Patsy Brownson elected NAFA's 23rd President

Helping Members INCREASE JOB

On Monday, April 26, 1993, Patsy Brownson, CAFM and Fleet Administrator for Cox Enterprises, Inc., in Atlanta, Georgia, will become NAFA's 23rd President. As she prepares to lead more than 3,400 fleet professionals, she took time to share her thoughts on where the Association is headed, her goals and how she will direct NAFA for the next two years.

After serving as a NAFA leader for 15 years, you've seen the Association go through many positive changes. Are there any projects that you want NAFA to undertake during your term as President to continue with those changes?

My main concern is to help NAFA continue on with the directions set by our strategic plan. But there are a few special projects that I intend to promote.

First, I want to help our members increase their job security. All across the U.S. and Canada, governments and corporations are reducing staff, looking at outsourcing some work, and restructuring responsibilities. Fleet managers must be able to justify their employment. We're not being singled out; top management is examining every aspect of its business. NAFA's job is to help Members not only be efficient and professional, but also show top management the added value we provide. We as fleet managers must be the real experts on efficient vehicle operations. We've got to be ready to help top management make the best decisions. And we have to demonstrate the leadership skills and expertise that ensure our personal value to our employers.

Next, I want to encourage participation by and support for managers of light truck fleets. Because I have managed light trucks throughout my fleet career, I think I'll bring a different perspective to NAFA in this area. The Association has been geared mainly toward cars, yet more and more Members are managing light trucks these days.

Almost all of our many members and work for governments and utilities, manage a lot of trucks. Larger


Brownson and Immediate Past President Gordon B. West exchange ideas mapping the smooth transition of NAFA leadership.
SECURITY Is First Priority

What is NAFA doing to help Members who face the burdens of added work with less help?

NAFA has to help fleet managers become even more efficient as their workloads grow heavier and heavier. We have to teach Members how to prove their value to top management.

The NAFA Fleet Information Resource Center is already an absolute gold mine of information: more than 600 Members called for help during the first eight months of this new service. Essential information is available almost instantly, whenever a member needs data or reports.

Because research takes so long—and because Members are being asked for documentation so often by management—NAFA is now researching common issues for Members. Our Resource Kits will cover such diverse issues as safety, driver-reimbursement, alternative fuels, even sample policies, driver manuals and job descriptions. Our goal is to save each Member time and effort.

And of course, through Fleet Focus, our monthly newsletter, we're keeping Members up to date on fast-changing law and regulations. Pat O'Connor in Washington and Ron Leclerc in Ottawa monitor everything important that will impact fleet management. By providing all this news at the earliest moment, NAFA provides Members with the longest possible time to prepare for change. Both Pat and Ron always welcome direct inquiries from Members.

Later this year, we may have several "model" presentations for members.
agement. These will be outlines of memos or sample slide presentations to management on critical issues. Members may simply enter their own fleet data and make any necessary modifications to cover their fleet’s unique circumstances. The Board of Trustees has appointed an informal group to start work on these “white papers.” We hope this project will save Members from “reinventing the wheel” whenever top management wants a report on a topic of common concern.

These new services show NAFA is being very pro-active in making sure our members have all the important information at hand. I’m proud NAFA is keeping in such close touch with Member needs and is responding so quickly to provide essential help.

NAFA’s diverse membership must be difficult to serve, since fleet managers have such varied skills and responsibilities and because they work for employers with different missions. How will you as NAFA President be able to keep track of members’ needs?

I think we made a very good start with the “Needs Assessment Survey” and with our strategic planning process.

When the Board of Governors started the strategic planning process in 1990, we were basically relying on our own views and knowledge. We then tried focus groups to explore the needs and attitudes of a sample of members in depth. Then we conducted the Needs Assessment Survey of every single NAFA member. It was gratifying to confirm that the NAFA leadership team was right on target. We really did have a good grasp of member needs and concerns.

I expect to fully continue with the strategic planning process; we will definitely need to conduct a Needs Assessment Survey of the members again, just to make sure that we’re still on track and still satisfying the members’ needs.

Keeping fleets ready to cover breaking news is a challenge Brownson meets for Cat Enterprises, Inc. subsidiary, WSB-TV, Channel 2.

Has the fleet industry changed at all since the every-Member survey was completed in 1991?

The only thing that I see changing possibly is the consolidation of fleet responsibility. In hard economic times, fleets are usually hard pressed. Some fleet managers will have to cut staff; some will have to take on additional non-fleet responsibilities. I think we’re going to see more of these changes in the future and, as I said, NAFA will have to help fleet managers become even more efficient and prove value to their employers.

What does an Affiliate gain from supporting NAFA and what does NAFA expect from Affiliates?

Well in just a few months, we’ll really know what Affiliates gain from NAFA. And we’ll also know what Affiliates need from us to do their jobs better. By the end of 1993, we hope to conduct a detailed survey of every NAFA Affiliate to explore every aspect of the important relationship we share. The every-Member survey was an important part of NAFA’s strategic planning, and the every-Affiliate survey will help us continue that process. We’ll be working with the NAFA Affiliate Committee to develop this survey, analyze results, and make new plans.

I really appreciate the value of Affiliates to NAFA’s growth and ability to help fleet managers. And I know that many Affiliates appreciate their close relationship with us. We share a relationship which helps us both.

I believe that one of the biggest benefits to Affiliates is the chance to work with fleet managers through NAFA. Our educational and social events give Affiliates the chance to work as partners with fleet managers in a non-sales setting. The Affiliate and the fleet manager work together as a team, getting to know each other’s expertise and talents. When a NAFA Affiliate calls on a NAFA Member, they already know each other and may have worked as teammates through the Association.

And because NAFA is so important to fleet managers, many of us intentionally seek suppliers who have demonstrated their commitment to fleet by NAFA affiliation. Lots of people want to make a profit from fleet sales, but the ones who really care about the long-term excellence of fleets are probably active Affiliates in NAFA. That’s why we look through the

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NAFA annual roster and NAFA's other publications when we need products and services. The best Affiliates get to know the fleet manager and the fleet's needs, which gives the Affiliate the chance to show how products or services really can help the fleet managers to succeed.

**PART 2**

Fifteen years ago, Patsy Browson was a wide-eyed newcomer to fleet management. Her desire to learn and help others has led her today to the threshold of one of the most influential positions in the industry: the NAFA Presidency. Proud that she is proof that NAFA is truly member-driven, Browson explained how she learned of NAFA and the value she derives from membership.

How did you first become involved in fleet management?

I didn't plan to be a fleet manager; it just happened through circumstance. In 1976, I was the executive secretary to the chief operating officer of Remco Enterprises in Houston. He was responsible for the fleet at that time and since I was his secretary, he asked me to work on fleet management. Basically, we started with very few vehicles—probably around 25. As I got more involved with fleet, around 1980, I was given the choice of remaining as executive secretary to the corporate chief executive officer and chief operating officer, or taking over full responsibility for the fleet. Since I had already been in the highest secretarial position, I decided to learn fleet management. Through the years Remco grew and became a large corporation. When I left in 1987 Remco had about 500 vehicles.

Why and how did you become involved with NAFA?

In 1978, after I had been responsible for fleet for a couple of years, we started leasing. As we were signing the contract, the leasing company's representative mentioned NAFA. He asked if I wanted to be a member and invited me to a meeting. Strangely enough, it was a meeting of the Reception Committee for the NAFA Annual Conference in 1978. So the first NAFA meeting I attended was a Conference committee meeting, and I actually joined as a Member at the Conference in Houston.

What have been the greatest benefits of your membership?

The greatest benefit has been in making me a professional fleet manager. If NAFA hadn't been there to educate me, I wouldn't have become the professional that I am today. Through chapter meetings and seminars, by participating in the Annual Conference, by reading all NAFA's publications, and by getting to know other fleet managers, I was able to gain the knowledge and skills.

Two other great benefits are the work of Pat O'Connor, NAFA's Legislative Counsel, and our close working relationship with the automakers. This exposure to up-to-the-minute information is so valuable to Cox and to me as a fleet manager that it is impossible to put a dollar value on it.

Even though you were very likely to achieve recognition as a future NAFA President, you still studied for the challenging NAFA Certified Automotive Fleet Management program. Why and what benefits did earning professional certification bring to you?

I studied to become a Certified Automotive Fleet Manager because, as an officer of NAFA, I knew how important earning this honor would be. Achieving the CAFM is an important recognition in itself. The CAFM is a distinguished certification and I wanted that to go along with my name. It not only makes me another recognizable source in NAFA and at my office, it also makes me a recognizable source throughout the entire fleet management profession.

Has the CAFM designation helped your career?

Definitely. Studying for the CAFM exam was very difficult. I will not say it was an easy chore. You need discipline, setting aside time for formal study of textbooks and other materials. But once you receive that Certified Automotive Fleet Manager designation, it just makes you feel that you truly are a professional, you really do understand all the elements of professional fleet management. You feel that you can take that certification and wear it as a badge. I recommend it to everyone.

**PART 3**

Behind every NAFA President there is a solid support team of national, regional and local leaders. As Patsy Browson begins her term as NAFA President, she reflects on the teams of which she's been part, and looks eagerly to the future as a new breed of NAFA leaders take office.

Did any special individuals spark your interest in NAFA leadership?

On the National Board, my mentor was Helen Bland. She was already involved in NAFA when I first started in 1978, when the profession was mainly male. Because our pre-fleet backgrounds were similar and because she was such a respected female fleet manager in a profession which was mostly male at that time, her successes were an inspiration for me.

I should note that being a woman was never a handicap in NAFA. I felt very comfortable at my very first meeting, because at NAFA, it didn't matter whether you were male or female. All that mattered was that you were a fleet manager. If anyone had an experience with a challenge that I was... continued on page 10
going through, all I had to do was ask. Members and Affiliates offered advice and showed me the way.

I believe NAFA still fosters the helping and cooperative relationships, and that’s very important to me. When you’re brand new in this field, it’s often very hard to start out right. You know you have some problems, so it is great to find out that in NAFA, you have many friends. It’s more than just a business acquaintance, you actually become comrades. There’s an open friendship in NAFA that I haven’t felt in any other association.

When did you realize that you might want to be NAFA President?

When I was Chair of the Southwest Chapter in 1983 and was exposed to the NAFA Board of Governors. It was inspiring to me. I just felt that I would like to continue in any capacity that I could and contribute to the association that helped me to become a better, more professional manager.

A few years later, I was approached by the National Nominating Committee to see if I was interested in serving as National Secretary, so I accepted the nomination. That exposure allowed me to see the full workings of the Association and really piqued my interest and desire to serve as NAFA President.

Because NAFA has given me the opportunity to realize my goals and ambitions, I want to make sure we continue to do that for others. NAFA made me a professional fleet manager; I want to make sure the same opportunities are available to everyone.

How will you find the time to lead NAFA while you are managing the complex fleet at Cox Enterprises? Do you have a lot of support?

I have been very fortunate at Cox. When I accepted the fleet management job here, I explained to them how important my NAFA leadership was to me personally.

Cox is very supportive in that they promote employees’ active involvement in professional associations. Most companies should be. When I am introduced, it’s not just as Patsy Brownson, President of NAFA, it’s as Patsy Brownson, Cox Enterprises’ Fleet Manager and President of NAFA. Not only do I get recognition, not only does NAFA get recognition, the company definitely gets recognition. And to be honored by your peers is very important at Cox. They want professional people in their management positions, and to be honored by being elected an officer or as a chapter chair or to be involved in an association to the extent that I have been, they’re very proud of that.

Of course, in order for the company to be proud of what you do, you have to tell them about it. You can’t just sit back and say “I’m going to a meeting” and not tell them why. You can’t expect top management to enthusiastically support your participation in local meetings and national programs unless you clearly identify the value and benefits to your employer. And I make sure I do that through regular reports to my boss.

My boss is a firm supporter of my NAFA involvement because he sees what I can bring back to the company. For instance, he knows that not only do I attend meetings as a NAFA officer, but I do so to talk to fleet managers about their fleets, to talk business. There are lots of benefits to Cox, and my boss—and Cox—recognize that.

Although Cox has gone through a couple of management changes lately, I am very excited about the communication lines that have been opened with people further up in the organizational structure. Just recently, I’ve had several occasions to speak with high level people about fleets and what NAFA does for us. I’m confident those above me know the value and benefit of my NAFA participation and that they support me fully.

There’s a perception that it’s lonely at the top. Are you worried about the heavy responsibility to the profession which is being placed upon you?

I think any good NAFA President is going to be concerned with the responsibility that comes with being president of a large and important association. But I really don’t think I’m facing it alone. This is not a one-person show. I’m going to rely very heavily on the vice-presidents, the trustees, the chapter leaders and the committees to help make decisions for this association to go forward.