

COMTO HOLDS CLOSING CEREMONIES ACROSS THE COUNTRY FOR ITS 2011 CLASS OF INTERNS

By Jacqueline Burrell

Closing ceremonies across the country were recently held for COMTO's 2011 summer interns. Starting in the nation's capital at COMTO headquarters, the closing ceremonies continued in Dallas, Denver and concluded in Atlanta. Each of the four COMTO chapter host cities took a different day of the weeklong celebration to honor and recognize the interns they helped to select and mentor.



WASH DC (L-R) Front Row - COMTO President Julie Cunningham, Interns James Gerrald, Maurice Nick, Khadijah Ottley, Program Coordinator Mariah Stanley, Assistant Program Manager Jacqueline Burrell, Intern Jonathan McCoy (Back Row) – Intern Marcellus Ford, Program Manager COL Jim Paige and Intern Ashley Wiggins

These ceremonies marked the end of a ten-week summer internship, from June 6 to August 12, 2011, for fifteen (15) college juniors and seniors, who got to experience firsthand the real world complexities of working in the transportation industry.

COMTO Program Manager, Jim Paige, who attended the ceremonies in each city was pleased. "They were all very well done and paid tribute to all of our outstanding

interns."

The majority of the students were part of COMTO's ***Careers In Transportation for Youth (CITY) Internship Program***. Sponsored by the Federal Transit Administration (FTA), the CITY program is designed to promote public transportation as viable career options for the next generation of leaders. This represents the seventh class of interns in the CITY program.

"COMTO is pleased to partner with FTA in preparing the next generation of leaders for our industry," stated Julie Cunningham, COMTO's President and CEO.

"Denver Regional Transit District is pleased to be part of this great effort," stated Phil Washington, GM, DRTD. "Mentoring and developing our youth is critical. We want to do even more internships in the coming years."



DENVER (L-R) - FTA Program Coordinator Edwin Rodriguez, RTD General Manager, Phil Washington, Interns Brian Watkins and Marvin Woolfolk.

More Applications than Positions

COMTO received close to 90 applications for the 14 internship positions under the CITY program. The sheer volume of college students interested in the transportation industry sparked COMTO President Cunningham to add another position this year, funded by COMTO, bringing the total number of internships up to 15.



ITSA President Scott Belcher and
COMTO Intern Khadijah Ottley

For the additional internship, COMTO partnered with Intelligent Transportation Society of America (ITSA), the leading advocate for technologies that improve the safety, security and efficiency of the nation's surface transportation system.

“I am a strong advocate for internships,” said **ITSA President Scott Belcher**, explaining that he began his career as an intern. In addition to the typical “feeder” schools, he enjoys interns from a variety of colleges and universities.

“They get a chance to see what life is like outside of the communities that they’re growing up in and going to school in.”

For COMTO, ITSA is a perfect vehicle for interns to learn because of the “broad brush of exposure to the industry,” that it provides, noted COMTO President Cunningham.

All Majors Welcomed in the Industry

This year’s class of interns learned that regardless of their major – which included accounting, business management, architectural, civil and electrical engineering, marketing, and even film - there is a place for them in the transportation industry.

Stationed in **Atlanta, Georgia, Dallas, Texas, Denver, Colorado** and the **District of Columbia**, these 15 college students worked on closing grants, training workshops, marketing, bus fleet maintenance, inspections, surveys, ADA compliance issues, databases, procurement, scheduling, and video recordings for the web.

“I wasn’t sure when I started whether I wanted to go into transportation,” said Dallas intern **Jasmine Callies**, a junior and a Business Management major at Prairie View A&M. “But based on what I’ve seen and done, this is where I want to be.”



DALLAS (L-R) - COMTO Chapter President Renee Edwards, Interns David Folarin, Jasmine Callies and Michael Aragon, Mentor, Gail Lyssy, Director of Program Management and Oversight, FTA Region 3.

The goal of COMTO's internship program is to ensure that the nation is equipped with a diverse workforce in the transportation industry, one that can embrace the unlimited opportunities of the next century.

DC intern Marcellus Ford, a film major at Howard University said: "I've learned that no matter what the industry, there is a need for marketing, for helping people understand what it is the company does. That most definitely includes the transportation industry."

"I am very fortunate to have a second CITY internship," stated returning Atlanta intern, Isaiah Brown. "I definitely want to pursue a career in the transportation industry."



ATLANTA (L-R) - Interns Isaiah Brown, LaDonna Bordley, Samaria Mitchell and Kera Wright (Back Row) COMTO Chapter Vice President Renee Willis and Chapter President Joe Erves

Words of Advice

At COMTO's 40th National Meeting and Training Conference, held in Philadelphia, PA this year, the interns listened to a host of transportation CEOs, COMTO leaders and White House officials' stories of how they came to the industry. Not one was the same. They also got lots of advice.



"You will never have to work a day in your life if you love what you do," COMTO board member Aida Douglas told the students.

"Plan your work and work your plan," advised long time COMTO member, Ann August, Executive Director of South Carolina's Santee Wateree Regional Transit Authority.

During an exclusive meeting with FTA Deputy Administrator Therese McMillan, she advised the interns to learn three critical skills for success:

- ✓ Communication – being able to clearly express your ideas and thoughts
- ✓ Analytical Abilities – being able to first understand a problem; then problem solve
- ✓ Listening – taking the time to truly hear what someone is saying

The group thoroughly enjoyed the family feeling of the conference and all the mentoring. COMTO's Board of Directors and Senior Leaders were each paired with an intern to mentor. "The best part of this conference is having a mentor in your field that is able to help you achieve excellence," said Ashley Wiggins, a senior at Morgan State University majoring in Accounting and Finance, who was matched with Jovan Goldstein, a senior advisor to COMTO and its Board of

Directors. “My mentor is a CPA which I aspire to be and he has provided me with so much to think about and consider going forth in my career.”

The Road Ahead

With so many highly qualified candidates who applied from all over the country, representing nearly 50 different colleges and universities, COMTO plans to expand its internship program even further next year.

“Our industry is at a crossroads, where the current workforce is nearing retirement age,” stated Renee Edwards, COMTO Board Member and President of the Dallas COMTO Chapter. “We have to involve, engage and recruit the next generation of workers and leaders now. They are our future.”