

Reflecting on Two Years of Change for NAFA Members

NAFA's Immediate Past President Bryan Flansburg, CAFM®

By Bill Romba

THE FLEET INDUSTRY HAS experienced a great deal of change since 2017 when Bryan Flansburg, CAFM, took office as NAFA president. The Location Manager at First Student, Flansburg successfully navigated the Association through some major transitions during his term, chief among these being the fleet industry's ever-quickenning shift toward mobility management.

It was very important to Flansburg that NAFA stay on top of this revolutionary change, not only to keep abreast of the latest information and technological developments, but also to help members understand how they might be affected directly.

"I think that the industry's biggest challenge is understanding how mobility might affect fleet operations. To me, mobility is how we move people or product from point A to point B, whether that is with a fleet vehicle or not. How is that going to affect the fleet manager? I think it's going to affect them from the standpoint [that] it'll be more about managing products or people than managing assets."

Flansburg said he did not have a specific platform during his presidency, but his biggest goal was to advance NAFA as an Association during his term.

"It's funny because the last two presidents, Ruth [Alfson, CAFM,] and I, didn't have a platform that we stood on," he said. "We had so many irons in the fire that we wanted to complete the things we had started and look at what the NAFA Board wanted to do moving forward, rather than what the NAFA president wanted to do. So I don't know

that I really had any goals or things that I wanted to accomplish other than to move the Association forward in a positive direction.

"The biggest thing that I really wanted was for people to understand what mobility may mean to them in the future, and I think that we are really moving that forward," Flansburg added.

Another key change for NAFA took place a few months before Flansburg took office, when members voted to approve landmark bylaw amendments that helped redefine the Association's membership structure and afforded more opportunities to Associate Members. "I think the biggest positive is the fact that we are now allowing our membership to define the future of NAFA," he said. "Previously, it was a subset of that membership, only the fleet managers, that were defining the direction of NAFA. The fact that there can be up to five Associate Members on the Board now, where there used to only be one, it really gives a broader view of what NAFA's membership needs are."

Flansburg also discussed another change that was announced at this year's Institute and Expo when NAFA unveiled the new Communities initiative. "For so long, NAFA has touted that we are the largest and most diverse fleet Association in the world, and that's true. What we lacked, however, was a method by which all of the fleet segments could feel like they had voice in NAFA, or where they could effectively collaborate with each other. The Communities program will solve that. So, if I'm with a university fleet, I will belong to a community that's a university community," he explained. "That way, I



can communicate with people with like-minded fleets so that we can try to help each other solve problems that we've probably already worked on separately."

Successfully navigating a national Association with a few thousand members through crucial changes like these is no small feat. So, not surprisingly, Flansburg stated that serving as president is very different from any other position he's held. "And I think I've held every Board position at least once, if not twice," he quipped.

In a recent conversation with Patti Earley, CAFM, Flansburg said he offered this as advice to her as she begins her term as NAFA's 36th president: "It's different as the president," Flansburg said. "You are the



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leader, so you can’t necessarily force your opinion on others. You must listen to other people. There are multiple personalities on the Board. So the advice I gave Patti is how to know when it’s time for a vote because it’s a fine balance between allowing the introverts to process things long enough and upsetting the extroverts that want to move forward.”

In addition to leading NAFA through some landmark transitions, Flansburg also experienced a devastating personal tragedy during his presidency when his son Derrick died in October 2017. He said that this moment stands out to him because of the heartfelt response he and his wife Sandy received from the NAFA community.

“We all have friends, we all have family, but I call NAFA my family. They were all there for me during that tragedy that my

wife and I went through, so, to me, that really sticks out in my mind,” he said.

Looking back on a professional moment that stands out from his term, Flansburg said that was the push toward mobility. “When I worked at the University of Colorado Boulder, I had someone who reported to me whose job was looking at how to get people onto campus without driving a vehicle. There were around 5,000 parking spaces on campus, and we had 32,000 students and 6,000 faculty and staff, so we had to get people to move around the campus without them necessarily having to drive a vehicle.

“So professionally, the mobility shift is something that I really look back on and think we’ve come a long way, but personally, it was my son’s death where the NAFA family really stood out and shined for me.”

A member of NAFA for 23 years, Flansburg said that, as the fleet industry continues to evolve toward mobility management, he feels NAFA has an excellent opportunity to serve as a vital industry resource.

“I started with NAFA in 1996, and it’s meant so much to me over the years through education and certification,” he said. “I see the Association continuing to bolster its assets and continuing to rise to the needs of the membership and to the needs of the fleet manager, period.”

As mobility begins to play a bigger role in the coming years, the fleet profession will look very different from what it has been in the past. But NAFA and its members are in the best possible position to stay ahead of the curve because of Bryan Flansburg’s foresight and leadership during his presidency. ■

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