FOR MANY YEARS, CHRIS AMOS, CAFM, HAS BEEN ONE OF THE MOST ACTIVE AND INFLUENTIAL MEMBERS OF NAFA. IN APRIL, HE WILL BECOME THE 31ST PRESIDENT OF THE ASSOCIATION. WE HAD THE OPPORTUNITY TO TALK WITH AMOS ABOUT THE HONOR AND WHAT HE HOPES TO ACHIEVE DURING HIS TERM AS PRESIDENT.

Q: The past year has clearly been a time of change and building for the future at NAFA. Where do you see the association heading in the next decade? And where would you like to take it during your reign as President?

A: NAFA has an organizational culture that embraces continuous improvement. This is one of the things that attracted me to NAFA service and has kept me involved. Certainly the rate of change recently has been exciting, as we have rebranded and made progress on several strategic initiatives.

I believe the fleet management profession is finally coming of age with business and government executives, and even the general public, recognizing the importance of properly managing the essential assets related to fleet. NAFA, its Members, and its Affiliates have been responsible for this progress over the past 52 years. Still, we collectively represent only a fraction of the vehicle fleet industry in only part of a vast global economy.

NAFA began to emerge from its cocoon in the early 1990s when the then largely commercial, light-duty, leased fleet manager leadership made the leap to recruit and embrace government fleet managers, including yours truly. The Association has become stronger, more diverse, and more representative of the fleet industry as a result. Current strategic initiatives have us poised to make those types of bold moves again.

During my opportunity to serve as NAFA’s President, I hope to continue our progress in forming partnerships and alliances for the betterment of our profession as a whole and the NAFA family in particular. NAFA is a key player, but we must both lead and be guided by others if we are to reach our full potential to influence the fleet industry. NAFA’s Certified Automotive Fleet Manager (CAFM) program will continue to be our vehicle for reaching out to the greater fleet management industry.

Q: How so?

A: The state of Ohio partnered with NAFA in 2006 to offer the CAFM program to its fleet managers as a condition of employment. The National Institute for Automotive Service Excellence (ASE) recognized the CAFM program in 2006 as part of a partnership agreement with NAFA. The National Conference of State Fleet Administrators (NCSFA) joined with NAFA in exclusively endorsing the CAFM program in 2007. Ferris State University adopted the CAFM curriculum for its fleet management courses and accredited the program in 2008. Other partnerships are currently being negotiated.

Every partner in the CAFM fleet certification alliance brings additional support to it and the fleet profession. Each broadens the perspective of the CAFM program, helping to identify the needs of their members or students and future direction of the fleet.
management industry so that the curriculum continues to proactively evolve to meet those needs. Some partners have committed to contributing to the curriculum content of the CAFM program, thereby strengthening it beyond what NAFA may be able to quickly accomplish on its own.

Each partner supporting the CAFM program strengthens its recognition, demand among employers, and thereby the value of the designation to each individual who attains and maintains it. The collective efforts of the partners in the CAFM alliance will help the program achieve critical mass within the fleet management profession and industry. When college students begin to graduate with fleet management certification and degrees and employers demand the CAFM designation, our profession will have finally achieved the respect and recognition afforded to others, like accountants with a CPA.

Q: What do you see as NAFA’s most important strength? What would you like to see improved?

A: NAFA’s diversity of professional endeavors is at the same time our greatest strength and also our biggest internal stumbling block. It is because we have Members and Affiliates who come from many different fleet sectors that we are of such help to each other. The core of fleet management is the same for us all. The differences between us serve to point to alternative approaches of accomplishing things. We need to take advantage of our diversity and continue our efforts to avoid erecting internal barriers between fleet and parent organizational types.

I believe we need to change the way Members regard NAFA’s Affiliates. Personally, I view the companies that help deliver services to my City of St. Louis fleet as partners. I keep in mind that they are in business to make a profit, but that doesn’t negate the fact that it is in everyone’s best interest for our business relationship to be based in mutual respect.

I would like to see all NAFA Members take this same attitude with our Affiliates. Yes, their primary motivation for participating may be to gain access to members in order to conduct business and make a profit. That doesn’t negate the fact that our Affiliates and their companies are often the best resource for information and expert advice. We need to stop expecting Affiliates to just pay for things and start treating them like the business partners they truly are. Many Affiliates want to play this larger role but never get the opportunity. Moving forward, I aim to help change this perception for the betterment of us all.

Q: Let’s look at your leadership style. How will you lead NAFA differently from Gayle Pratt? How are you two alike?

A: Gayle has been a very effective NAFA President, and I can only hope to serve the Association as well. As her Senior Vice President, I’ve supported her vision for NAFA. In turn, Gayle has encouraged me to pursue the educational initiatives about which I am passionate. I think we have been a good team. In fact, the entire Board of Trustees is working well together, and I expect that will continue with the Board I lead because we all have the best interests of NAFA’s Members and Affiliates foremost in our priorities.

When it comes to leadership style, Gayle and I are alike in that we lead by example and we appreciate and acknowledge the contributions of others. Honesty forces me to admit that Gayle has much more poise and class than I ever will. I’ll probably continue to be a bit brash and impatient and hope that my peers will continue to cut me some slack. A long line of mentors and Kim, my wife of 27 years, have actually smoothed off some of the rough spots on my personality so I’m not quite the ogre I might have been.

Q: Tell me about the fleet you manage in St. Louis.

A: I am very proud of the men and women who work with me to support and manage it. I’m privileged to work for excellent leaders such as Mayor Francis Slay and my director Marjorie Melton, P.E., who are very supportive of our efforts. Yet, like many major urban areas, there are far more infrastructure needs than there are resources available to meet them. As a result, the Equipment Services Division operates in old, ill-suited facilities and supports a diverse fleet of over 2,400 units that are far older and less dependable than our customers need.

Even so, every day I go to work I know that I am part of something important. What my staff and I do, or fail to do, affects the lives of our citizens, so we do the best
we can with what we have and don't give up. It is frustrating to know exactly what needs to be done, to have executive support to do it and not have the necessary resources to make it happen. More so because you know there are even more vital uses for the money. So, how do we handle this? Our division motto is “Part of the Solution.”

Q: You've been with the City of St. Louis for more than a decade now. How is running a municipal fleet different from your days in the military? Ever miss the barracks?

A: Fleet was only a part-time job for me as a regular Army officer where I also worked in personnel, finance, and information technology specialties. I was actually surprised to learn fleet management was a career choice when I answered the newspaper ad for St. Louis County's first fleet manager. Almost five years with the County gave me a chance to adjust to the slower paced and more decentralized command structure of local government before taking the promotion to be Commissioner of Equipment Services with the City.

The biggest difference with being a civilian and military fleet manager is that I now have full responsibility for the life-cycle of my fleet without a stovepipe of technical specialists making many of the decisions for me. And yes, while I greatly prefer the family home we have now to on-base officers' quarters, I do miss much about Army service. Not so much the 5 a.m. runs, though.

Q: What first interested you about being a mechanic and then working in fleet? Was this an interest you had while growing up?

A: Like many young men of my generation, I was fascinated with machines in general and fast cars in particular. Fortunately, my parents, who were both high school teachers, didn't buy into the popular belief that being a mechanic was somehow beneath a student bright enough to go to college. So, I took my college prep courses half-days and played sports at Southwest High School, where my dad taught, and took half-day auto mechanic classes at O'Fallon Technical High School, where my mom taught.

Working as a mechanic part-time was a great way to earn date money, and it gave me an appreciation for earning a living through physical labor. Mechanic training, and even my limited experience turning a wrench, has been very helpful managing a fleet. I think my staff appreciates that I can make informed decisions without a lot of explanation, and I'm willing to take a close look at a problem in the shop when necessary. What's a day without a little grease on your hands and diesel exhaust in your lungs?

Q: One of your main interests is education. What have been some of your favorite accomplishments with regards to NAFA and education? What would you like to accomplish down the road?

A: Education has always been a passion for me, as I consider myself to be a lifetime learner. With so little fleet management knowledge documented in the early 1990s, rectifying that situation became a call to action for many of us.
I recall some folks telling Walter Burnett, CAFM, Linda Carlton, CAFM, and me that we had bitten off more than we could chew when we undertook to write NAFA's first major reference guide, the Fleet Maintenance Staffing Guide. That was a bit like waving a red flag in front of a bull—and yes, I know bulls are color blind, but you get the point.

Since then, dozens of dedicated volunteers with expert staff guidance and assistance have steadily built a library of reference materials, which serve as the primary curriculum for the Certified Automotive Fleet Manager (CAFM) program. The last of the education gaps we identified 15 years ago are finally in the works now. When the last one is finished in the next two years, I expect it will be like dropping a 50-pound rucksack at the end of a 20-mile road march: a sense of relief, accomplishment, and a cause for celebration with my many NAFA friends who have made that journey with me.

Q: Where do you see NAFA's role in the global world of fleet management?

A: NAFA has long been an international professional society with Members and Affiliates spanning the United States and Canada as well as touching six other countries. One of the major goals in rebranding ourselves was to foster the idea that NAFA has long since outgrown our "National" origins and needs to expand to underserved areas globally.

I expect that NAFA will expand to better serve some of our "outer" regions, including Alaska, Hawaii, and Puerto Rico initially. Then we will push further south into the Caribbean, Mexico, and Central and South America where the demand justifies it. We hope to make these forays into additional international markets with the help of strong partners who have already begun to blaze the trail.

Q: Finally, how has NAFA helped shape your career? As someone who has plunged wholeheartedly into NAFA volunteerism, what advice would you offer a new Member to get the most out of the Association?

A: I have met many of my good, personal friends and most of the fleet professionals I admire through volunteer work at NAFA. Working with friends makes the projects fun and even the tedious governance tasks tolerable. They become like family; you look forward to seeing them a few times a year on holidays. I owe most of what I know about managing a fleet to the CAFM program and shared experiences of peers at NAFA. That has kept me gainfully employed and given me a solid professional reputation.

In return, I've tried to give back to the profession and to NAFA, which has given me so much. My advice to others is to find something that you are passionate about and put yourself out there, and don't get discouraged. One of my good friends and mentors, Janis Christensen, CAFM, recently reminded me with a chuckle that she had rejected my offer to serve on her Alternative Fuels Task Force in the early 1990s when I was new to NAFA. So, just volunteer early and often and you too will eventually be matched up with a rewarding role to fill.

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