

## **The 44th Annual ELA Convention: A Week for Many Thank-You's**

ELA is completing what can only be called an exciting and unique week in its history. First and foremost is that it is a week of many thank-you's. The uncertainty, the desire to connect with others, a quality program in place, many rumors, hindsight and a hurricane combined to create a situation unparalleled in the association's history.

The 44th Convention is now history, however, and many thank-you's go with the week's events. With that in mind, thank you . . .

...to the attendees. Virtually all showed patience and understanding for the accommodations that had to be made to the schedule and conditions. People in the equipment finance and leasing business are type A's, otherwise many would not have been there. First and foremost they do not like to lose control of things. The storm challenged that as attendees lost most of their ability to communicate with the outside, control their schedule inside and then plan their departures with any sense of confidence. But they operated like champs.

...to the Boca Raton Hotel and Resort staff for going well beyond any reasonable expectation for taking care of the comfort and safety of attendees. The food was excellent at all events, the professionalism did not falter and they remained committed to work with the association to make the convention a good experience. The hotel staff was given a standing ovation at the close of the final general session.

...to General Tommy Franks and Jim Collins who did not let the weather prevent them from arriving and delivering two great general sessions. General Franks was the man for the moment so to speak as he went on just several hours after riding out the storm with attendees. He focused on a message of finding opportunities in adversity and that achieving objectives in a competitive world takes a positive attitude and hard work. Jim Collins was equally positive as he ignited attendees through a Good to Great discussion and then shifted into how to remain great. For attendees, his focus on how it is possible to be great in a mature commoditized industry was particularly good. The smaller number of attendees allowed extensive question and answer discussions with each.

...to the ELA officers and directors of ELA for constant leadership during the four days of the convention. Each was everywhere all the time, monitoring, giving information and helping out. Only two directors and one officer out of 27 were unable to make it.

...to Sally Maloney the convention manager and the balance of the ELA staff who continued to work out changes necessary to deliver the general sessions, the breakout sessions and the social sessions.

...to breakout speakers and presenters who had to adjust from sessions with PowerPoint and microphones to the handouts and group discussion. The sessions became more tutorial and roundtable and lively discussions occurred around topics such as Opportunities in Healthcare Financing, Sales Training and Lessons from NorVergence. About two-thirds of the sessions were delivered.

...to PGI, ELA's production company. Ninety minutes after the storm passed, attendees walked into a fully lit ballroom with all production facilities up and running to open the first general session.

...for power generators. They made life much easier. Let's hear it for bottled water while we are at it.

...for the safety of all.

...for 60's temperatures and dry air following the storm which allowed open windows and doors and left the sleeping and meeting rooms comfortable. Convention attendee and former ELA Chairman and current Chairman of the Equipment Leasing and Finance Foundation, Joe Lane offered an insightful comment:

"Over the years, we have done countless surveys among members to rank the value propositions of the convention, and the "opportunity for networking" continues to be at the top of every list. This year, I heard nearly unanimous consent among those who attended that the opportunity for networking, discussion, getting to know each other better, and establishing some common platform for future business was perhaps better than any convention in our history." (Read the full text of Joe Lane's comments)

The stories from the convention will grow and grow. Was it easy for people? No! Within three years we will all have been in waders and wearing life jackets and the camaraderie stories will be wonderful.

Hurricane Wilma was a serious event and left a large part of South Florida in bad shape, much worse than expected. All of the leaders of ELA wish that the convention that was planned could have been delivered as planned, but nature is powerful. You cannot apologize for nature; you must be in awe of it. One former chairman of ELA stood outside for much of the storm just to marvel at its speed and power. He observed that he "...now knows he hasn't seen everything, it was amazing."

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mike Fleming". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long, sweeping underline.

Mike Fleming  
ELA President