



Past, Present, And Future:

Jim Anselmi And 25 Years Of Change In Fleet

By Donald W. Dunphy

In the August 1989 issue of *NAFA Fleet Executive* (the precursor to *FLEETSolutions*), Jim Anselmi co-wrote an article with Port Authority of New York and New Jersey colleague Duncan Frissell titled *Choosing A Personal Computer Fleet Management Package*. The aim of the piece was to ease the tech-averse fleet professional into the understanding that the computer was going to be a big part of their career moving forward.

“Big,” it turned out, was an understatement. The photos of personal computers included with the write-up show machines that resemble, to modern eyes, like a typewriter wired to an industrial microwave oven. The machines pictured had less computing power than the smartphone located in one’s pants-pocket today. Anselmi couldn’t have known just how quickly technology would accelerate but was right on

target with how important it would become.

Anselmi has had a well-rounded view of all things fleet throughout his career, from his time with the NY/NJ Port Authority to working with a corporate fleet at Lorillard Tobacco, and up to being a NAFA President, receiving a Distinguished Service Award, as well as his work with the NAFA Foundation. In November 2011, Anselmi celebrated his 25th year with NAFA, a most appropriate time to look back to where fleet’s been and try to predict where it is going.

Past - “I could say I saw it coming, but no, I didn’t,” Anselmi said candidly about the importance of computers in fleet. “Back in ’89 we looked at PCs coming on, getting away from mainframes, and becoming more than an administrative tool for all businesses, including fleet management. We saw that the

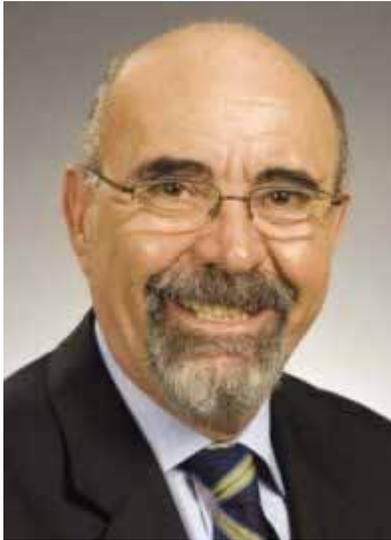
Internet was becoming, more and more, a part of our daily work environment—emails and all that.”

Yet it was the scale by which the reliance for technology was growing and the capacity for those tools to do more and more, while concurrently growing smaller and smaller, that eluded Anselmi at the time. “As with all technology, looking back with twenty-twenty hindsight, it is just growing exponentially; quicker than we anticipated, and further than we anticipated.”

“I just read an article this morning,” Anselmi continued, “about being able to point your smartphone at a restaurant—if it is an Italian restaurant, (the phone) will bring up all sorts of reviews, menus, that sort of thing. So, no, we did not see technology getting this far, this quickly.”

Anselmi takes the view of technology as not the dominant tool for the fleet manager, but one in an

entire arsenal. "Back in '89 we had tools to help us that our predecessors in the '60s didn't have, so now the fleet manager has tools that we didn't have. I don't see technology as having drawbacks, just as another tool, another challenge for the fleet manager. It's something else they've got to embrace and learn how to use effectively."



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-- Jim Anselmi

"I remember our predecessors were worrying about AM/FM radios and air conditioning in vehicles! This has all now become standard," Anselmi said. "Fuel prices back then were not a concern to us but, today, are a major concern to the fleet manager. Outsourcing was probably one of the major concerns as well during my tenure. There was constant outsourcing of fleet jobs, more in the commercial side, but also in the government side to an extent."

From 1995 to 1997, Anselmi was the NAFA President and noted with pride that he was the first from the Public Service side of fleet to achieve the designation. He noted that over the years, NAFA has grown more inclusive of all the spheres of fleet management. "(The Association has) a lot of good Public Service and Commercial fleets now. It's becoming a better balance as opposed to

1986 (when I joined NAFA) when Public Service was a committee, not a section."

Present – Anselmi turned his eyes toward the issues currently facing the fleet manager, and the primary one is universally recognized not only in this industry, but worldwide as the biggest hurdle to clear. "Everybody in business is constantly

being challenged to reduce their budgets. Each year, that challenge becomes more and more difficult. Gas prices! Every year I remember, as a fleet manager, being asked what my fuel costs were going to be and, wow...my crystal ball was never clear on that!"

"I'm sure that's still a challenge to the fleet manager," Anselmi continued, "trying to predict something that's probably one of the major expenses, of what the cost of fuel is going to be in the next year."

Anselmi also noted the ever-increasing importance of vehicle selection, noting that the increased varieties of vehicles, features, and sustainability issues that tag along are also things that he and his predecessors didn't have too much concern about in their day. "Do they get into electric vehicles, flex-fuel vehicles, or maybe the natural gas vehi-

cles? The fleet manager is as proactive (about sustainability) as he or she would like to be, but still has to respond to what the OEMs are producing. They have to match what is best for their corporate image, their drivers' needs, and in Public Service what a government's needs are. It's not easy out there! The fleet manager is an asset to their city, or government, or corporation. They have to provide that service to the internal customers, but at the same time balance that bottom line."

This led Anselmi to consider another aspect of the present fleet management landscape that might be different from that of the past, that of stability within either the Corporate or the Public Service model. The assumption was that a company's structure should remain relatively constant for several years, without frequent shifting of administration (and consequently, shifting of departments). Contrast that with a government fleet that could turn over every two-to-four years, in deference to changes in elected leadership. Where this once might have been true, Anselmi insisted it is no longer the case and the two sides have never been as similar as they are now.

"Everybody has a boss," Anselmi said. "The Corporate side has a CEO, and the CEO and top management changes; the whole corporate philosophy can change as often as a city council's and state governor's can. Their views of fleet, as either an asset or as a high cost, changes too and their procedures reflect that. In some cities, governments, and for some corporations it can be a little more stable. But (lately) there have

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been a lot of mergers. Then there's a new top staff, a new CEO, and the whole philosophy of that company can (and probably will) change. A fleet manager has to stay flexible and alert because the only thing that stays the same is change.”

One of the key reasons for administrative turnover in recent times has been a struggling economy, and that has had a direct effect on the individual NAFA Member as well. Having seen the good times as well as the bad, Anselmi considered the benefits of retaining a NAFA membership during hard times, and why the higher-ups may be ambivalent to support it. “I view membership as a part of training; training was always one of the line-items that got cut in both the Corporate and Public Service sides because you were mortgaging the future. You could do away with training expenses because you focused on the training of the people for the time, not to be worried about tomorrow.”

“You see that happening a lot to associations,” Anselmi said. “Companies cut out travel, and fleet managers’ and staff’s ability to attend sessions and conferences, but still, these are training. Whether at a conference or at a chapter meeting, these are training sessions, they’re networking, and they account for opportunities, and it is the worst idea (to impede a fleet manager’s ability to take part) when you’re trying to work smarter. It’s a hard sell, though, and it is too easy for (upper management) to say, ‘Aaah, you’re going to Charlotte or St. Louis and you don’t need to. It’s expensive, you’re out of the office, and you’re not working.’”

Anselmi pointed to the concept that knowledge is asset, not liability, and those who receive the most from it can be the least able to participate. “I’m thinking about

the managers of smaller fleets that could benefit even more from that kind of training. There’s so much more benefit in NAFA’s assets than they get credit for.”

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Future – The conversation began with Jim Anselmi recollecting that his “crystal ball” gave him some insight back in 1989, but not all of it. When asked to shine it up once more to make predictions of where the fleet management sector is heading, his reply was completely pragmatic. It is the economy and will still be the economy.

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“Both governments and corporations are going to want to reduce fleets and support services, but it’s going to be a major part of the corporate side. That’s due to the fleet not be-

ing the product being sold. (The vehicles) are the tools for the person who sells the product, the salesperson that goes out to make the deal, makes the rounds, that sort of thing.” Because of that distinction, Anselmi felt a fleet’s viability was going to become dependent on the fleet manager’s ability to sell it, and fleet managers themselves as a money-saving element and not an expense. “(Fleet managers) are going to have that constant battle,” Anselmi added.

He noted that one of the ways they will be able to rise above will be in continuing the trend toward sustainable vehicles and practices, noting that their salesmanship will also be put to the test in debates of present investments for future gains, versus holding onto the presently comfortable status quo.

And technology? “Well, in 1989 my crystal ball wasn’t all that clear, and it’s still not that clear!” Anselmi joked.

A graphic advertisement for Fleet Focus. The background is a blue-tinted image of a large parking lot filled with cars. On the left, there is a blue rectangular box with the text "Fleet FOCUS" in white, where "FOCUS" is in a larger, bold font and has a white target symbol over the letter "O". To the right of this box, there are three lines of white text on a dark blue background: "APPEARING TWICE MONTHLY WITH YOUR PAID NAFA MEMBERSHIP", "GET HEADLINE NEWS, INSIDE NAFA, REMARKETING STRATEGY, SPOTLIGHT ON LEGISLATION, AND MUCH MORE", and "GET ON THE INSIDE TRACK WITH INFORMATION, NOTIFICATIONS, AND DISCOUNTS YOU WILL FIND ONLY IN FLEETFOCUS".