

From Theater to Public Affairs, Bybee Traded Tinseltown for MTA



Public Affairs
Manager Lynda
Bybee

By ED SCANNELL

(July 6, 2001) At first glance, Lynda Bybee's career might seem to have taken some odd twists and turns, but the MTA's Public Affairs manager says it's all been a good fit.

A Sacramento native, Bybee left California's Central Valley in the 1970s armed with an education in English and Theater Arts from Cal State University Fresno. She headed for New York City's Greenwich Village where she went to work for an advertising agency.

Later, Bybee and six friends formed a documentary film company, but soon the Golden State beckoned her to return.

Bybee's next stop was Hollywood where she managed and produced live theater at the Westwood Playhouse (now the Geffen Playhouse) and other local theaters.

Then came what Bybee calls "a big change in career direction." In 1983 she was hired by HNTB, a major national and international architectural and engineering firm, to work in the company's transit division.

Community relations for the subway

Then it was on to Dillingham Construction's commercial division where she served as the Regional Director of Business Development and later to Parsons-Dillingham, where she worked in community relations on the team providing construction management for the extension of the Metro Red Line into Hollywood.

"The transition from theater to major construction really was an easy one," says Bybee. "They're both about production, and I'm comfortable with the demands both fields present."

No surprise, her next move to the MTA to take a job as a Public Affairs supervisor during the construction of the Metro Red Line Hollywood extension was a natural.

To be sure, trying to address the concerns of residents and business owners during this major construction project was not an easy task, but Bybee says she always believed in the subway's ultimate value to the community.

"I knew these were difficult times for the community, but I felt that the end product was going to be something that the community would profit from," said Bybee. "I felt they would come to enjoy the rewards of a first class transportation system."

Bybee says that in dealing with people and their frustrations on a day-to-day basis, she learned to engage in the art of listening and respect.

Treating the community with respect

"There were times when I was able to provide assistance and other times when we weren't in a position to do the things the community would have liked," said Bybee. "But, my experience was that if you treated the community with respect you gained credibility for the project."

Since the completion of the subway project, Bybee has become the MTA's point person in ensuring that the agency serves its disabled patrons, and she also has risen to the position of Public Affairs manager where she heads a staff of 12 full-time employees and interns.

The scope of the department's work is growing, too, as the MTA plans for the construction of projects in three transit corridors: light rail on LA's Eastside, the San Fernando Valley east-west busway, and Bus Rapid Transit and light-rail projects in LA's Mid-City and Westside.

In addition, her department is in the forefront of efforts to promote public safety through education once a project becomes operational. Last year alone, the MTA's safety messages reached 60,000 people along the 22-mile Metro Blue Line.

Bybee says her work is all about challenges and opportunities.

"I look at my department as an issues bureau, and my goal is to find the quickest resolution to the issues that arise on almost a daily basis," she says. "After working many years on the subway project, our Public Affairs team has developed a real connection to the community, and we're working hard to give the people of Los Angeles a voice in their transportation system."

From her early days in theater and film to the present at the MTA, Bybee has seen life from more than just a side or two. And while Bybee and her team can't anticipate every bend in the road, she says they're prepared to go the distance.

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