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Press Release

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LIRR

IMMEDIATE

MTA Long Island Rail Road President Hosts Girl Scouts of Nassau County

Helena Williams, 1st Woman to Run a Railroad, Offers Words of Advice & Encouragement

It was a day everyone had looked forward to and it finally arrived.

Long Island Rail Road President Helena Williams had agreed to host a contingent from the Girl Scouts of Nassau County, participating in a program that offers Scouts an opportunity to meet face-to-face with successful women from different walks of life.

Late Monday afternoon, 13 young ladies brushed off the chilly, rainy weather and arrived on time at Mineola Station to be greeted warmly by Williams who whisked them – along with their leaders and parents - up to a second floor conference room for a special one-on-one.

"I just delighted to welcome you here," Williams told the girls who were seated about a rectangular conference table. Outside, the LIRR's evening rush hour was well underway and trains – both electric and diesel – whizzed east taking commuters home from work.



"Were you a Girl Scout?" asked one of the girls. It was just first of many questions the Scouts would be putting to their host.

"Yes, I was, - a long time ago," Williams responded

"How did you get to be president of the LIRR?" another wanted to know.

Williams, head of LIRR and its 6,000 employee since 2008, recalled her own childhood and how dedication to school work always stood her in good stead. Of course, in those days she had no idea that she would wind up running a railroad. She told the girls, all elementary and middle school students, that now was the best time to develop good study habits. Success in school helps build confidence, she said, adding that courage is important too.

"Shoot high and never be afraid to try something new," she told the Scouts.

Williams explained she was an English major in college, then went to law school where again her studies helped her hone learning skills that would allow her to take her career in any number of directions, even mass transit, an industry in which most leadership roles are held by men.

After law school, Williams worked for many years as a labor lawyer for the City of New York and the MTA, a specialty that introduced her to the inner workings of the nation's biggest transit system and the issues it faced. Eventually, that led to an appointment as president of MTA Long Island Bus and her experience there helped prepare her for the challenges at the LIRR.

"I love transportation. It's a great field," she told the girls. "My goal now and every day as president of the LIRR is to make sure that we are providing our customers with safe and reliable service.

When Donna Ceravalo, executive director and CEO of the Girl Scouts of Nassau County, asked if it was really possible to have a successful career and raise a family, Williams responded that she and her husband had worked together to raise their three children.

"I am an example of someone who made a decision to work and have a family and I can tell you that it is doable. Remember the words I mentioned earlier? Confidence and courage. That's what it takes."

