RUTH ALFSON, CAFM®, is looking at the future as she prepares to become NAFA’s 34th President, specifically to the future of fleet on the whole, with a mind toward the overall goals of effective leadership. “It is the ability to make a decision; follow through with it; make sure it is communicated to everyone, and when it is communicated, it gets everyone on-board to accept it; and then it requires working things through to its conclusion.”

Future Sustained

Often decisions require pragmatism that seems counterintuitive, yet are based on sound knowledge of economic cycles and history. The news on this early-January day sounds particularly rosy as prices for oil and gasoline slide into financial territories not seen in many years. It’s a good time to be in a job that relies on vehicles.

Alfson feels now is not the time to be lulled into a false invitation to complacency. “Historically, (gas) prices are not going to stay this low. So while they are, putting into place the parameters and policies to make a fleet more sustainable makes sense. That way, when they do eventually start climbing again, having all this in place alleviates your scrambling when higher prices return. You know gas prices are not going to stay this low in the next two-to-five years, so start building the parameters now to get more fuel-efficient vehicles in your fleet.”

“You have to think not just for now, but for the future,” Alfson said. “We need to be more proactive. The more we blindly keep going with the status quo, the more we will have to overcome when it becomes too expensive to run on conventional fuels.”

As NAFA moves closer to the launch of the Sustainable Fleet Standard Program, Alfson is aware that it presently is harder to pitch sustainable practices to upper management than when gas was upward of $3.50 a gallon. She suggests that fleet managers need to base their case on solid data from their fleets’ own histories. “I would take examples from the past -- how
much was spent on gas at this time period, and this time period, and the next -- and the age of the fleet because the older the vehicle, the more gas it will consume.”

“If (upper management) ultimately decides they’re not going that way, there’s not much more you can do.” Regardless, she explains, it is better for the fleet manager to move against the tide and make the case for forward-thinking. “When that future eventually comes and you’re proven right, (supervisors) will have to listen and pay attention to you. You need a plan. You can begin the plan and look prophetic afterward, or not and wind up scrambling to make it all work out, just as others scrambled in the past.”

**Future Learned**

Throughout her years of service to NAFA, Alfson has shown again and again the same focus and determination she has shown in her position as Manager, Fleet Center of Excellence at Serco Group, Inc., in Ohio. As a Trustee, a part of the Education Steering Board, Chair of the Certification Board, as well as of the National Education Development Committee, as a key player in the Tri-State Chapter and more, Alfson has not shied away from responsibility.

She cites NAFA’s educational components as a necessity in achieving better results and for fostering innovative ideas. Networking and forging relationships are “a huge educational opportunity. Everyone has come across a problem that inevitably someone else has already been through and has solved. (What you learn) may not exactly be the solution for you, but it points you in a direction where more information becomes available, which can be customized to suit your needs.”

Alfson adds that this wealth of information extends across the entirety of NAFA’s membership, through fleet managers and Affiliates alike.

**Future Assured**

This unique social laboratory has helped NAFA become the industry leader in fleet education, integrating new ideas that have been proven by those out in the field, and Alfson suggested it should be the starting point for anyone in fleet. “NAFA offers education for the beginner through to the advanced fleet manager. There’s a lot of fleet-related information out there, but you want to go to the source expert on your particular subject, and NAFA provides that.”

While Alfson is hopeful about the state of the fleet industry during the next few years; she nonetheless speaks with great pride and with a sense of stewardship about the body that is NAFA membership. “I have found that, in this profession, these fleet managers and the Affiliates that work with fleet managers are some of the most knowledgeable, professional, and friendly people you could ever meet. I have never seen a more helpful, understanding group, willing to express their knowledge to people.”

“These people are great; wonderful to work with, wonderful to know, and wonderful to have as an educational resource.”

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