

Saltzgeber's Career of Fixing Fleets

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Steven Saltzgeber, CAFS, knows fleet from every angle. Over the past four decades he has managed vehicles, assembled vehicles, fixed vehicles, and even operated them.

Over the years, he has gained a reputation as someone who can fix fleets and improve efficiency. But, more importantly, he takes his expertise and uses it to give back to the industry that helped him get to where he is today.

Saltzgeber was presented the Legendary Lifetime Achievement Award at the 2017 Government Fleet Expo & Conference. The award, sponsored by the National Joint Powers Alliance (NJPA), recognizes one member of the Public Fleet Hall of Fame for his or her lasting contributions to the industry. The winner was selected by industry professionals via an online ballot.

Taking on Risks

For many, a career is defined by one notable role. But Saltzgeber's career is characterized by a wide variety of experience. He's managed two state fleets and two major private fleets, and earned many awards and certifications over the years.

"Don't get comfortable and don't be hesitant to take risks in your career," he said.

At a glance

Throughout his career in fleet, Legendary Lifetime Achievement Award winner Steven Saltzgeber:

- Managed fleets of all sizes
- Continued to develop his skills in fleet and management
- Contributed to the industry through his involvement in various fleet associations.

Saltzgeber's first job out of high school was an assembler and mechanic at a local truck manufacturer, where he helped assemble terminal trucks, single cab trucks used for transporting trailers around a shipment yard.

He spent 15 years at the Utah Transit Authority — starting as a mechanic, working his way up to maintenance supervisor, and obtaining his commercial driver's license (CDL) along the way, which allowed him to drive buses and wrecker trucks.

Next, Saltzgeber became the fleet manager for the City of West Jordan, Utah, for three years. In addition to his 8-5 shift with the fleet, Saltzgeber worked as a volunteer firefighter three nights a week from 6 p.m. to 6 a.m. Because of his CDL, this often meant driving the fire truck.

“The fire chief thought I needed experience in fire in order to specify a truck,” he said. “It did help me, but probably to their detriment, because now I knew what we really needed on a fire truck that wasn’t bells or whistles.”

Saltzgeber was recruited to take over the State of Utah fleet in 1994, where he stayed for 11 years. During that time, the state became interested in consolidating its fleet and this became Saltzgeber’s primary role.

He joined the State of Georgia fleet in 2008, and worked to optimize and centralize the state fleet, which meant downsizing the team and outsourcing services during the recession. He also launched a vehicle tracking program.

After two years Saltzgeber took a job with Coca-Cola and was named vice president of fleet operations. In this role, he created a program to increase reliability, productivity, and maintenance management. Saltzgeber stayed with the company for about three years before he was recruited by Republic Services, managing the waste fleet for two years. He implemented a similar program to improve reliability, availability, and equipment utilization.



Fixing Up Fleets

Over the course of his career, Saltzgeber earned a reputation as a fixer of fleets, and this comes in handy in his current role as a manager for Mercury Associates. At the consulting company, he shares best practices, creates replacement plans, analyzes policies and procedures, and reviews rates.

Saltzgeber said it takes between two and four years to get a fleet on the right track. When approaching a new fleet, he always looks at the number of assets first, which can take up to 50% of a fleet’s costs.

“It’s the one thing you can use to drive down costs. Fleets should continually right-size,” he said.

He also looks at fuel management and labor. Additional aspects of the fleet that should be reviewed include utilization, whether preventive maintenance is conducted on time, and mechanic productivity.

Working for a variety of fleets over the years also brought along valuable leadership knowledge. Saltzgeber said the most rewarding part of his career has been working side by side with people; as fleet manager, he made an effort to know everyone’s job, emphasized the team over individuals, and learned to motivate others.

“People always want to do their best. It’s up to you as the supervisor to bring that out,” he said. “If a person is performing poorly, look at the leadership.”

One overlooked aspect of management, Saltzgeber noted, is to ensure all employees succeed — even if that means succeeding somewhere else. In the past, he has helped employees find other jobs.



Embracing the Industry

Saltzgiver has been a key member of several fleet associations over the years, which started when he first began working at the City of West Jordan and joined the Rocky Mountain Fleet Management Association (now known as FleetPros), eventually serving as chair.

He later became involved with NAFA Fleet Management Association, where he still sits on the Board of Directors, and the National Conference of State Fleet Administrators (NCSFA). As executive director of NCSFA, he managed three profitable and well-attended conferences.

Even with decades of experience, Saltzgiver never stops learning. He spends at least an hour every day reading industry news, keeps a wall full of books about management and fleet, and regularly attends classes to stay current.

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