

DAVID OGILVIE: As President Helped Build on NAFA's STRENGTHS



Two years ago at NAFA's 1997 Fleet Management Institute in Montreal, Quebec, Hewlett-Packard (Canada), Ltd.'s David Ogilvie became the Association's 25th President. At that time he said his goal was to build upon the strong foundation that was already in place. Now, as he hands over the reins to NAFA's 26th President two years later, he can look back with pride on an Association that is stronger and more vibrant than ever before.

"I feel really good about that part of it," he explained. "We've really tried to improve on some of the things that were already working well and, overall, we've been successful. Financially we are in very good shape. Our membership is strong. Education, which is where we've focused a tremendous amount of our attention, has really dramatically improved during the last couple of years. We've certainly accomplished that part of it without question. It's basically what I wanted to do; build on the existing strengths."

Despite the Association's growth in so many ways, Ogilvie recognizes that one problem he said he wanted to help solve two years ago – weakness at the chapter level – is still a problem.

"If I've had a frustration for the last couple of years," he admitted, "it would be that we haven't really helped to address some of the weaknesses in the local chapters. Participation is very critical, whether it's at the national or local level. Not only does it allow the Association to accomplish its goals, it is also a wonderful opportunity. Unfortunately, participation has been weak in many of our local chapters. It's really a question of how do we get people to volunteer more."

Recognizing the importance of this issue, Ogilvie (who will continue serving the Association as Trustee – Past President) has had several discussions with his Senior Vice President (and incoming President) Sal Giacchi. "We are going to have to deal with it at the Board level," he said. "We've talked about it, but I think we need to put a concerted effort into identifying the common issues and to try to come up with some solutions. Perhaps we even need to ask whether the chapter structure needs to be completely redone. It's definitely an area we have to deal with."

For Ogilvie, Members who don't actively participate are missing out on some of the greatest benefits of their Membership. "There is a tremendous value to participating," he explained. "The real gain for me is the people I've met over the years. I've learned a tremendous amount of information from them. They are a great source of knowledge. And, I've made some great friends."

Ogilvie knows first hand how beneficial participation can be. "When I joined NAFA I didn't know anything about fleet," he said. "I didn't know anything about being a leader. Basically, I didn't know anything about anything. At that time I was just a sponge soaking up information. There were some really good people in our local chapter who were great resources with a wealth of fleet knowledge. I will always be indebted to what those people did for me. They really helped get my career in fleet."

Although he was not interested in becoming a leader, he eventually did get more involved after some "arm twisting."

"While I never had any aspirations to be a leader," Ogilvie said, "I've gained tremendously from the experience. I've grown a whole lot in my ability to do certain things. As my two-year term reaches an end, there is a sense of accomplishment and personal satisfaction with what NAFA has achieved."

Besides his own personal growth, Ogilvie's term as President saw the Association go through some major changes as well. To name only a few, the Association's Web site continued to offer more services, the educational programs were enhanced, and bylaw changes saw Affiliates taking on new roles within the Association.

"One of the most challenging things was the bylaws change last year," Ogilvie explained. "It was perceived by some people as being a large switch for the Association. In a sense, they were right; accepting Affiliates as Members and having an Affiliate on the Board of Trustees is a big change. Although I don't see where it is going to have a huge effect on NAFA, I do think it makes a statement and recognizes the evolutionary role that Affiliates play. I think we will have a stronger Association based on these changes."

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instance, Giacchi explained, if something were to happen in the area of alternative fuels, they now have the ability to form an ad hoc committee that can look at the issue and recommend an action without having to wait for the next Board meeting. "This change will make us stronger and allow us to answer Members' needs quicker than ever before," he said. "We will not be limited to just the people on the Board of Delegates. If we need people with different or specific talents, we can choose and pick people from different areas of the industry."

One of the challenges Giacchi sees facing the industry in the next couple of years can be found at the chapter level. "They are struggling," he explained. "We have a lot of good chapters out there but we also have a lot of chapters that are losing members because the organizations in their areas are merging and downsizing. This also affects their ability to get people to volunteer for leadership positions. Organizations are expecting more and more of their employees. It doesn't leave much time to volunteer and get involved."

This can be problematic at a time when members needs are increasing and the demand for new services becomes apparent. "The next biggest challenge will probably be how much can NAFA handle within the structure we have today based on current staff levels and the amount of time people have to volunteer. I would like to see NAFA continue to grow with strong chapters offering outstanding educational programs."

One of his personal goals for the Association during his term as President is to see the Association become truly international. "I really want to look into expanding NAFA to where it is really an international association," he pointed out. "It's time, now that it's going to be a new millennium, to go forward. A lot of our managers have international or global fleets today. I believe NAFA could be a major resource for those people. Perhaps we could begin by starting chapters in Puerto Rico or London or hold a masters program in London where manufacturers would display vehicles similar to the new car shows that chapters hold here in the U.S. We already have fleet managers attending the FMI from those locations. The networking that would be available for our Members with global fleets would be very helpful. The time for this change is now and I hope I can help do that for the Association."

And he should know about the power of networking. After all, it was the networking and knowledge he gained from that first conference he attended 28 years ago that helped Giacchi get to where he is today. "I really believe the networking is one of the strongest and most valuable things NAFA has to offer beyond the programs we have," he explained. "It is a tremendous opportunity to be able to actually go out and meet the Affiliates and Members and have your own little focus groups after meetings or over lunch. You might have a problem that you can speak to a handful of fleet managers about and come up with some solutions and recommendations. How do you put a value on that?"

Another major change, which was just approved during the February Board of Governors meeting was the committee restructuring that resulted in the elimination of some committees, major changes to some other committees, and the creation of an Education Steering Council and an Education Development Committee.

"I think we will see some great results from this restructuring in the future," Ogilvie said. "Although the actual results won't really happen until after Sal takes over leadership, the changes were really begun over the last couple of years. We recognized that the committee structure needed to be re-evaluated and Sal was chosen to lead our analysis of it."

Looking back on the accomplishments made by the Association over the last two years, Ogilvie recognizes the contributions of those individuals who have taken the time to volunteer and serve on the various responsible committees. "All the credit for many of our successes, such as the revamping of the CAFM program, the outstanding Fleet Management Seminars, the newly created At-Your-Desk Seminars (which is a really neat way to deliver education), and the Fleet Management Institute, goes to the committees. Being NAFA President is a lot of fun. But it is really the people around you that make it easy and who really get things done. My job was to get out of their way and let them do it. They've done a great job."

Now that his term as President is drawing to a close, what does he have planned for the future? "I will still be around, there's no question about that," he said. "I will do whatever I can and work in whatever area I'm needed."

One thing he does not intend on doing, however, is be in the way. "I look forward to being past president and leading a much more balanced life," Ogilvie explained. "I don't have any real strong desire to hold on - in fact, it's just the opposite. I think the biggest contribution I can make is to let go and let the new leadership team run the show. And, since I'm quite confident they are fully capable of doing that, it's going to be neat to refer to myself as past president."

In addition to helping out wherever needed at the national level, Ogilvie also intends to become more involved with his local chapter.

When asked for any last words on his tenure as president, Ogilvie quickly noted that "it has been a great experience. I've enjoyed meeting and working with so many good people. They've all help me tremendously. The headquarters staff - it's hard to find the words for them - they've been really super. They've done an awful lot of stuff that goes way beyond what we would have expected them to do. The Board of Trustees has been outstanding and has made my job pretty easy. I have to say thanks to HP for the support they've given me the last couple of years. And last but not least, I have to thank my family. They've been very supportive. I know it's no fun for them to have Dad away on weekends. Overall, I've been really blessed by having good people to work with who have made these last couple of years a lot fun."