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WLI 2014 Fall Meeting Scholarship Recipient
Essay

I must wholeheartedly thank the Urban Land Institute for selecting me as the 2014 WLI Scholarship recipient in conjunction with the ULI 2014 Fall Meeting. What a gift to receive, and what a great group of inspiring women to be associated with!

These amazing ULI leaders have committed themselves to increasing the number of active female ULI members, to elevating the number of women in ULI leadership positions and to promoting the advancement of women in the real estate industry as a whole. I am proud to say that I have met and mingled with the best.

What made this year's Fall Meeting a stand-out for me—and why I am especially pleased to have received the WLI Scholarship—are the meaningful connections made in my brief time at the conference. Every single person I met at this Fall Meeting was dedicated to helping me better understand the organization and to offering new ideas to help grow my local ULI chapter and my professional offerings.

I am most grateful to my WLI mentor, Wendy Rowden, for personally showing me the ropes and introducing me to the other inspiring leaders of WLI. Wendy took the time to understand my goals within ULI, and introduced me to several Council members, including the Redevelopment and Reuse Council director. Urban historic building redevelopment has been my life-long passion and my area of professional focus at Hnedak Bobo Group, the national architecture and interiors firm where I work as Principal over the Urban Adaptive Reuse studio.

WLI's mission and the scholarship/mentorship program will continue to have a significant impact on me professionally and personally as I take what I learned back to my local ULI community. As newly appointed Chairman of the Membership Committee and Co-Chairman of the Women and Diversification Committee for the ULI Memphis Chapter, I have a keen interest in understanding ULI's established national goals and priorities, as well as learning techniques for effectively building membership and recruiting enthusiastic women leaders for our local organization. The city of Memphis also has a large minority population, and it is equally important to me that we develop strategies for diversifying ULI membership and leadership.

Lessons learned:

ULI Networking: This WLI scholarship experience gave me the opportunity to participate in the organization's higher level networking opportunities. I attended my first ULI Council meeting as a guest, and now better understand the structure of the ULI Councils, their focus, their membership, their responsibilities, their strengths and what it takes to become a Council member. This is an area I am deeply interested in getting more involved.

I also had the opportunity to attend several other social networking events associated with full membership. From these experiences, I have come to understand the benefits of ULI organizational networking. Full membership definitely has its privileges!

WLI Networking: Hearing the stories and listening to the programs of other women involved within the leadership circles of ULI was truly inspiring. The level of respect they have received within the overall organization is testimony to both their skill and determination. I, too, have personal goals to be more engaged at the national level through Council membership, contributions to programs and future speaking and learning opportunities. I also have great hopes and aspirations for my local chapter. With 26 local women members, few attend programs on a regular basis. My goal is to change that by growing membership and sustaining attendance through better engagement. The question is 'how?'

It was motivational to hear the author of the book, 'Stiletto Network', speak at breakfast about the effectiveness of simple networking. I have ordered the book in hopes of learning more about networking and developing opportunities for women to help other women in a primarily male-dominated industry.

In the short time since the conference, I have shared my 'lessons learned' with our new ULI Memphis Board President. I approached him with the idea of planning a 'bring a friend' social gathering for our local female members. Most organizations benefit most from word-of-mouth advertising, so asking our existing membership to reach out to their networks seemed like the most effective first step. No pressure, just a group of women getting to know one another better. What a terrific and intimate opportunity to share stories and experiences about how to strengthen our community through thoughtful collaboration, planning and execution.

Our President quickly reached out to a potential benefactor in support of our WLI Memphis initiative. We just need a little "kick start" then I'm confident we will be off and running, thanks to the inspiration provided by the WLI scholarship and mentorship program and by my new connections and experiences from the ULI Fall Meeting. I'm reminded of the quote, "Great Oaks from little acorns grow."