from the Prez...

The Gift of Mentoring

“I’ve become my mother,” is a phrase usually underscored with dread. For me, however, becoming like my mother has been one of my greatest accomplishments. As my career has unfolded, I’ve realized more and more the profound influence my mom has had on me. While she will always be my mother, she has also been my mentor. It isn’t simply that she encouraged me to seek a meaningful career and gave me advice (most frequently to get more sleep). Rather, it’s that she quietly led by example. Based on her example, I set big goals for myself, as I always assumed that women regularly held high-level positions in industry and government. Based on my mother’s influence, I marched right out into the world with blind confidence and a “sky's-the-limit” attitude.

I also had the good fortune of learning from other great mentors at work. A number of colleagues took me under their wings and taught me technical skills, tips and tricks, and what it means to be a professional in the consulting world. Even more importantly, they taught me to solve problems, add value, and be a leader. I didn’t realize at the time the lasting value of those relationships and how those colleagues challenged me to set the bar for success so high.

I encourage young professionals today to set their own bar high and assume that there are no limits to their contributions and careers. This recent election cycle and political rhetoric has highlighted the particular issue of women’s limited representation in leadership positions. It’s for this reason, and the fact that I have two children who will be beginning careers in the next few years, that I now truly recognize and appreciate the value of mentoring and teaching at all levels.

As FHI’s President, I both engage in and think a lot about mentoring and its importance. In the end, I’ve concluded that mentoring and coaching are critical proactive elements of an organization. But, I also believe that you can’t force specific mentoring relationships. I

Calm Streets, Safe Neighborhood

West Woods is a suburban neighborhood in the northwest corner of Hamden, Connecticut, where roadways vary from narrow, winding country roads to wide, straight, residential streets lined with single family homes. The neighborhood is home to Quinnipiac University, West Woods Elementary School, the Alice Peck Learning Center, Brooksvale Park and Sleeping Giant State Park. The Farmington Canal Trail, used by walkers, joggers, and bicyclists, travels north/south through the neighborhood connecting communities from New Haven, Connecticut, to Northampton, Massachusetts.

The neighborhood is challenged by levels of traffic typically associated with a suburban setting and a road infrastructure that is more common to a rural environment. Sidewalks are sparse in West Woods, and, despite several roadway crossings of the Farmington Canal Trail, no on-street bicycle facilities exist.

Responding to these issues and the need for a more comprehensive town-wide transportation network, the Town of Hamden engaged FHI to work with the local neighborhood association to craft a plan to improve traffic safety and calm traffic. The West Woods study follows a previous successful FHI planning effort funded by the South Central Council of Governments in the Spring Glen and Whitneyville neighborhoods of Hamden.

Improving roadways is about more than stop signs and sight lines; it’s also about engaging residents in the planning process within their community. To

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See SAFE NEIGHBORHOOD, continued on page 2
that end, FHI worked directly with the West Woods Neighborhood Civic Association and residents to quickly get up to speed with neighborhood concerns through the use of a workshop, public presentation, and an online survey. In promoting the survey, FHI placed 20 lawn signs that encouraged residents to participate via a link on the Town’s website. Civic association members placed the signs in front yards and at key locations throughout the study area. Over 400 people from 120 streets responded to the survey. Immediately after the lawn signs, we saw a spike in responses, effectively doubling the number of participants.

Community concerns were clear: Slow down cars in our neighborhood and improve safety for pedestrians and bicyclists.

To respond to these needs, FHI crafted strategic recommendations that will be feasible for the Town of Hamden to implement both in the near future and over a five-year period.

These recommendations include thru truck prohibitions, speed limit reductions, speed humps, mini traffic circles, pavement markings, and bicycle lanes, all intended to slow vehicle speeds, improve roadway safety, and accommodate all users.

Once implemented, residents of West Woods are expected to experience slower traffic speeds and less thru truck traffic on local roads. Residents will also benefit from on-street bicycle facilities providing connections to the Farmington Canal Trail.

Neighborhood by neighborhood, Hamden is making progress towards better accommodating all users on its roadways. The Town’s commitment to its residents is evident by its investment in these efforts.
Focusing on Community Needs

The Central Connecticut valley town of Naugatuck wants to tackle a number of challenges, including ways to attract new, high-quality jobs, provide a diversity of housing choices, enhance quality of life for residents, and develop the community core into a more compelling destination. The community has a strong desire to transform its downtown into a more vibrant place that enriches the lives of residents and invites visitors. But a core question remains: How can Naugatuck achieve that change?

While updating Naugatuck’s 2001 Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD), FHI has been strategically focusing on community trends that have occurred over the past decade and then carefully articulating Naugatuck’s strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. This "SWOT" analysis will lay the foundation for policies and strategies to help Naugatuck achieve its vision over the next 10 years and beyond.

A community-wide survey has been critical to formulating a Vision Statement for the town. Respondents overwhelmingly want to preserve the town’s existing and traditional form and place high value on its historic resources and natural assets, such as the Naugatuck River. There is consensus that the downtown is a hidden gem, and with improvements, can become a community gathering space with vibrant places to shop, dine, and socialize.

The POCD update will be completed in the spring of 2013 and will include a practical guide for auditing progress. The town wants to position itself to monitor progress annually and take advantage of opportunities as they arise. Our efforts will provide Naugatuck with not only a strategically designed set of practical actions to help it implement its vision, but also with a process to keep the plan current and viable for years to come.

Recent Wins...

Connecticut
- Traffic Peer Review for Town of Ridgefield
- North Park Area Sustainable Development Plan for City of Hartford (with Utile Design Group)
- Thompsonville Zoning and Development Study for Town of Enfield (with Cecil Group)
- TOD Pilot Program for City of Norwalk
- Integrated Transportation Plan for City of Hartford (with IBI Group)
- Traffic Calming Study for Town of Hamden

New York
- Amherst-Buffalo Light Rail Corridor Alternatives Analysis (with AECOM)

New Jersey
- Bound Brook Downtown Urban Design Plan Implementation (with Melvin Design Group)
- Public Outreach Regional Planning for North Jersey Transportation Planning Authority
- Unified Land Use and Mobility Plan for Town of Morristown (with VHB)

New England–wide
- Environmental Land Planning On-Call for Northeast Utilities (with Normandeau Associates)
believe that mentors are self-chosen based on personal connections and trust. As a leader, you can, however, foster a culture of mentoring that is invaluable to individuals and your organization. In the end, mentoring is less of a “program” and more of an attitude. It’s a genuine understanding that helping others succeed leads to success for us all. So, in the year ahead, be sure to look within your organization, or across the industry, and reach out to other professionals to whom you can give the gift of your experience and wisdom. I certainly plan to. And I also hope to continue to be on the receiving end.

Happy New Year!

Susan VanBenschoten
President & CEO

Phases 2 and 3 of the study will be completed over the next two years and will include additional public involvement activities such as intercept surveys, home surveys, targeted outreach to young rail riders, as well as additional workshops, dialogs, and webinars.

The study is moving quickly and FHI is excited to be part of a project that will shape the future of long-distance rail travel in the Northeast for generations.

Commissioner Redeker and others from the Connecticut DOT during agency scoping meeting open house in New Haven, August 2012
Staff Notes

25 Years and Going Strong!!! We celebrated our 25th anniversary this fall with a boat cruise around the Thimble Islands in Branford, CT. It was a gorgeous day on the water, where we reflected on our past and got excited for what lies ahead. We even made it back safe and sound from our 3-hour tour!!

Rogues Gallery

Peter & Debbie Hoffman
Sandy & Alan Nafis
Carla Tillery
Carol Gould
David & Jill Barrett
Jaime & Shawn Callaghan
Stephanie & Josh Weiss
Marcy Miller
Mike Morehouse
Dan Hageman
Laurel Stegina
Carla Tillery
Sandy & Alan Nafis
Susan & Paul VanBenschoten
Dan & Marlene Hageman
Rachel Gary & Darren Guran
Debbie Hoffman

Susan & Paul VanBenschoten

Sandy & Alan Nafis

Susan & Paul VanBenschoten
Jill Barrett has been invited to participate in a Transportation Research Board (TRB) “Blue Ribbon” committee to oversee the John and Jane Q. Public Communication Award sponsored by TRB’s Planning and Environment Committee. This is the first year blue ribbon committees have been selected, so it’s quite an honor.

Several staff members (Susan VanBenschoten, Jill Barrett, Mike Morehouse, Ruth Fitzgerald and Leslie Black) were in Washington D.C. for the 92nd TRB Annual Meeting in January. We always enjoy confering with colleagues, hearing about innovative approaches, and sharing our success stories. We hope we saw you there this year!

Connecticut’s Department of Energy and Environmental Protection received the Community Development Award by the CT Chapter of the American Planning Association for the Newhall Remediation Project. Since 2003, FHI, led by Project Manager Jill Barrett, has been providing public communication and outreach services for this project.

Laurel Stegina staffed FHI’s Invasive Species exhibit at the Connecticut Association of Conservation and Inland Wetlands Commissions (CACIWC) Annual Conference. She had an enjoyable day of rubbing elbows with some of New England’s other fervent fighters of invasive plants.

Ruth Fitzgerald continues her world travels with recent stops in Ireland & England. Here, Ruth can be seen with her family in Ireland and with husband Dave (and Big Ben) in London.

Susan VanBenschoten and Laurel Stegina attended a MAP-21* (current federal transportation funding legislation) roundtable discussion with U.S. DOT Undersecretary Polly Trottenberg. The December roundtable was hosted by the WTS-Connecticut Chapter, and attended by a small group of transportation leaders including DOT Commissioners Redeker (CT) and McDonald (NY).

*Moving Ahead for Progress in the 21st Century