



Lillian Hames

Title: General Manager

Organization: Sonoma-Marin Area Rail Transit

City: San Rafael, Calif.

Lillian Hames was born in Heidelberg, Germany. Because her father was an army officer, the family moved on a regular basis during much of her childhood. Her travels stopped for a time, when the family settled in Virginia. In her collegiate years, Hames attended **Virginia Tech** to study architecture. "I discovered in the first couple of years, that I had no talent for the art side of it," she laughs. She then moved on to studying urban planning/urban studies. It was during this time she was selected for a summer internship with the **Federal Railroad Administration (FRA)**. "It was the first year they allowed women into their field program."

The FRA intern position included assignments to the Western FRA districts to work in the regional offices doing track, signal and rolling stock inspections. "I was also asked to attend meetings and prepare briefing notes," she says.

She returned to school and received a graduate degree in transportation planning. It was during her second stint interning for the FRA that she attended a Portland (Ore.) regional transportation meeting and was introduced to the Portland transportation director, who offered her a job with the **City of Portland Transportation Planning** section in 1977, she says. "They were talking a lot about rail in Portland in the late 70s. I told my parents back in Virginia, 'I'll just stay a year.' I wound up staying 15 years."

She worked for the city of Portland as a transportation planner for nearly five years and then for the **Tri-County Metropolitan Transportation District** of Oregon (TriMet) for 10 1/2 years. "TriMet was a great place to grow up professionally — working on three light rail projects — I was there for the opening of the first light rail line and the Vintage Streetcar project, which became the **Central City Streetcar**," she says.

After getting married, Hames moved to San Francisco where she worked for transportation consulting firm, **David Evans and Associates** and, after three years, opened up her own firm, **Pittman and Hames and Associates**, with a partner. During this time, she worked on projects doing preliminary planning work for the **Sonoma-Marin Area Rail Transit (SMART)** corridor. After seven years with her own firm, she received an offer to become the project director for SMART. The rail corridor is a 70-mile passenger railroad and parallel bicycle-pedestrian path along the publicly owned Northwestern Pacific Railroad right-of-way through the two counties.

Drawing from her experiences in Portland where development of rail was previously looked upon as "not making sense" and that it "wouldn't work," Hames was able to tackle the obstacles that stood in the way to realizing the Sonoma/Marin project.

Not taking no for an answer was a skill that Hames employed when she worked diligently to pass a sales tax measure to fund the project. After losing in 2006, the project backers tried again in 2008, this time winning by 70 percent. Hames cited the efforts of the SMART staff and the board of directors for "going the distance" over the two years to get it passed.

In addition to winning the sales tax measure, Hames says her



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biggest accomplishment was being able to describe to residents of the North Bay the value of the rail corridor and the way it can be integrated into a controlled land use.

Currently, the agency is immersed in the conceptual engineering for the project and finalizing RFQs for civil and track work, right-of-way acquisition, station and maintenance facility design, systems engineering and vehicles.

"In Portland I had the opportunity to learn how rewarding it is to work on rail project development through project implementation and operation," she says. Having the opportunity to initiate another rail project is the most rewarding element of her job, she adds. "Visualizing SMART's inaugural train run and understanding the positive impacts this project will bring to residents of the North Bay for years to come, really keeps me focused and motivated."

Outside of work, Hames likes to spend her free time long-distance walking and tending to her vast rose garden. "I used to compete in rose competitions when I lived in Portland, but I haven't been able to do it since I moved here," she says.

— JANNA STARCIC