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Gender equity

Foothill Transit marks first all-women board

By Kevin Smith, SGVN

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WEST COVINA - You've come a long way, baby.

That could well have been the theme at Foothill Transit's June executive board meeting. Because for the first time in the agency's 24-year history, all of the members of the board were women.

They included Pasadena Councilwoman Margaret McAustin, Pomona Councilwoman Paula Lantz, board Chairwoman Patricia Wallach, Covina Councilwoman Peggy Delach and Diamond Bar Councilwoman Carol Herrera.

It should be noted that the historic all-women roster was temporary, as Delach was sitting in as an alternate for Glendora Councilman Doug Tessitor.

But even a temporary first says something about the changing face of American business.

"It is interesting," Delach said. "It's funny because I was on the executive board for about six years and I turned to an alternative position this past year because I had so many other commitments. So Doug and I switched spots. He used to be my alternate."

Delach said she's seen a definite shift in the makeup off boards and committees.

"It's indicative of the changing roles of women in all facets of business," she said. "I work in commercial construction and for the first 15 years of my career it was pretty much all guys. Now it's not unusual to see half guys and half women."

McAustin, who is serving as the first Pasadena representative on the agency's executive board, noted the serendipitous timing with the 40th anniversary of Title

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The landmark education amendment bars says someone can't be denied participation in, or the benefits of any education program or

activity receiving Federal financial assistance based on gender

"I think a lot of women directly benefited from Title IX," McAustin said. "And it paved the way for women to hold positions of leadership."

Statistics show that trend is picking up.

Women made up 46.6 percent of the U.S. labor force in 2011, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, and they accounted for 51.4 percent of management, professional and related positions.

Their role in Fortune 500 leadership positions is far lower, however. In 2009, women held 13.5 percent of executive officer positions with Fortune 500 companies. That increased to 14.4 percent in 2010 but dropped to 14.1 percent last year.

In terms of board seats held with Fortune 500 companies, women held 15.2 percent in 2009, 15.7 percent in 2010 and 16.1 percent in 2011.

Felicia Friesema, Foothill Transit's director of marketing and communications, said she feels a debt to Foothill's female board members and the others like them who have risen through the ranks to hold such posts.

"I thanked them all because I realized I was standing there in part because of of the hard work and leadership of people like that," Friesma said. "I just felt that it was an historic moment."

Foothill Transit is the primary public transit provider of the San Gabriel and Pomona valleys, providing 14 million bus rides each year.

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