



BRETT



CONNOR



CUNNINGHAM



DIPERT BROWN

WOMEN IN TRANSPORTATION



HAMES



MILLER



WIGGINS-TOLBERT

This year we profile the achievements of seven women, who have used skills in planning, business, leadership, communications and industry advocacy to make their mark on the industry.



Helene Brett

Title: Director of Membership

Organization: APTA

City: Washington, D.C.

Helene Brett, director of membership at the **American Public Transportation Association (APTA)**, is celebrating her 30th year in her position. "It sounds crazy! These days, people don't tend to stay with jobs that long, but I really love my job," she says. "I really admire the association for what it does for the industry and for the people that support this industry."

Practically a Washington, D.C., native, Brett has been a resident since childhood and landed her first job out of **Virginia Tech** as a history major with the **National Trust for Historic Preservation**. After two years at the trust, she took a position with the **Travel Industry Association of America** and ended up in charge of membership when the previous staff member left for her honeymoon and decided not to return to the job, as luck would have it. She eventually moved to a similar position at APTA and during her tenure, membership has grown from 643 to around 1,500 member organizations.

"We get information from all sorts of leads," she explains. In addition to executing formalized outreach campaigns, Brett conducts extensive research to identify potential member organizations and educates non-members about APTA's benefits and services. "Sometimes, it's a member telling us that they have a contact that would like to know more about what APTA does, and we follow through," she says.

Along with recruitment and retention of members, Brett's main responsibilities on the job include preparing for the APTA Expo every three years, working with staff to gather the materials and information needed to best represent the organization and communicating with vendors and contractors to pin down all the many details. "The first Expo came not long after I first came to APTA, and I'm proud to say I've been able to attend and help with each one of those tri-annual Expos since then," she says. "It's a pretty intense three-day period. You're on your toes constantly."

As staff advisor to the Member Services Committee, Brett also helps direct the committee's mentoring program that matches seasoned APTA members with new members to share information on a peer-to-peer level. "We've been able to mentor more than 300 members over the last eight to 10 years," she says. Upcoming projects for Brett include APTA's business plan and finding new ways to deliver information about membership ben-

efits and services, a new Website to be launched in the fall with more interactive features, and outreach to high-speed rail groups for recruitment due to likely growth in that area.

Brett says that her No. 1 priority is customer service. "The [membership] staff is great," she says. "They know how I feel about that — we want to be responsive. We're here for our members. That's our job."

To that end, Brett's policy for the membership department is for staff to always acknowledge each e-mail the day it was received. "We let people know that we'll get back to them if we can't answer it immediately," she explains. "[Members] know that they can depend upon me, and that I will follow through, if I take ownership of a problem, and get to the bottom and resolve it."

That kind of determination is useful in handling Brett's great-



As the director of membership at APTA, Brett's various responsibilities include recruitment and retention of members and preparing for its tri-annual Expos. She also serves as staff advisor to APTA's Member Services Committee, where she helps direct the mentoring program.

est challenge on the job, which she identifies as the constant change, not only within the industry, but in keeping track of individual members and records. On top of that, database and computer technology keeps evolving, as well. "I've seen four computer conversions over the time I've been here," Brett says, "and that involves a lot of effort and attention to detail to make sure data integrity is accurate." Brett also trains other APTA staff members on the use of the member database.

However, responding to inquiries and interacting with members is what Brett finds most rewarding about the job. "We've helped so many individuals in this industry to learn about how [APTA] can partner with them, help them advance their business interests and serve the American public," she says.

— CLAIRE ATKINSON



Marlene Connor

Title: Director of Public Transportation - Bus and Paratransit

Organization: Wilbur Smith Associates

City: Holyoke, Mass.

Thriving on the satisfaction she has always drawn from community engagement, **Marlene Connor** took a detour into transportation on her way to law school.

Connor stumbled upon the transportation field during her college years. Ever since, she has been involved in nearly every aspect of planning, from alternatives analysis, to bus rapid transit (BRT) development to legislative issues.

Right before heading to law school, Connor took a summer internship at the regional planning agency at Springfield, Mass.-based **Lower Pioneer Valley Regional Planning Commission** (LPVRPC) (now the **Pioneer Valley Planning Commission**). She switched career goals soon afterward.

"I had always been actively engaged in community-based activities, even while at college," says Connor. While in school, she interned at **Western Mass Legal Services** (WMLS) and participated on organizational boards, such as the **Boys and Girls Clubs of America**. "The internship at the LPVRPC started as a summer job, but was so interesting with regard to the people and community perspective of transportation, that this seemed more appealing to me than going to law school," Connor adds.

Connor stayed with the planning commission for seven years, and then moved to the **Pioneer Valley Transit Authority** (PVTA) and worked there for 12 years, eventually becoming the CEO. She then joined **Urbitran Associates** in New York, where she was able to follow her desire to work on several different types of projects. The most interesting work, Connor says, was helping create the **Department of Transportation for Middlesex County** in New Jersey.

"I was really pleased to have a hand in helping people rethink how to do things. We were able to indicate that the mobility needs of the residents were not being met through...existing service providers and that the creation of a new County department would both better coordinate services and resources and establish the means for the County to develop its own transportation priorities," Connor explains.

She went on to get involved in statewide efforts as a team member developing the "Work First" plan for the state of New Jersey and **New Jersey Transit**, conducting a statewide bus study for the state of Connecticut, and forming an investment strategy for the **Massachusetts Association of Regional Transit Authori-**

ties (MARTA) and the commonwealth of Massachusetts' legislative delegation.

Most recently, Connor works as the director of public transportation, bus and paratransit, for **Wilbur Smith Associates**. She has tackled an alternatives analysis in Birmingham, Ala., coordination plans for the state of New Jersey, and a BRT project for **Monterey Salinas Transit** as well as for Albany N.Y.-based **Capital District Transit Authority** (CDTA). Connor explains why she finds throwing herself into projects that help transit systems so rewarding: "I understand what it's like, how hard it is to get buses and trains out every day...I like the ability to make a difference."

Connor recently contributed to a plan with the goal of reinforc-



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ing the value of **Augusta (Ga.) Public Transit** as a community resource and creating more direct service to activity centers. She enjoyed working within the community infrastructure and helping residents recognize public transportation's value.

"In both [Middlesex County, N.J. and Augusta, Ga.], there were clear needs for mobility improvement, some recognition locally that something different needed to happen to improve people's mobility options, and that public transportation could be a more valuable commodity, if structured effectively," Connor notes.

She has also been very involved in crafting the **American Public Transportation Association's** position on authorization, is a member of the Business Member Board of Governors, the legislative steering committee and is the chair of the intergovernmental issues subcommittee. She participates in conversations on energy, mobility management and local coordination partnerships between service agencies and the transportation infrastructure. "It's given me a good opportunity to...help on issues that are just so critical today," she says. —NICOLE SCHLOSSER



Julie Cunningham

Title: President/CEO

Organization: Conference of Minority Transportation Officials (COMTO)

City: Washington, D.C.

Julie Cunningham, president/CEO for the **Conference of Minority Transportation Officials (COMTO)**, says the highlight of her year so far was serving on **President Obama's** transition team. "My focus was the **Department of Transportation's** Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization, but I got to sit in on meetings for the various operating agencies, including the transit, rail, maritime and highways," she says. "Just to be able to see the agencies from inside out, top to bottom, was an invaluable experience, and certainly the privilege of serving the first African-American president in this capacity was a once in a lifetime opportunity."

In her role at COMTO, Cunningham directs the activities of the organization at every level, from operations to safety compliance and public relations. "It includes directing the national staff here in D.C., and spending a lot of time on Capitol Hill, educating our congressional members about our initiatives and our agenda," she says. With chapters in 39 cities, she is also in charge of working with chapter presidents on their respective initiatives to ensure each is in line with the strategic direction set forth by the COMTO National Board of Directors.

Early in her career, Cunningham spent 18 years in the nuclear power industry, with responsibilities covering government relations and strategic communications. It was during that time she returned to school and completed a degree in business management from **Hiram College** in Ohio. Later, she was appointed to serve as a trustee on the board of directors of **Laketran**, a transit system serving Lake County in northeast Ohio. She then got involved with the **Ohio Public Transportation Association**, and was introduced to COMTO by **Ronald Barnes**, a former COMTO national chairman.

One of her recent accomplishments at COMTO has been working with the **Missouri Department of Transportation** and its stakeholders — including community organizations, union members, contractors, and small and disadvantaged businesses — to create a plan called "Connecting the Dots," which is, as Cunningham describes it, "a comprehensive plan of inclusion to ensure that women and minorities have opportunities on the heavy highway construction projects in the state. I am so pleased that COMTO's participation in that process has helped the state of Missouri to go surpass the federal goals for both workforce and DBE (Disadvantaged Business Enterprise) participation."

Cunningham also touts COMTO's ability to attract the next

generation of transportation professionals as one of the organization's biggest strengths, with a shadow day held for students each February, a youth symposium held at the annual conference, an FTA-funded internship program for college students and a scholarship program that last year awarded nearly \$300,000 to students pursuing careers in transportation.

Cunningham is also working with COMTO's board to advocate on behalf of DBEs to change the bonding requirements for the



At COMTO, Cunningham directs the activities of the organization at every level, including directing Washington, D.C. staff and educating congressional members about the group's initiatives.

next surface transportation bill. "Our aim is to see an interstate certification program," she says. "Currently, DBEs must be recertified to work on projects in various states."

Another goal of hers is to work with COMTO chapter leaders to ensure that chapters are as diverse as the organization's board of directors. "Thirty-eight years ago, COMTO started as a networking vehicle for minority transit professionals, but now we're multimodal," she explains. "The goal is for each chapter to have individuals and member agencies from not only transit, but also port authorities, airports, highways, rail and small businesses in the private sector."

At press time, Cunningham was in Tanzania, with **FTA** and COMTO representatives for a conference with the East African Community intergovernmental organization to discuss the development of sustainable transportation systems in the five participating African countries.

What does Cunningham find to be most rewarding about her job? "To be able to work with transportation professionals across the country that know their craft," she says. "They are passionate about what they do. I'm not a transportation expert, but I don't need to be, because I'm surrounded by the best of the best, the brightest, the most passionate cadre of transportation professionals that any country could hope to have."

— CLAIRE ATKINSON



Autumn Dipert Brown

Title: COO

Organization: Dan Dipert Coaches and Tours

City: Arlington, Texas

Autumn Dipert Brown just finished an MBA in accounting and finance at **Rice University** in Houston and was preparing to return to the banking industry when a chance meeting at her father's office changed the course of her career.

Her father, **Dan Dipert**, is the founder and CEO of **Dan Dipert Coaches and Tours**. Dipert Brown had accepted a position at one of Texas' major regional banks and was home visiting her family before starting the job. Dan Dipert happened to be meeting with his CPA when Dipert Brown stopped by. "Apparently, the CPA said, 'you need some help,' and he offered me a job," she says. In her early years in the family business, Dipert Brown focused on updating the computer, software and accounting systems in place at the company. Next, she took on responsibilities for personnel and operations, and before long, was in charge of much of the company's internal workings. "My brother and I are partners, and we've divided up [responsibilities]," she explains. "He's responsible for maintenance and sales and marketing, but we both chime in on everything that might affect the company."

Similarly, her husband David Brown manages **Holiday Tours** out of Randleman, N.C., with his sister Deanna. "We telecommute back and forth between North Carolina and Texas, so a lot of the work I do outside of the office in Texas," says Dipert Brown, who jokes that "a lot of people think that David and I never see each other unless we're at industry functions."

Dipert Brown was elected to the **United Motorcoach Association's** (UMA) board of directors last year and began her three-year term representing 300 companies in Region 1 in January. In 2006, UMA also named Dipert Brown its Safety Leader of the Year, an award that recognizes leadership through safety management and represents the only national safety award in the motorcoach industry. "My mission and my calling is safety, and recruiting and training drivers," she says. "I am very passionate about improving the quality of people we employ so that we're safer, have better customer service and improve the industry." In 2005, Dipert Brown was asked to chair **International Motorcoach Group's** (IMG) driver training committee, a position she

still holds. That year, she developed a multimedia motorcoach driver training program based on the program in place at Dan Dipert Coaches and conducted a "train the trainer" session for more than 50 operator members.

Dipert Brown is also an instructor for the UMA's **Bus and Motorcoach Academy**. She credits the people she works with for providing the support that allows her to dedicate so much time to industry organizations such as UMA, IMG, the Bus and Motorcoach Council, and the **National Tour Association**. "The people I work with are just amazing and outstanding," she says. "I talk about my accomplishments in safety and training, and I couldn't



Mere days away from beginning a job fresh out of college, Dipert Brown's father offered her a job and the rest, as they say, is history. Partners in the company, she splits her responsibilities with her brother.

do any of that without them backing me up and making sure I had the time to devote to industry organizations."

One of her main focuses is keeping up with the speed of change within the transportation industry. "With new government regulations, environmental changes, changes in safety and equipment, and with technology moving at such a rapid pace, our sales and marketing plan has changed," Dipert Brown says. "Who knew 10 years ago that the **Yellow Pages** would be dead? **Twitter** and **Facebook** — six months ago, those words weren't even in our vocabulary. To be able to adjust to all the change we've had in the last decade is the most challenging part of, I think, anyone's job right now."

Dipert Brown spends much of her spare time scrapbooking and researching the genealogy of her ancestors. A member of the **Daughters of the American Revolution**, she has traced her family's lineage back eight generations to the year 1755.

— CLAIRE ATKINSON



Lillian Hames

Title: General Manager
Organization: Sonoma-Marín Area Rail Transit
City: San Rafael, Calif.

Lillian Hames was born in Heidelberg, Germany. Because her father was an army officer, the family moved on a regular basis during much of her childhood. Her travels stopped for a time, when the family settled in Virginia. In her collegiate years, Hames attended **Virginia Tech** to study architecture. "I discovered in the first couple of years, that I had no talent for the art side of it," she laughs. She then moved on to studying urban planning/urban studies. It was during this time she was selected for a summer internship with the **Federal Railroad Administration (FRA)**. "It was the first year they allowed women into their field program."

The FRA intern position included assignments to the Western FRA districts to work in the regional offices doing track, signal and rolling stock inspections. "I was also asked to attend meetings and prepare briefing notes," she says.

She returned to school and received a graduate degree in transportation planning. It was during her second stint interning for the FRA that she attended a Portland (Ore.) regional transportation meeting and was introduced to the Portland transportation director, who offered her a job with the **City of Portland Transportation Planning** section in 1977, she says. "They were talking a lot about rail in Portland in the late 70s. I told my parents back in Virginia, 'I'll just stay a year.' I wound up staying 15 years."

She worked for the city of Portland as a transportation planner for nearly five years and then for the **Tri-County Metropolitan Transportation District** of Oregon (TriMet) for 10 1/2 years. "TriMet was a great place to grow up professionally — working on three light rail projects — I was there for the opening of the first light rail line and the Vintage Streetcar project, which became the **Central City Streetcar**," she says.

After getting married, Hames moved to San Francisco where she worked for transportation consulting firm, **David Evans and Associates** and, after three years, opened up her own firm, **Pittman and Hames and Associates**, with a partner. During this time, she worked on projects doing preliminary planning work for the **Sonoma-Marín Area Rail Transit (SMART)** corridor. After seven years with her own firm, she received an offer to become the project director for SMART. The rail corridor is a 70-mile passenger railroad and parallel bicycle-pedestrian path along the publicly owned Northwestern Pacific Railroad right-of-way through the two counties.

Drawing from her experiences in Portland where development of rail was previously looked upon as "not making sense" and that it "wouldn't work," Hames was able to tackle the obstacles that stood in the way to realizing the Sonoma/Marín project.

Not taking no for an answer was a skill that Hames employed when she worked diligently to pass a sales tax measure to fund the project. After losing in 2006, the project backers tried again in 2008, this time winning by 70 percent. Hames cited the efforts of the SMART staff and the board of directors for "going the distance" over the two years to get it passed.

In addition to winning the sales tax measure, Hames says her



"Visualizing SMART's inaugural train run and understanding the positive impacts this project will bring to residents of the North Bay for years to come, really keeps me focused and motivated," says Hames.

biggest accomplishment was being able to describe to residents of the North Bay the value of the rail corridor and the way it can be integrated into a controlled land use.

Currently, the agency is immersed in the conceptual engineering for the project and finalizing RFQs for civil and track work, right-of-way acquisition, station and maintenance facility design, systems engineering and vehicles.

"In Portland I had the opportunity to learn how rewarding it is to work on rail project development through project implementation and operation," she says. Having the opportunity to initiate another rail project is the most rewarding element of her job, she adds. "Visualizing SMART's inaugural train run and understanding the positive impacts this project will bring to residents of the North Bay for years to come, really keeps me focused and motivated."

Outside of work, Hames likes to spend her free time long-distance walking and tending to her vast rose garden. "I used to compete in rose competitions when I lived in Portland, but I haven't been able to do it since I moved here," she says.

— JANNA STARCIC



Amy Miller

Title: Director of Marketing
Organization: New Flyer Industries Inc.
City: Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada

Perhaps the most unique experience in her career, organizing a town hall meeting for **U.S. Vice President Joe Biden** in March at the **New Flyer** facility in St. Cloud, Minn., gave **Amy Miller** a chance to become an expert at working with White House and Secret Service staff. However, "Now that I know what needs to be done, I'll probably never have a chance to do it again," she says. She spent five "frantic" days planning the event, which also brought U.S. Cabinet secretaries to the plant. "It was truly rewarding to see how it all came together," she says, "and to see snipers on the roof and guard dogs — it was really quite fun."

Miller, director of marketing at New Flyer, has had extensive experience in learning what she calls "classical marketing skills" at such Fortune 50 companies as **Quaker Oats**, **Coca-Cola** and **ConAgra**. She brings to her position at New Flyer those hands-on skills learned along her career path, as well as a bachelor's in finance earned at **Mississippi State** and a master's in marketing from the **University of Tennessee**.

Miller never foresaw a career in transportation, having pursued academic interests in electrical engineering and business in college, followed by three years in banking and attaining her graduate degree. Nevertheless, when she moved to Winnipeg, Manitoba, and happened to meet **Paul Smith** (New Flyer's executive vice president of sales and marketing) through a colleague, he offered her a position that would make use of her brand management skills, saying once she gave the job a try, she would fall in love with the industry.

"I love both the people I work with and our customers," she says. "And, it's a product I really believe in. I think it's so great that we can go home at the end of the day and have the satisfaction of knowing we're doing good things for communities and for the environment."

During her six years at New Flyer, Miller has led corporate, customer and product marketing efforts, covering such tasks as maintaining internal and external communications, developing advertising and promotional campaigns, planning customer appreciation events and product demonstrations, representing the company at trade shows, and working with customers to improve New Flyer products and service.

An event she characterizes as one of the company's strongest showings ever was the 2008 APTA Expo, where Miller organized

New Flyer's display and communications materials, buses on the show floor, and a party for 1,200 attendees aboard the USS Midway that featured a 13-piece band and fireworks. "We had a really integrated marketing effort...everything told a very cohesive story," she says.

Part of her assignment when she started at the company was re-launching the New Flyer brand. "That was the first time New Flyer had formalized brand guidelines and brand management discipline," she says. "Using market research and customer insights, reviewing the previous 75 years to get a sense of where we've been, and understanding where we want to take it in the future, we were able to create a new corporate identity for our brand as well as introduce our heritage logo."

Miller is now leading efforts to refresh those brand guidelines, making modifications for new products the company has intro-



With past experience at companies including Coca-Cola and Quaker Oats, one of Miller's assignments when she started at New Flyer was relaunching the company's brand. She is currently leading efforts to refresh those brand guidelines.

duced and for technologies that weren't in place just five years ago. "There's this whole world of new media — for example, in 2004, we didn't have brand guidelines for **Twitter**," she says.

Other projects Miller is also working on currently include a company-wide sustainability initiative, strategic planning, and the brand building and communication efforts tied to New Flyer's latest product, the XcelSior standard bus model.

Outside of work, Miller enjoys cooking and entertaining, takes time out for golf lessons and supports her 10-year-old son's hockey and soccer teams.

— CLAIRE ATKINSON



Alice Wiggins-Tolbert

Title: Project Manager
Organization: Parsons Brinckerhoff
City: Atlanta

Alice Wiggins-Tolbert, project manager at **Parsons Brinckerhoff** (PB), brought her knowledge of public transportation to the private sector, making outreach and revenue generation major focuses of her work. She spent time as a spokesperson for what at the time was known as the **Southern California Rapid Transit District** (now the **Los Angeles County RTD**) and as an executive for **Metropolitan Atlanta Rapid Transit Authority** (MARTA). "I've always been in an agency that never had any money and I always saw so many things that needed to be done," she says. "I've made it my credo when I come into an agency to look for partners who can underwrite the cost of things, who want to experiment."

While studying journalism during her undergraduate years, Wiggins-Tolbert felt a pull toward television, hoping to someday become a news anchor. One of her early jobs was working as a reporter for the *Chicago Defender*, one of the first weekly African-American newspapers in the U.S. From there, she went to Los Angeles to pursue TV journalism, eventually taking the position with the Rapid Transit District, which she says changed her life. The local ABC affiliate had offered her an entry level writing job, but working with the transit agency was more attractive. "I thought, 'you know what? I have a great job, it pays more and I'm interacting with all of the news organizations instead of just one,'" she explains.

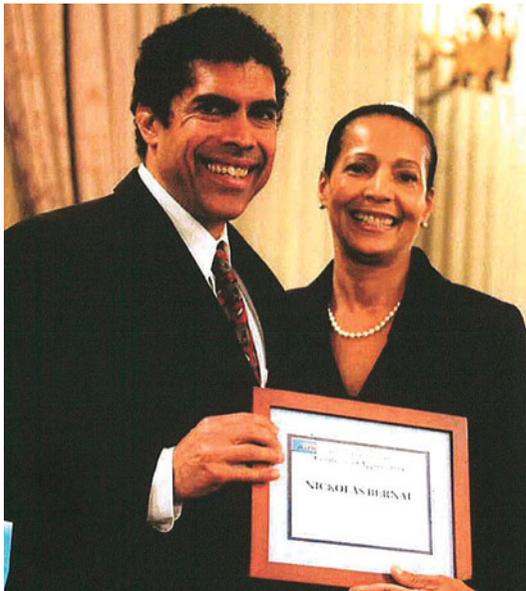
At the time, there were few women or minorities represented in the industry, she says, but Wiggins-Tolbert was still able to connect with mentors. "They took me under their wings and taught me to understand the whole operation, as opposed to just what I was supposed to do, and appreciate how to work with the entire organization, which made all the difference in the world," she says.

As she describes it, Wiggins-Tolbert entered the transit industry at a time when the need for external affairs departments was growing. "I took on the mantle of creating, for the first time, a unit dedicated to the positive promotion of public transportation," she says. "It's just wonderful to see how external affairs on all levels has come out of the strength of the public voice."

In her current position with PB, Wiggins-Tolbert participates in local communities, serving on boards of directors and engaging civic and political organizations in outreach and business development. As she explains it, these activities help her assess the most effective ways to move forward and what organizations are open to partnerships. "I have a full sense of what the prevailing attitudes are out there, especially as our clients are going into new areas of con-

struction or development," she says.

At the Los Angeles office, Wiggins-Tolbert was working on the early stages of a congestion pricing project, which is now in development. She is currently transferring to the Atlanta office, where she hopes to be involved in another congestion pricing project and the development of a Southeastern mega-region for transportation. "Since PB works on so many different layers of infrastructure, I have a chance to get on the front end of bidding on some of these projects that used to be something I wouldn't really get involved in," she says. "Of course, now transit systems are beginning to adopt their own highways, and get more in-



Feeling a pull toward television, Wiggins-Tolbert was in L.A. pursuing TV journalism before taking a job at the Southern California Rapid Transit District. She is currently transferring to PB's Atlanta office, where she hopes to be involved in a congestion pricing project.

involved in highway projects, which is really interesting."

Wiggins-Tolbert was also recently voted to APTA's executive staff and will serve as the chair for marketing and communications. "This is an industry that continues to grow, and I guess that's one reason why I stayed in it so long," she says. "It's never dull, it never shrinks, there's always so much more to do. But I think more than anything, most of us are involved in it because it serves people. It's about being able to help a community survive and sustain itself and these days it's becoming so incredibly important from an environmental point of view and from an economic one as well."

In her spare time, Wiggins-Tolbert finds an escape in writing. She is currently writing a work of fiction that, she is quick to point out, "has nothing at all to do with public transportation."

— CLAIRE ATKINSON