Meet NAFA's 26th President

SAL GIACCHI:
Taking the Association into the New Millennium

Twenty-eight years ago, a young Assistant Fleet Manager named Sal Giacchi was sent by his boss to NAFA's Annual Convention in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. That was the start of a relationship with the Association that would have tremendous impact on his fleet career over the years. Since his humble beginnings with the Association, Sal Giacchi CFM/CAFM, Director - Corporate Support Services for Loews Corporation in New York City, has been an active participant at both the local and national levels. And now, as the Association is looking towards the new millennium, he is taking on a new role as NAFA's 26th President.

"I am looking forward to the challenges as President," said Giacchi, who will officially take over the reins from current President David Ogilvie during the Annual Business Meeting at the 1999 Fleet Management Institute in New Orleans, Louisiana. "I really appreciate the membership's support in making me their president and I hope to do the best possible job I can for them. And I know the Association can continue to grow because we have a lot of talented individuals volunteering their time in leadership positions."

Giacchi admits he had no strong desire to become a leader when he first became involved with NAFA. "I had no aspirations," he said. "But, I was very impressed when I went to that first conference and heard the NAFA President make his speech. Maybe at some level I was thinking to myself 'could you imagine being the President of an Association like that and address a crowd like this man was doing?' At that time, however, I would have thought there was no way that could ever happen."

Along the way, Giacchi has become a seasoned fleet manager and a well-respected NAFA leader. He has served at the local level as both the Chair and Treasurer of the New York Chapter. At the national level he has served as Senior Vice President, Vice President, Chairman of the Board of Delegates, Trustee, Chair of the 1989 Annual Conference in New York City, and Chair of NAFA's Certification Committee.

NAFA's CAFM Program, Giacchi explained, was begun after the Certified Fleet Manager (CFM) program was discontinued at the Wharton School in Pennsylvania. "It was really exciting working with the CAFM program during those first few years," he said. "I was certified by Wharton and I am proud of the fact that I was one of the first 10 people in the fleet profession to be certified."

In fact, Giacchi sees the CAFM Program as one of his greatest accomplishments so far (one of the other successes he is proud of is the NAFA Now Index). And, he is happy to see that many of the issues they thought were important when first setting up the program, such as lifecycle costing, are still being taught in the present program.

While some things stay the same, Giacchi recognizes that change is necessary to keep the Association strong and vibrant. He begins his role as President at a time when the Association is undergoing some fundamental restructuring, the most notable being the recent overhaul of its committee structure. As Senior Vice President, he headed a committee to look at the existing committee structure and to evaluate its effectiveness for meeting the needs of the Association's Members. After much consideration, the final recommendation, which was approved during the February Board of Governors Meeting, was the elimination of some committees, the restructuring of others, and the formation of two education committees, the Education Development Committee and the Education Steering Committee.

"I think the change to the committee structure is a really good thing," he explained. "If you look at NAFA and look at where we were and where we are going you will see that it's a positive thing. We have grown nicely over the years and this is a necessary part of that process. The various committees were started for very specific purposes and, in many cases, they have already accomplished what they set out to do. Over the years they have evolved into other areas than what was intended. As part of the restructuring we looked at the individual committees and evaluated whether they needed to meet at each board meeting or whether they needed to meet at all."

To ensure that all segments of NAFA membership are represented in the new process (which consists of the new, smaller committees and focus groups and ad hoc committees) the Education Development Committee will have advisors chosen from every sector of membership, including public sector, commercial, utility, and affiliates. "With the new structure, there will be better representation than was possible before."

Of course the most ambitious aspect of the new structure is the ability to respond to industry issues much quicker than under the old committee structure. For
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 need are increasing and the demand for new services becomes apparent. “The next biggest challenge will probably be how much can NAFCA 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 NAFCA 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 NAFCA 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 NAFCA 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 NAFCA 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 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 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 its 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.”