

NYAMA MEMBER PROFILE
NYAMA PRESIDENT AND ALBANY INTERNATIONAL AIRPORT
ASSISTANT AIRPORT MANAGER JOHN DELBALSO

There's an old joke about a U.S. Marine drill instructor who asks for a volunteer to step forward—and all but one of the Marines in formation take a step backward.

“Thank you, private!” the staff sergeant barks at the Marine left standing alone.
“Now go clean the head!”

The joke has a kernel of truth to it: There's a simple mantra in the military that goes something like, “Never volunteer for anything.”

It's a phrase NYAMA President and U.S. Marine veteran John DelBalso often has heard during his career—he just doesn't buy it.

“My M.O. has always been to try to get involved in everything I could,” says DelBalso, who applied that philosophy throughout his nearly 10 years in the Marine Corps. His try-anything attitude in the service ultimately led to an assignment as a CH-53 helicopter crew chief in Somalia during Operation Restore Hope, followed by a high-profile position with the Marine One helicopter squadron; DelBalso frequently saluted President Clinton as he arrived and departed on the White House lawn from 1994 to 1999.

DelBalso left the Marine Corps with the rank of Staff Sergeant to join Albany International Airport in 1999. At the upstate hub, not far from where DelBalso grew up in Latham, N.Y., he advanced through the ranks for AvPorts, the firm that manages many of the daily operations at the airport run by the Albany County Airport Authority. Prior to being named assistant airport manager in 2013, DelBalso took part in nearly every aspect of the airport's daily operations, including airside and landside operations, security, access controls, wildlife hazard management, properties management, and much more.

“That's the great thing about working at an airport like Albany,” he says. “You get the opportunity to do and learn so much.”

His opportunities included joining the NYAMA Board in 2013. Soon after, DelBalso became part of the Executive Board, culminating with his election as president at the 2016 NYAMA Fall Conference, in the organization's 40th anniversary year.

DelBalso is especially proud of membership's accomplishments following NYAMA's Advocacy Day in March. The state budget adopted earlier this year sharply increased the appropriation for the NY State Aviation Capital Grant Program, adding \$10 million to the \$12.5 million that was originally earmarked. (Of the \$22.5 million, \$2.5 million will be directed to the Airport Improvement Program, which helps cover the state's share of airport projects that receive federal funding.)

"Getting that additional funding was a big victory, as was the provision on transportation network companies (TNCs)," he says. "Giving airports the ability to regulate Uber and Lyft and other TNCs is so important, and it got done because of the work put in by our membership. It started with the preparation. The initial calls took place as long as six months ago by the committee, and then on Advocacy Day itself, we had close to 50 members participating, going to dozens of meetings.

"I know the Fall Conference is our big event, but in many ways, Advocacy Day is one of the most important things we do. And I think NYAMA's credibility got a huge boost when we helped gain passage of the Aviation Jobs Act. Now, for aviation issues in the state, we have the ear of key members of the state Assembly, the Senate, and the governor's office. You put all that together, that's how you get things done."

DelBalso and NYAMA's management team also helped create a new strategic plan for the organization earlier this year, and there's still a few items on the president's punch list that he'd like check off before his term ends in the fall.

"One of the things is providing greater value to our membership. We have ideas and are working on it, and I think that will help us build and expand our membership," he says. "It's been a great year so far, and I think there's still more we can do."