

← Gaffney to depart NAA

GAFFNEY TO DEPART NAA LONG-SERVING CEO TURNED ORGANIZATION AROUND

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By Jim Moore

Nine years and five months after taking over the National Aeronautic Association, the 111-year-old organization that certifies aviation records and administers awards including the Robert J. Collier Trophy, Jonathan Gaffney will step down Sept. 30. His tenure may have set a record, though Gaffney, with a laugh, said that he just can't be sure.



Jonathan Gaffney speaks at the 2015 Robert J. Collier Trophy dinner. Photo courtesy of the National Aeronautic Association.

Gaffney was hired as the president and CEO in 2007 with **NAA** on the verge of insolvency, and he quickly set to work cutting expenses and righting the ship.

“We were in pretty rough shape,” Gaffney recalled in a telephone interview. “People give me credit for doing this ... actually, it wasn’t easy, but it was pretty clear” what had to be done.

Gaffney cut the staff in half (NAA, a nonprofit organization, now has a paid staff of three full-time and one part-time employee), moved the offices to much more affordable digs, and stopped the presses on an expensive magazine the organization had published, a large part of what had drained the operating reserves and left NAA with perhaps four or five months left before the doors would have closed.

With the expenses under control, he turned to the major corporations—Boeing, Gulfstream, and Lockheed Martin among them—that had long supported NAA, and “they all stepped up.” NAA has had balanced books ever since, and continues to focus on its three core missions: certification of aviation records, presentation of aviation awards, and representing American air sports with the Fédération Aéronautique Internationale.

It has been, Gaffney said, a plum assignment.

“If you love the business this is the best job to have,” Gaffney said, noting it was a “very, very difficult” decision to depart.



Jonathan Gaffney. Contributed photo.

Gaffney’s love of aviation runs deep, and prompted him to visit a Marine Corps recruiter in 1982 with an eye on serving as a fighter pilot. The recruiter, noting Gaffney’s eyeglasses, suggested another path, and he wound up putting his degree in health administration to work in the Navy Medical Service Corps, including service on the *USS Nimitz*, and fleet assignments. He later worked in the administration of the Metropolitan Washington Airports Authority as vice president of communications.

Having been around aircraft and aeronautics throughout his life (Gaffney’s father served in the

U.S. Air Force), earning a pilot certificate remains very much on Gaffney's to-do list. It will have to wait, he said, until he retires. At 55, Gaffney plans to keep working for years to come, though he is not yet sure what his next job will be.

Gaffney said that after nine years, it was time to turn NAA over to a new leader and take his leave from the demanding job of leading a very small organization with a \$1 million budget that works with volunteers and organizations across the country. "They'll bring somebody in that will make it even better," Gaffney said. His resignation is effective Sept. 30, and was announced to the board of directors June 10.

"The entire aviation and aerospace industry are extremely grateful for the tremendous amount of skill, work, and time that Jonathan put into NAA over the last nine years," said Jim Albaugh, Chairman of NAA, in a news release. "He has restored a very important organization in our industry and he will be missed by all of aerospace."

It is possible that Gaffney's long tenure is, in fact, a record, though it would take a great deal of work to certify.

"All I have are calendar dates for chief executives," Gaffney explained. "Stored away in our warehouse are just hundreds of thousands of pounds of documents ... Unless someone digs through it I have no clue."

There was at least one other leader whose tenure spanned nine years, but Gaffney's nine years and five months might be enough to put him at the top of that list, if anyone ever takes the plunge into all that paper.

"I've always wanted to set a record," Gaffney said with a chuckle.



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