Charles A. Gibbens, Jr.
Takes the Helm at NAFA

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Charles Gibbens Reports for Duty

It was 1969 when a young graduate fresh from Virginia Tech’s Corps of Cadets was commissioned as an officer in the United States Army and soon reported to his first duty assignment. Little did the then Lieutenant Charles A. Gibbens, Jr. know, the assignment would set the course for the rest of his life.

“I was assigned to a combat arms armor unit,” NAFA’s new president explains. “That means tanks. Throughout my 21 years in the Army, I was constantly involved with vehicle, weapon and communication systems maintenance and supply activities.

“These activities are the life blood of a mechanized unit. You have to keep your equipment up and running to accomplish your mission. This involved the repair and maintenance of those systems, the maintaining and requisitioning of repair parts, and refueling operations.”

Does this sound a little like what a fleet manager does?

Gibbens retired from the Army in 1990 as a Lieutenant Colonel and when it came time to look for his second career, he came across an advertisement for a fleet manager in the County of Henrico, Virginia. “Although it wasn’t what I was looking for at the time, after reading the qualifications and job requirements, I said to myself, ‘that’s essentially what I’ve done for the past 21 years.’”

Although Gibbens admits the one area his military background did not prepare him for was the budgeting and financial requirements involved with the County, he credits an excellent staff that helped him quickly learn what was needed. Fifteen years later, Gibbens remains with the County of Henrico.

Gibbens has also been a member of NAFA for the same 15 years. Throughout his membership, he was a charter member of the Old Dominion Chapter and has served on many committees as the vice chair and later chair. He has also been the chair of NAFA’s Alternative Fuels Committee, vice chair for NAFA’s Board of Delegates, NAFA’s treasurer, vice president and senior vice president.

And now he accepts yet another assignment as NAFA president. He has certainly earned his way to the top.

“This progression was helpful. It allowed me to see how all the pieces of the big puzzle fit together,” Gibbens says. “Having served at the chapter level and understanding how chapters function, it allowed me to better understand how the NAFA governance works through the Board of Trustees and the Board of Delegates, and how the committee structure supports both the chapter and national level functions. In the end, it’s all about serving member needs and that is why NAFA exists.”

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Gibbens believes that what NAFA does best is provide professional educational content to its members and provides different forums for networking to connect people. “Our annual conference is a first class educational experience and the CAFM certification program is the best in our industry,” Gibbens raves.

There have been many changes in NAFA throughout Gibbens’ membership, but he has confidence that the association has and will continue to work to adjust to the needs of the members. “Over the years I have seen NAFA make the effort to determine the needs of its members and to change as necessary to meet those needs. Sometimes this requires changing how NAFA does business because of new technology.” Gibbens cites that e-mail rather than paper mailings, the availability of information on the Web site rather than hard copy references, and the strides NAFA continues to make with the delivery of educational materials as just a few examples of the adjustments NAFA has made.

“Much of this change is driven by our members’ desires to have what they need when they need it,” Gibbens explains. “This willingness to regularly assess where we are and where we want to go will help ensure that NAFA continues to best serve its members.”

Challenges and NAFA’s Future?

For the first time in 20 years, a NAFA president begins his tenure with a major change to the NAFA Headquarters’ staff. In February, Phillip Russo, CAE, was named executive director of NAFA replacing David Lefever, CAE, who retired. Lefever, in the past, acted as a liaison between the outgoing and incoming presidents.

Gibbens doesn’t see this as a serious obstacle and believes the executive director’s duties are to ensure that he and his staff implement the guidance from the Board of Trustees as articulated through the president. “A visual example of this relationship recently given to me was that the president is the tip of one pyramid representing members and the executive director was the tip of another pyramid representing NAFA staff. Where the two tips meet, it represents the formal relationship of the president and the executive director. As this transition continues with the new executive director, I see that the roles of the Board of Trustees as well as the executive director remain the same.”

Fifteen years of growing with the association has Gibbens encouraged about the future of NAFA. “I believe

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As if the duties of automotive fleet manager for the County of Henrico, Virginia weren’t enough to contend with, now Charlie Gibbens adds NAFA president to his daily workload.

“There is no doubt that the duties of NAFA president can amount to a ‘second job’ but I view it as a way of giving something back to an organization and profession that has given so much to me,” Gibbens says. But Gibbens has faith in NAFA members, the Board of Trustees and the staff. “I suspect if everyone pulls their fair share the load will not be too great. I am particularly grateful to the County of Henrico Virginia for supporting my participation in NAFA.”

Gibbens has enjoyed doing the volunteer work he has done over the years and sees it as personally and professionally satisfying. “In short we are a friendly lot and NAFA’s greatest strength is its members and their genuine interest in each other.”

With his busy schedule, Gibbens does find time for himself every now and then. To relax and unwind he plays a Martin HD 28 acoustic guitar and enjoys freshwater fly fishing. The evolution of film to digital photography has also inspired the resurrection of his love of picture taking as one of his hobbies.

Gibbens claims his “vices” are going to the movies and sometimes watching too much high-definition television. “It’s addictive and I have an over-developed right thumb from channel surfing.”

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our future is bright, given our willingness to explore and evaluate new opportunities that are consistent with our current strategic plan that was based on a member survey conducted in early 2004."

Gibbens understands that it will take several years to devise the details to implement the goals set forth in this plan. “But the process will keep us focused over the near future. We are currently reviewing several partnering possibilities that may result in a win-win situation for each organization.”

Throughout the next two years, Gibbens hopes to remain focused on devising the specific actions to implement NAFA’s new strategic plan. He understands that it will take the cooperation of members and staff to accomplish this, and knows that discussion and input are needed from both sources to determine the best way to implement the goals. “I see myself as the conductor of the orchestra, the one who keeps the group on the same sheet of music and going in the same direction. But I also hope we have fun in the process because the journey is as important as the destination.”

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