NAFA's New President

Interview With Douglas Weichman, CAFM

DOUGLAS WEICHMAN, CAFM, DIRECTOR of Palm Beach County Fleet Management, will become NAFA's 32nd President during the 2011 Institute & Expo in Charlotte, NC (April 9-12). Fleetsolutions spoke with Douglas in January to discuss his goals as President, NAFA's entrance into social networking, the Association's role in fleet education, and how he would like his term as President to be remembered.

What are some of the goals you would like to reach during your term as President?

One initiative close to my heart is NAFA's student/intern program. The student— or junior membership—classification was "reactivated" when partnerships were originally established with colleges and universities for NAFA's Certified Automotive Fleet Manager (CAFM) program. These alliances developed into fleet management related degrees and programs offered by our partner colleges and universities. Students enrolled at these universities can receive college credit for passing the CAFM exam, as can any member. Last year at NAFA's Institute & Expo (I&E), students from Ferris State University participated. A great group of NAFA volunteers from the Michigan Chapter, directed by Steven Pederson, established this accomplishment. Subsequently, the Student Advisory Task Force (SATF) was created to oversee student activities. Steve Pederson is the Chair and NAFA Affiliate Mike Antich is Vice Chair of the SATF.

The goal now is to formalize this process at the national level of NAFA for all student activities and establish a program that will seek sponsorship of these students at I&E. I also plan to continue our alliance with the current college and university partners and establish additional partners. Furthermore, I want to establish a scholarship program for students in the degree programs at NAFA's partner colleges and universities; and establish intern job opportunities within the NAFA community. I'd like to see these efforts become one of NAFA's methods to harvest new talent for the Association and fleet industry, and continue to raise the level of respect and professionalism for fleet managers.

Another goal is to refine the I&E to ensure it remains the best opportunity for fleet managers to network, obtain excellent education opportunities, get updates...
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on industry trends and legislative activities, improve the interaction with industry suppliers, and remain the best value for our Members. Additionally, I want to increase the return on investment for NAFA’s many Affiliates and companies that participate on the expo floor or attend the I&E.

Finally, I plan to expand upon networking opportunities through NAFA’s many outlets such as chapter meetings, I&E, our new social networking efforts, and wherever else NAFA members spend time in their professional roles.

You will be the first NAFA President to be in control as the Association jumps into social networking in a big way. Do you have any thoughts on how social networking will impact NAFA?

I believe this is the next evolution of information exchange, which will play a role in establishing relationships and interaction among Members. Similar to how the use of the Internet and other forms of information delivery has changed our lives, I have found it a great source of open dialogue on many topics that are related to the Association. I have benefited from the group discussions that take place through the available networking outlets such as LinkedIn and Twitter. I believe it will help NAFA reach out to Members who have not been reached before.

NAFA has made a lot of strides in fleet education in recent years. Do you see that as the Association’s strongest aspect? If not, what do you see as the strongest aspect of NAFA?

NAFA’s educational effort is the cornerstone of the Association and plays a vital role; however, I believe the overall strength of the fleet manager is the Association’s strongest aspect. This includes not just our educational efforts, but an overall mission to increase professionalism for the fleet managers and elevate them in everyone’s eyes. Along with our networking opportunities — which can happen at one of NAFA’s seminars, meetings, I&E, and social networking websites — establishing lifetime friends and business acquaintances can provide support or serve as a sounding board to complete the fleet manager’s mission.

What are some of the challenges facing fleet management today? How can NAFA help?

Short-term budget measures have become common practices in the past few years due to the current political and economic conditions. This practice leads fleet managers to receive directives that will have long-term effects. These directives are a diversion from best management practices related to total lifecycle costing, stretching preventive maintenance cycles, and, in some cases, delaying needed repairs or buying inferior products that have higher failure rates in an effort to reduce short-term spending. This type of activity over time could lead to the failure of the fleet manager’s mission, which includes providing vehicles that are safe, reliable, meet their intended use, have high rates of availability, are provided at competitive prices, and help provide sustainability.

Changing technology, manufacturer volatility, reduction in staff and support, always having to prove your net worth, and new legislative initiatives are just some of the current challenges.

NAFA has many products and educational opportunities for fleet managers to aid them tackle these issues so they can illustrate to their hierarchy the negative effects of the practices mentioned above. NAFA’s literature facilitates establishing professional benchmarks and best management practices. Since many Members are facing the same difficulties, NAFA Members also provide support, and this is where networking

As a Member of NAFA since 1987, Weichman has been very involved within NAFA’s educational programs as well as with the Fuels & Technology Council. His NAFA career includes such highlights as the creation of the NAFA Green Fleet Award (since renamed NAFA’s Sustainable Fleet Award), rejuvenating the student membership classification and starting the Student Advisory Task Force, his work as an instructor for NAFA’s Fleet Management Seminar, and his participation in the development of several educational products.

Weichman has been the Director of Fleet Management Division for Palm Beach County since 1990. Before that he was the Fleet Manager for Miami-Dade County for nine years and has held private sector fleet positions upon graduating from Ferris State University with a Bachelor of Science in Automotive & Heavy Equipment Technology.

Among his career highlights, Weichman’s Palm Beach County Fleet Management Division was selected as Vocational Fleet of the Year by FleetOwner in 2006; has been an ASE Blue Seal designated facility for the past nine years; ranked in the top 20 of the 100 best fleets for the past three years; and Weichman was named Public Sector Fleet Manager of the Year in 2009 by Government Fleet. Weichman is a Florida Association of Governmental Fleet Administrators (FLAGA) member, Governor of Florida appointee to Clean Cities, instructor at the University of Wisconsin’s Fleet Maintenance Management, taught courses at the National Truck Equipment Association’s annual truck show, and has published numerous articles.
is vital. In addition, NAFA staff provides support for Association Members. Finally, NAFA provides legislative support through its councils in DC and Ottawa who work diligently to see that fleet manager input is heard and acknowledged.

If a fleet manager were to ask you, “Why should I join NAFA?”
What would you tell the person?
NAFA is the only fleet-related association to establish the big tent mentality where you can find information on every aspect of fleet management. Membership opens up opportunities and provides resources to acquire the needed information and tools that ensure success. NAFA maintains a large amount of educational opportunities for its members. It promotes networking with professional fleet managers and supporting companies through our Affiliates. Personally, I have been able to make career lifetime friends and acquaintances that are an asset to my success both professionally and as a person.

The certification program is industry leading, and, with the help of the newly created Center for Professional Fleet Certification, it will become an industry-wide standard of excellence. I believe there are many advantages a Member is afforded by being part of NAFA, from our legislative support to unified efforts to elevate the perception of the fleet manager. NAFA allows you to choose the level of involvement you are comfortable with or simply use the many resources that are available.

During my time with NAFA, I have found that the Association is made up of a great group of caring individuals that are willing to help and solve problems selflessly and are the “good samaritans” of the fleet management profession.

Looking ahead, what would you like people to say about your term in two years?
I would hope that I will be viewed as a fair, passionate, and ethical President who always had the best interests of everyone involved in NAFA at heart. That, as President, my word was my bond and I made every effort to accomplish goals that helped the Association; that I was able to achieve an open and transparent way of conducting NAFA business for our Members and Affiliates, stakeholders, and Board of Governors; that I completed goals that make the Association better for its Members; that I helped foster a positive and more professional overview for fleet managers; and that NAFA stayed financially strong enough to allow the Association to attain the goals in our strategic plan.

I would like to thank all of those who have supported NAFA and are part of our Association. I truly believe my many experiences and participation in NAFA over the past 25 years have played a major role in where I am related to my career and professional accomplishments and I give thanks for allowing me to serve as the President of NAFA.