD



*Talin Espinoza*

Talin Espinoza has contributed significantly to promoting diversity, inclusion and multi-cultural awareness within Flatiron and the transportation industry as a whole, supporting the goals and mission of WTS. She is Flatiron's Director of Business Development Northwest and Southwest Districts. With over 19 years of client service and business development experience, she serves on the Board of Directors for the Construction Management Association of America (CMAA) Southern California Chapter, the largest community of construction professionals in Los Angeles, and has also been a Board Member for the Association of General Contractors (AGC) Los Angeles District since 2014.

Talin is a contributing writer for an Architecture, Engineering and Construction (A/E/C) publication for PSMJ, Inc. and serves on the Association of General Contractors (AGC) Diversity, Equity and Inclusion committee. The Los Angeles Business Journal has also recognized Talin as a woman of Influence in Construction, Architecture and Engineering.

One of Talin's most recent notable accomplishments is as a founding member of the Women in Heavy Civil Committee for the Beavers Heavy Engineering Construction Association, the most influential association in the heavy civil construction industry. Talin and team approached the Beavers to promote and support the presence of women in heavy civil careers and provide a safer and more inclusive environment for women professionals. The outcome resulted in the first annual "Women in Heavy Civil" luncheon as part of the 2023 Golden Beaver Awards, a sold out event.

Talin has exhibited extraordinary efforts, commitment and initiatives in facilitating professional opportunities for women and minorities. She acquired a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Certificate from Cornell that has contributed to her leadership within Flatiron and construction industry work, including the AGC Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Task Force (DE&I). Talin supports and contributes to the DE&I Task Force to change the hearts and minds of our industry and inspire a new and better world and developing industry best practices for DE&I.

Initiatives of this groundbreaking Task Force include:

- Developing Zero Tolerance Campaign to drive culture change and promote best practices & success
- Explore, develop & launch Culture of Care Program
- Develop & launch AGC Underrepresented Business Enterprise/Small Business (UBE/SB) Training & Technical Assistance Program.
- Leverage, promote and accelerate existing Build California Program goals

Talin was the first female president of the Construction Management Association, Southern California Chapter, in 15 years, created an executive leadership track to bring positive changes to women in construction, and founded the Women in Heavy Civil Committee of the Beavers Heavy Engineering Construction Association. She provides support and oversight to supplier diversity and outreach programs for Flatiron's Southwest District, including the \$2.5 billion LINXS Automated People Mover project at Los Angeles International Airport and the Rosecrans Grade Separation project and I-105 Express Lanes project. She works with the rest of the project team to ensure all project goals are met through robust supplier diversity community engagement and a workforce development program.





## HONORABLE RAY LAHOOD AWARD

*Samir Hajjiri*

Samir Hajjiri embodies WTS's vision and core values. Throughout his career with the City of San Diego, he has advocated for the advancement of women in the transportation industry and has provided his time and knowledge as a mentor to many female employees and co-workers.

Samir started with the City of San Diego in 1991 and within six years advanced to Associate and Senior Traffic Engineer. At the Senior Engineer level, he has worked in all aspects of transportation engineering including planning, development review, safety, operations, multimodal mobility policy/regulations, and implementation. Samir is regarded as the City's subject matter expert in a multitude of areas of traffic engineering. He has taken a lead role in complex and highly visible projects involving multiple disciplines and agencies including Caltrans, SANDAG and the GSA. He has successfully completed several complex projects including over ten community plan updates, many multimodal corridor plans, the Pedestrian Master Plan, comprehensive updates to the City's General Plan, Bicycle Master Plan and Street Design Manual, and the Virginia Avenue Border crossing. He has recently made valuable contributions to several key planning initiatives including the evolution of mobility analyses toward a more multimodal and equitable focus, Complete Communities, the Transportation Study Manual update, and SB 743 implementation. He currently is a Program Manager in the City of San Diego overseeing Transportation Development where he continues to make meaningful changes in the City pertaining to the transportation industry.

Samir's technical expertise is only part of what makes him a remarkable professional. Samir's strength as a supervisor and mentor are extraordinary, well known and appreciated by all who have ever worked for or with him. Samir encouraged women in his section at every level of their career to be members of and participate in professional organizations for networking and professional development.



Every woman on Samir's team was a member of WTS, ITE, NACTO, ASCE Transportation Group, and/or the Transportation Development Association. He supported and encouraged attendance at conferences and workshops such as the annual WTS Conference, ITE Meetings, and NACTO Conference.

Samir largely steered his section's work program to promote equity in transportation as well as in the workplace. One example is Samir initiated the City developing the first pedestrian master plan which identified areas with greatest pedestrian demand, deficiencies, and need for pedestrian improvements; ensuring that historically underrepresented populations needs would be identified. He inspires his team by creating a collaborative, future-focused, professional and inclusive environment. Samir promoted and encouraged women to advance in the transportation field by supporting them in pursuing career goals and providing opportunities for them to shine.

Throughout his career with the City of San Diego, Samir has advocated for the advancement of women in the transportation industry and has provided his time and knowledge as a mentor to many female employees and co-workers. Having grown and maintained a section where 50% of the team are females, Samir continuously encouraged the women in his section to become prepared for and to apply for positions of increasing responsibility and challenges. In the last 5 years, four out of five female employees have been promoted to higher positions. Samir has always provided excellent guidance, mentorship, and specific feedback in a constructive manner to aid career advancement.



## EMPLOYER OF THE YEAR

# AECOM

Founded in 1990, AECOM is one of the world's leading firms in design, planning, engineering, environmental consulting, program management, and construction management. With \$13.2 billion in annual revenue and 51,000 global employees, AECOM is ranked number one in Transportation and General Building by Engineering News-Record and has helped deliver some of the world's most iconic projects. AECOM Technical Services Inc. employs over 2,400 employees in California, including in a large office in San Diego. AECOM has played a major role in the design, management, and construction of Southern California's highways, bridges, railroads, ports, airports, major buildings, and water resources.

One of the industry's most respected women, Lara Poloni, is president of AECOM, and leads a global matrix organization working on all seven continents and organized in geographies and business lines. AECOM has more than 600 women in senior management positions, including global executives, technical discipline leaders, project managers, and directors of major initiatives. Moreover, AECOM more than doubles the U.S. national average percentage of women in Science and Engineering (S&E) professions, with women making up over 31% of our STEM employees (National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics).

AECOM promotes the involvement in WTS chapters, International Conference, and Leadership Conference. With more than 200 WTS members nationwide, our employees serve on WTS initiatives and committee boards. Locally, Morgan Wolfe has been a WTS board member for the past four years, serving as both the student chapter liaison and the membership chair. AECOM is a long-term Gold Sponsor of the San Diego WTS Chapter and is an active partner in the chapter through event sponsorship and attendance.

AECOM provides internship opportunities in transportation for women locally and throughout the world, with many choosing to join AECOM as full-time employees. We work locally with SDSU and Nensi Lakori to identify potential candidates for our San Diego office. Over the past 5 years over 50% of the transportation interns hired in the San Diego office have been women. **FOR THESE REASONS AND MANY OTHERS, WTS SAN DIEGO IS PLEASED TO SELECT AECOM AS OUR 2023 EMPLOYER OF THE YEAR.**

AECOM incentivizes the continuing growth and development of our women in a number of important ways.

- Educational reimbursement program: any employee who wants to begin or further her education in post-secondary college or university may be fully reimbursed for the cost of her studies.
- Professional registrations: reimbursement for Professional Engineer, Professional Land Surveyor, Certified Planner, and others, and for participation in professional societies and organizations.
- Robust mentoring program where senior personnel mentor employees and innovative reverse mentoring program where senior personnel learn from younger team members.
- Career advancement through continuing education and professional organizations, involvement such as WTS Leadership Trainings and Conferences.
- Bonuses for approved certifications, reimbursement for qualified classes, and flexible work schedules to accommodate classes and seminars.
- Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) throughout the company to enable employees with similar backgrounds and experiences and their allies to share information, knowledge, and experiences.





## *I-805/SR-94 Bus on Shoulder Demonstration Project*

The I-805/SR 94 Bus on Shoulders Pilot (Pilot) is the San Diego region's first implementation of shoulder operations utilizing state-of-the-art transit driver assistance and freeway transit vehicle-to-infrastructure (V2I) technology.

The State of California lacks legislation permitting buses to bypass congestion by using the freeway shoulders. The data from this pilot will provide valuable insights into the viability of increased priority for freeway-running bus rapid transit to provide commuters with more and better mobility options that take advantage of existing infrastructure. The project team developed the design and operating procedures in close coordination with stakeholders to address the needs of enforcement staff, vehicle code regulations, agency operators, vehicle drivers, and transit customers.

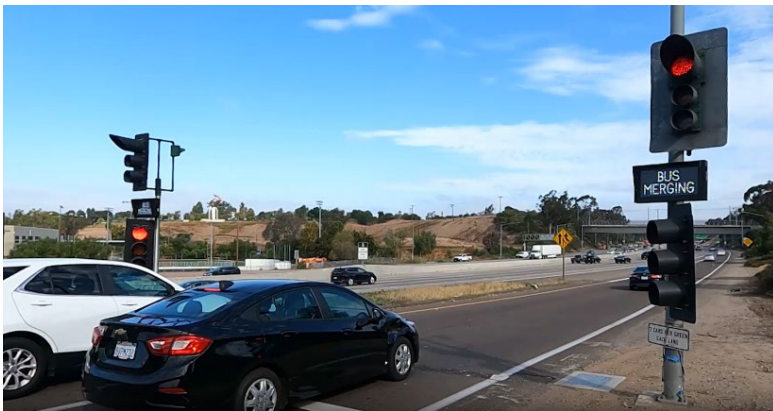
A technology package was installed on MTS South Bay Rapid Route 225 buses to create safer shoulder access at entrance ramp merge locations and allows the buses to "talk" to the ramp meter signals to create a gap in entering traffic. The project's usage of state-of-the-art in-vehicle and V2I technology package helps improve viability of transit as a mode of transportation by improving safety and schedule reliability. The Bus on Shoulders Demonstration pilot has successfully updated existing transit signal priority equipment on the Rapid vehicles, to the latest Cellular Vehicle-to-Everything (C-V2X) radios. C-V2X is a 3GPP technology, which will be further leveraged on future transit projects in the San Diego region. This is, however, the first use of C-V2X supporting TSP at Caltrans ramp meters, which could expand to other parts of the country if proven successful.

The three-year Pilot also allows the collection of detailed performance monitoring metrics, including on-time performance data, travel speeds, technology usage, enforcement issues, and rider/driver perceptions of the service. Over a three-year operating period, passengers regularly commuting on the South Bay Rapid service (100 passengers per trip, 12 trips per peak period) could save over 48,000 hours of cumulative travel time.

From July 2022 to May 2023, the Pilot resulted in significantly lower variability in travel times and greater reliability compared to general purpose and HOV lanes. Additionally, 57% of drivers liked using the technology package supporting safe passage through the entrance ramps. The project aligns closely with Caltrans' innovation and modality priorities, SANDAG's 2021 Regional Plan, and City of San Diego Climate Action Plan Goals.

Planning, Design, Construction and Operations of this Pilot included over 20 female leaders from multiple jurisdictions, including several design exceptions elevated to the State-level. Jennifer Williamson and her team were able to make the Bus on Shoulders project possible through strong relationships with our project partner agencies, Metropolitan Transit System, Caltrans, California Highway Patrol, the Federal Transit Administration, and the Federal Highway Administration. Over an 18-month period, and in partnership with FHWA, Jennifer's team obtained approval from the California Traffic Control Device Committee (CTCDC) to deploy experimental road-signage and markings, as well as blank-out signs at ramps. Under Jennifer's leadership, SANDAG developed an award-winning public outreach campaign that promoted this pilot through billboards, bilingual radio advertisements, and digital advertising.

This project was only made possible through a willingness between multiple agencies to embrace new technologies and offer a more modern transit system that is safe, accessible, and sustainable.



**SANDAG , CALTRANS  
& SAN DIEGO MTS**





## *SR-67 Pavement Rehabilitation*

On October 13, 2022, Governor Gavin Newsom stated "California is now one step closer to making the digital divide a thing of the past." This statement was made in reference to Caltrans project 11-430564 on State Route 67 in San Diego County. One may wonder how a Caltrans pavement rehabilitation project made progress towards a more ubiquitous broadband service to all Californians.

Fariba Ramos, head of Caltrans District 11 Electrical Design, played a crucial role in ensuring the addition of broadband fiber to the project by collaborating with electrical contractors, fiber optic conduit and cable manufacturers to identify sustainable and cost-effective solutions with minimal environmental impact. Due to an accelerated project schedule, electrical design team fast-tracked developing plans to incorporate fiber optic broadband and successfully implemented the additional scope in 3 weeks. Overall, Fariba's exceptional leadership and dedication to innovative solutions resulted in a project that successfully placed infrastructure for bridging the digital divide and implemented safety features by incorporating non-intrusive detection and signal performance measurements capability at signalized intersections.

Key elements of the project include adoption of innovative construction method, developing and working with non-standard project delivery methods, collaboration with multiple teams, and expanded project to include regional fiber-sharing. As a result, this project fostered strong relationships among the entities and San Diego County joined regional Fiber Sharing and added 18 miles of fiber to their network.

Micro Technology (Micro-Trenching, Micro Conduits, and cables) was the preferred construction method resulting in the installation of fiber optic conduits at lower cost, increased performance, reduced construction period which directly reduces the carbon footprint impact compared to conventional methods. Managing collaboration among multiple organizations and agencies was a challenge, but Fariba ensured alignment and information sharing, which streamlined decision-making and facilitated progress. By addressing concerns, gaining stakeholder support, and coordinating efforts, she successfully implemented micro-trenching as a cost-effective, high-performance, and environmentally friendly construction solution.



One of the primary outcomes is providing the infrastructure for a new and reliable internet access for the communities along SR-67, bridging the digital divide for previously underserved areas. Faster communication channels also implemented for efficient data transmission to the Traffic Management Center (TMC), improving monitoring through CCTV cameras, Changeable Message Signs, signalized intersections, and traffic monitoring stations.

There were several women that played crucial roles in the success of this project: Fariba Ramos, electrical design branch chief; April Lucchesi program manager and coordinator for MMBN; Margie Perez, construction division chief; Mona Attallah, branch chief for Electrical Systems; Barbara Moreno, Yadira Whitney, and Caridad Sanchez from the Caltrans public affairs team. The office handles media relations, develops internal and external communications, coordinates media campaigns, and disseminates public information regarding Caltrans, its operations, and activities.

This project serves as a shining example of how infrastructure projects can drive progress, connectivity, and a brighter future for all Californians.

**CALTRANS**



# ALTERNATIVE MODES & ACTIVE TRANSPORTATION AWARD



## *Bayshore Bikeway Project – Barrio Logan Segment*

The Bayshore Bikeway - Barrio Logan Segment successfully demonstrates a commitment to improving the safety and accessibility of active transportation modes, such as walking and biking, in a historically underserved, low income, and culturally diverse community. The project is implementing a Class I Bikeway and railroad crossing improvements to make it easier and safer for residents to walk and bike to their destinations. The project also incorporates features such as enhanced traffic signal systems and lighting, and wayfinding signage, further improving the safety and accessibility of active transportation.

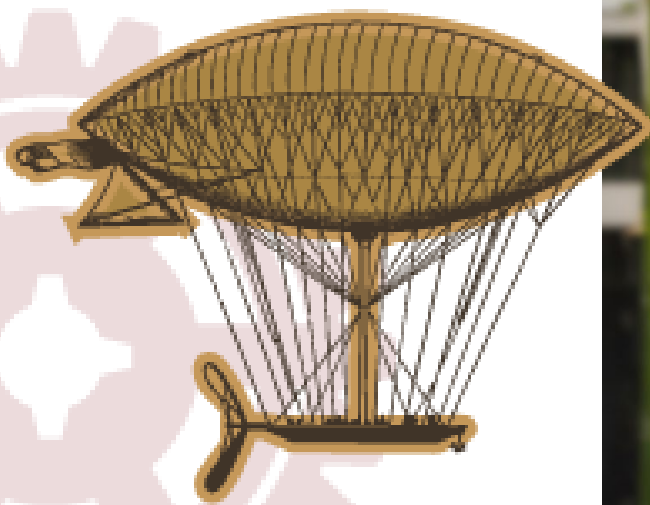
The project's success can be attributed to its project manager, Dinara Ussenova, P.E., SANDAG, who skillfully navigated these challenges and ensured the project's objectives were met. Her leadership, commitment to community engagement, and ability to manage complex projects were instrumental in the project's success. Her approach was to engage in open communication and collaboration to find common ground, address concerns, and reach mutually beneficial agreements. She also had to navigate a heavily industrialized area with various stakeholders, such as businesses, port authorities, and utility companies. Her approach was to understand their needs and challenges, establish trust, and collaborate on solutions.

The project successfully improves intermodal transportation, which included six rail crossings. Diana and her team worked with experts to ensure that bikeway and railroad improvements were designed to meet safety standards and reduce congestion. She applied for additional grant funding and worked with the City of San Diego to obtain reimbursements for fixing the aged infrastructure. Her ability to find funding and keep the project on budget was critical to the project success.

Ultimately, the project reduces motor vehicle traffic and its related air pollution, noise, and parking impacts. The bikeway provides Barrio Logan residents with an opportunity for physical activity, providing critical access to San Diego Bay, connecting Barrio Logan residents to the planned Chollas Creek Bike Path, the Sweetwater River Bike Path, and the trail system in the Otay River Valley Regional Park. In addition to improving safety and accessibility, the project will revitalize the Barrio Logan community by providing an attractive and welcoming streetscape. The project included landscaping to create a more vibrant and livable public space, improving the experience and quality of life for residents of the underserved Barrio Logan neighborhood.

The Bayshore Bikeway - Barrio Logan Segment project is a shining example of the positive impact that can be achieved through active transportation infrastructure improvements. By improving access to safe and affordable active transportation options, the project will improve the health, well-being, and economic opportunities of the Barrio Logan community.

**SANDAG, PORT OF SAN DIEGO  
& CITY OF SAN DIEGO**



## PURSUIT OF EXCELLENCE

### *Melissa Gomez*

Melissa is a Senior Transportation Engineer with experience ranging from preliminary engineering, engineering support throughout the environmental approval process, final design (PS&E), and design support during construction. Her expertise includes many aspects of street and highway/freeway improvement projects.

With a Bachelor's degree from UCSD and a Masters degree from Cornell, she began as a geotechnical engineer where she worked in some extremely remote desert locations doing inspections and toughing it out when others did not. Melissa's toughness cannot be understated. She's a hard worker and does what it takes to get through challenging situations. Melissa gained the respect of her peers early in her career for her reliability, immediate comprehension, and superior attitude. Melissa's exceptional service and leadership skills are evident in the long list of people that choose to follow her and clients that continually hire her.

Her solid basis in geotechnical engineering led to her expanding her expertise into transportation design in 2013 when she went to work at Parsons, a company seeking to grow a transportation presence in San Diego. Her confidence and positive attitude were immediately apparent to the team at Parsons, which led to an assignment on an extremely challenging transportation job - the California High Speed Rail Design Build Project (Construction Package 1): a highly controversial, large scale, and demanding project.

Melissa spent two years working through grade separation projects in support of the future rail line. Most folks did not have a positive attitude after being put through the grinder on this project, but Melissa hung in there and was a big part of completing the design of a constantly moving target, now constructed.



Over the years Melissa has contributed much to our local WTS chapter. She currently serves as the Vice President and was previously the chapter Treasurer. She has contributed to many local WTS events including organizing scholarship donations for local high schools and securing \$3,000 for high school scholarships. She passes down her passion for helping students through her team. She encourages her junior team members to speak at local high school events and helps them prepare presentations and represent the engineering community.

Melissa is committed to diversity and inclusion in the workplace and in contracting. With Melissa's influence and role in hiring, the Parsons San Diego office (which has doubled in size in the last year and a half) is over 50% women. Melissa supported the "Meet the Subs" event at Caltrans, as a prime consultant looking to support and partner with small businesses. She will again participate at this year's event. She has provided encouragement to female high school and college students to enter the transportation field. She talks the talk and walks the walk!

In the early portions of her career, Melissa had the opportunity to begin working with several transportation projects with the City of Ontario. She became the major driving force for the management and delivery of these projects for this City and formed a strong team bond with several city staff members.

*"Melissa was extremely knowledgeable, proactive, and a pleasure to work with as a Project Manager on several of our projects. She is an exceptional transportation engineer and proved to be an invaluable team member during the design and construction of our projects."*

- Jaime Maciel-Carrera, City of Ontario Project Manager





Laura, a San Diego native from Barrio Logan, observed the construction of the iconic Coronado Bay Bridge during her childhood. Though she never anticipated being involved with the bridge, Laura's journey began as a member of the California Conservation Corps (CCC), where she worked her way up to becoming a crew leader. As her CCC tenure came to an end, she transitioned to working as a toll collector at the Coronado side toll plaza.

Seizing an opportunity, Laura applied and was accepted into the Structural Steel Painter Apprenticeship program. With determination and perseverance, Laura completed extensive training, balancing her work as a structural steel painter on the Coronado Bay Bridge with over 280 hours of classroom instruction during her personal time. Overcoming obstacles and dedicating months of effort, she successfully graduated from the apprenticeship and became a journeyman painter. In 1995, Laura's outstanding performance led to her promotion as the lead structural painter, and she later assumed the role of supervisor for the Structural Steel Paint crew. With a remarkable 38 years of service, Laura's experience in structural steel painting spans over 30 years, including 16 years as the Lead structural steel painter and 5 years as the Structural Steel Paint Supervisor.

Laura has left an indelible mark in the transportation field through her remarkable achievements. As the first woman to complete the Structural Steel Painter apprenticeship program on the Coronado Bay Bridge (CBB), she shattered barriers and set a precedent for future generations.



## WOMAN OF THE YEAR

*Laura Mellizo*

Her groundbreaking accomplishments continued as she became the first female Structural Steel Leadworker and eventually the first woman to hold the position of Structural Steel Supervisor in southern California.

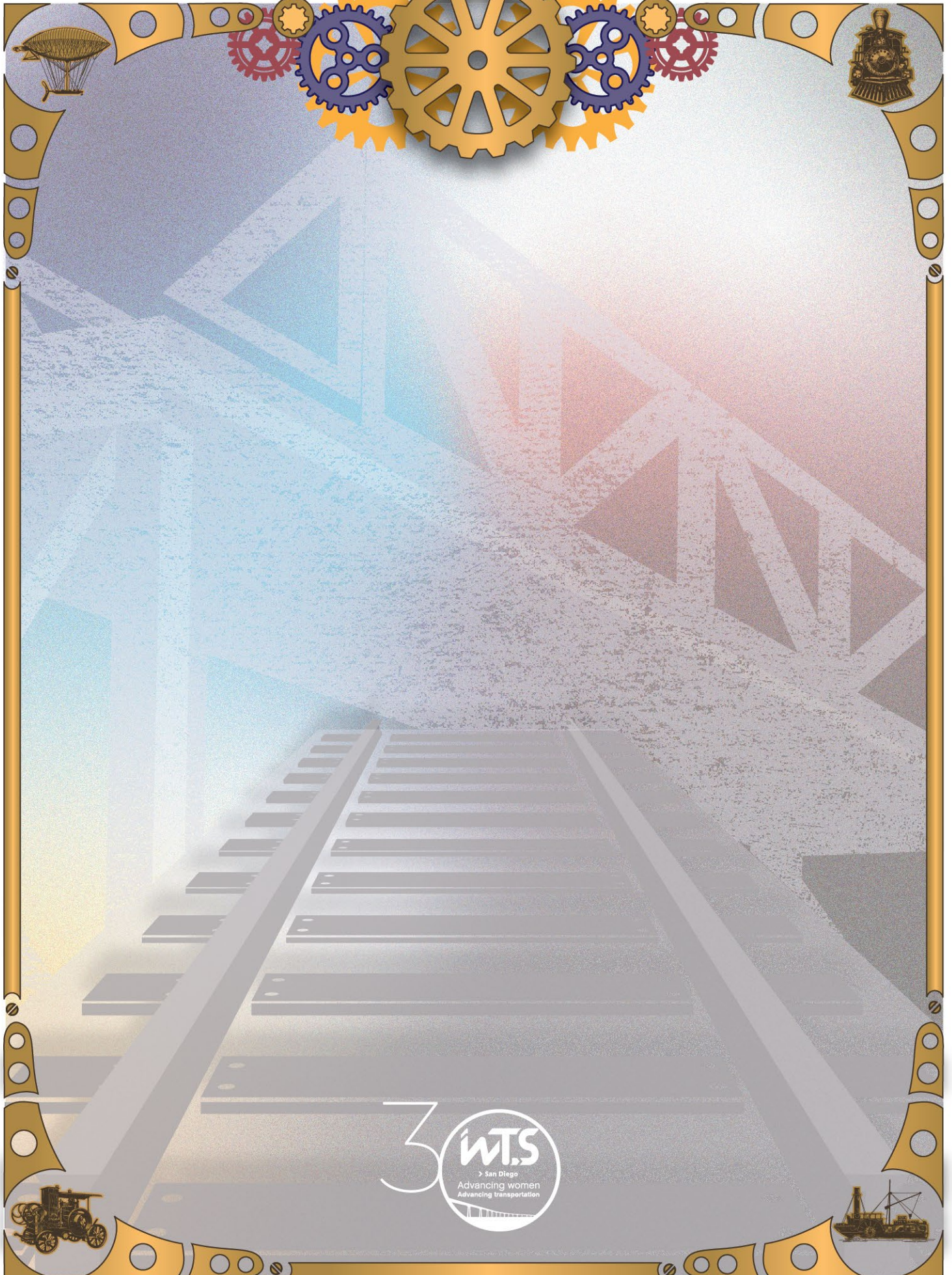
Throughout her career with Caltrans, Laura's expertise has been instrumental in the maintenance of numerous bridges across California. Her dedication to preserving the paint coating of these vital transportation structures has significantly contributed to their longevity and functionality.

Moreover, her profound knowledge and skills have played a pivotal role in shaping the current apprenticeship program. By serving as a mentor and guide, she has helped numerous apprentices and journeyman painters excel in the Caltrans paint program. Her commitment extends beyond her role, as she regularly conducts classes and travels throughout the state to support and foster the apprenticeship program. Laura's impact extends to future generations as well. Many of her former apprentices are now actively involved in the program as proctors and instructors, imparting the knowledge and guidance they once received from Laura. This cycle of knowledge transfer ensures that her legacy continues to shape the field of transportation for years to come.

One notable testament to Laura's influence is the creation of the crew's logo, "Don't Cheat the Steel," for the Coronado Bay Bridge Structural Steel team. This logo embodies the values of integrity, hard work, and a passionate commitment to delivering the best possible results. Despite her considerable technical knowledge, Laura's true strength lies in her ability to inspire and motivate her crew to achieve excellence consistently. She humbly deflects credit and emphasizes the collective effort of the team, reflecting her selflessness and team-oriented approach. It is precisely this attitude that has cultivated such an exceptional program under her leadership.







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