

# ASHI MEMBER SPOTLIGHT



**Nalaja Marcus, MBA, MS, BS, CHT(ACHI)  
Operations Director – HLA Laboratories  
Vitalant**

**Graduated from:** Hampton University (BS),  
University of Maryland (MS & MBS)

**How long have you been an ASHI member?**  
17 years

**Your first ASHI meeting?** My first meeting was  
in 2013 in Chicago. This meeting was exciting for

me because it was the first time I was able to participate in a learning and networking event in this field. I entered HLA around 2002 as a Lab Tech, so this gave me a new outlook on this very rewarding and complex career that I happened upon after completing my undergraduate degree.

**What made you decide to work in HLA?** I found HLA by accident while applying to lab positions in the DC/MD area. When I interviewed for the position, I did not know anything about HLA. After starting in the lab, I fell in love with the manual nature of the testing, the complexity of the cases, the opportunity to learn daily, and the reward of saving lives.

**What do you find to be the most rewarding aspect of your work?**  
Saving lives through transplant is the most rewarding aspect of this field. However, as I've grown in management, I've come to enjoy adding new people to the HLA sphere and watching their love for the complexity and thoroughness required to take form. It is exciting to discuss the growth and changes impacting the HLA community and to hear new ideas and perspectives. I must also mention the rewarding feeling you get when educating people outside of the field about HLA and transplant since it is such a "hidden gem". It gives superhero vibes.

**Tell us a fun fact about yourself:** I've been fortunate to work in several different HLA labs on the east and west coast. I have worked with some of the most amazing people and learned so much. Each experience has been helpful in my next role but also solidifies my commitment to our work and

our patients. I can be a little obsessive though too. For example, when I was pregnant with my daughter and instructed to go to the hospital to be induced, I instead went to my HLA lab to close out outstanding items and make sure everything was at a comfortable point for leave. This caused about a 4-hour delay for admission, but all was well. While in Atlanta, I learned that I like to paint and am actually pretty good at it.