

# THE GRAPEVINE

VOL. 2 / AIRCRAFT MECHANICS FRATERNAL ASSOCIATION / SPECIAL EDITION

## AMFA Mourns the Loss of Founder, Former National Director



O.V. Delle-Femine

## Dell's Dream

By Louie Key, National Director

This special edition of the Grapevine is dedicated to the memory, achievements, and lasting legacy of O.V. Delle-Femine — as we affectionately knew him, “Dell.” Dell and several of his coworkers started the Aircraft Mechanics Fraternal Association in 1962, and he served as the National Director until

he retired in 2008. I have read many tributes to Dell over the years. When he retired an entire issue of the Grapevine was bursting with accolades for the man who had influenced an entire industry with his vision. Some of the adjectives used to describe Dell included charismatic, tenacious, passionate, intelligent, patient,

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## Everyone working in our profession owes Dell a debt of gratitude



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a man of great character who was selfless in his drive to promote his great ideal of a union that exclusively represented the class and craft of the aircraft maintenance technician and related personnel.

I knew and worked with Dell for many years and all of those descriptions are accurate. I accompanied Dell on many organizing trips and informational meetings, and I loved to listen when he would speak and tell those in attendance about the inception and history of AMFA. It was great to watch how Dell's passion for providing a better alternative to the industrial unions came through and moved and inspired those in attendance. His enthusiasm was contagious and he took great pride in revealing that it was AMFA that introduced the first A&P license premium in the industry. He delighted in sharing the many accomplishments of AMFA and would stay and spend time with the entire group until every single question was answered. Everyone working in our profession owes Dell a debt of gratitude.

I first started serving with Dell on the National Executive Council in 2000, and experienced spectacular growth in our Association. We grew from three airlines and approximately 2,000 members to a record high membership of around 18,000 members at eight airlines. It was a great time in the industry, and it was a great time for AMFA.

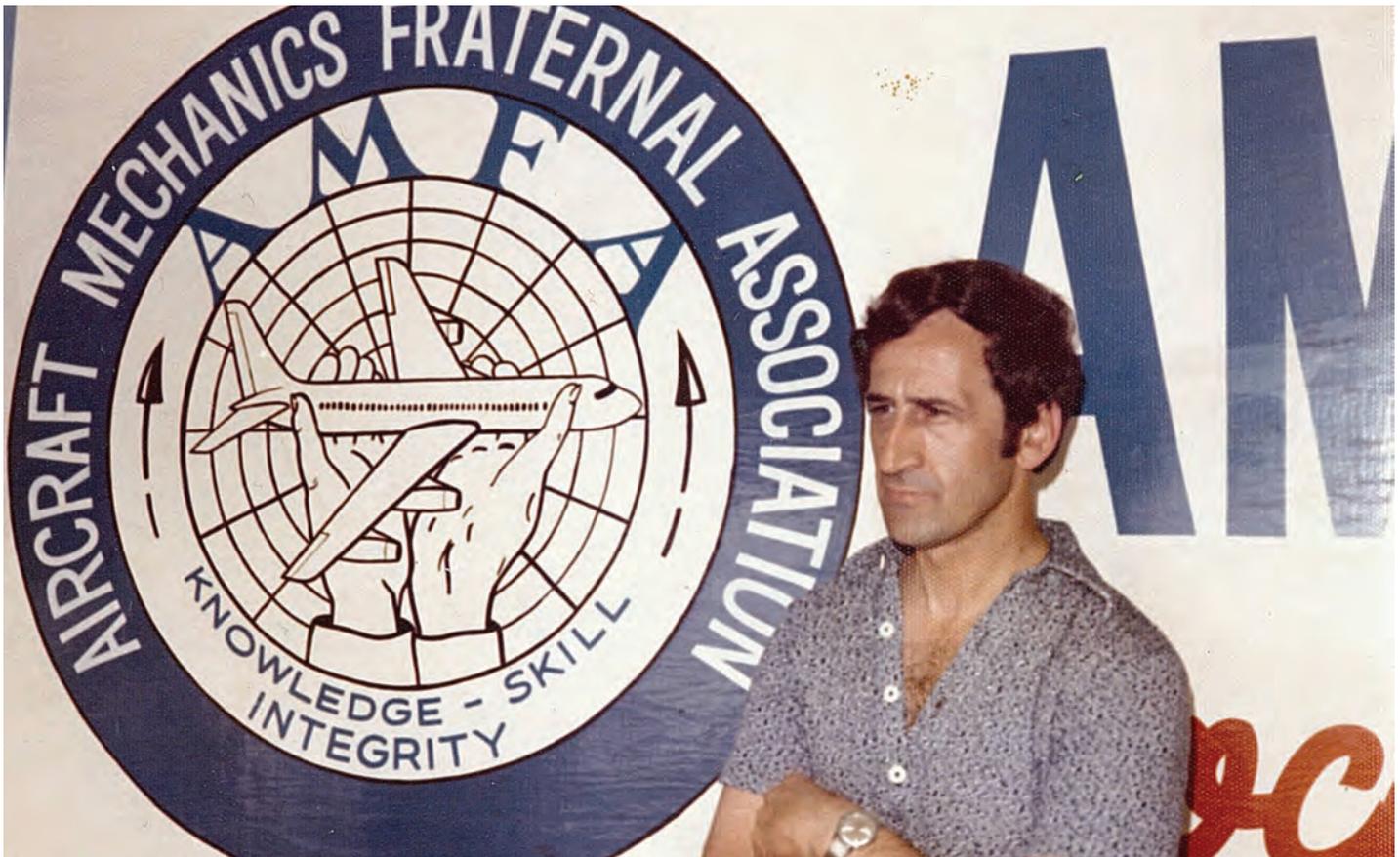
I learned so much working shoulder-to-shoulder with Dell on multiple negotiating committees through the following years. And after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks, the airline industry went through one of its worst periods. Many airlines went bankrupt and/or merged with other airlines leading to the loss of representation rights for AMFA. We endured painful membership losses before stabilizing. Though it all, Dell's determination never faltered, he had been through industry cycles before and knew that we would prevail. Today, AMFA represents two of the most prof-

itable and highly regarded airlines in the industry: Alaska Airlines and Southwest Airlines, with a membership base of approximately 3,200 members.

The airline business model for aircraft maintenance has drastically changed from the days when Dell and his co-founders first started AMFA in 1962. Airlines used to have hangars and technicians to do all of their aircraft maintenance work. Nowadays, there are unlimited third-party maintenance providers that are more than eager to take over an airline's maintenance and relieve the airline of having to manage a maintenance facility; all the airline has to do is simply write a check to the vendor. With this new reality, Dell's dream of all aircraft maintenance technicians being represented by one union is more relevant than ever.

As the torch of AMFA has been passed down we, the current members and leaders of AMFA, must continue the quest to be the voice of the craft industry-wide and hope that we can demonstrate even half the dedication, drive, and perseverance that Dell exemplified for us all these years.

Whenever we gather at union events someone there will always share a Dell story, which of course then leads to another story; some of the stories are inspiring recalling great battles, others are humorous, and many of the stories demonstrate his quiet generosity. They all weave together to describe a man we all wish we could emulate in some way. I know that I am a better person for having known him. Clearly, Dell was a leader and a man who influenced and inspired many people throughout his life. We will all miss him dearly and cherish the memories that the stories keep alive. Thank you Dell!



## Salute

By Aaron Hansen,  
Assistant National Director

I have many fond memories of my dear friend Dell. Dell instilled in some people a fight that would always be to the bitter end. Even though he was blessed with a long life, and we are saddened by his loss, Dell spent most of his life fighting for what he thought was right. Not only from a union standpoint did he fight, but also as a public service volunteer where many a holiday was spent working in New York in the soup kitchens helping others along with his late wife Marie.

Dell loved attending membership meetings or walking the hangar floor to see the membership. I enjoyed bringing him to Phoenix to see everyone when I was President

of Local 32 — he never turned me down for a visit. He loved to meet with the guys upstairs in the break room and have vigorous debates. I also remember the time we went to Detroit to speak before the UAW members during the Northwest strike and he prodded me to be the one to speak to the audience. That was my first time ever speaking before a group of about a thousand people!

Dell loved nothing more than to visit those that were a part of the Association and to also visit those interested in becoming a part of it as well. From Minneapolis to Atlanta to Tulsa and San Francisco, he would be there in a “New York minute” waiting outside the gates to talk to technicians and inspiring them to the true meaning of AMFA. The amount of hours that Dell spent flying in a plane far surpassed many businessmen.

He travelled from city to city to inspire technicians to stand up for themselves and realize that the craft specific philosophy was the best form of representation. Dell stood behind his principles and his decisions.

I remember many times I would call upon Dell for advice, and he would always have the answer to help guide me through some tough times during my early leadership days. He always had a direction in which to lead. He was a true leader. He knew the direction and stuck with it.

My friend, you truly will be missed, I have lost many super heroes in my life, but the memories of them will always be retained in my heart. As you used to say to me, “I will always honor our friendship and the respect that I have for you.” I salute you with those exact same sentiments.

# And I Bid You Farewell

By Justin Madden,  
National Secretary/Treasurer

The world has lost a great man. The craft has lost its biggest advocate. AMFA has lost its founder and champion. And I have lost a friend.

Say what you want about O.V. Delle-Femine, affectionately referred to as Dell. He could be obstinate, pig-headed, and difficult to work with at times — some of his tirades are legendary. He was also kind, deeply passionate about AMFA, and devoted to elevating our craft. Some have and will continue to vilify Dell as a raider and opportunistic promoter; however, he should be remembered as a liberator, a man who sought out change and never stopped.

The first time I met Dell, he was in Oakland, CA helping negotiate an amended contract with Alaska Airlines. We were there to discuss the AMFA organizing drive that was ongoing at Southwest Airlines. After that initial meeting with Dell, I walked away amazed at his level of energy and excitement for the craft. I had already heard the stories about Dell years before from the Ozark technicians who I worked with at Trans World Airlines. I heard about him living in his vehicle and on a park bench during the difficult times when AMFA represented no one and there was no income. About the sacrifices he made both personally and professionally to ensure that AMFA survived with integrity. Upon meeting him, I knew they were all true. His persona was larger than life and he made an immediate impact on me.

Though the years, I was able to spend time with Dell for various reasons, whether it was helping to build Local 32, preparing for the AMFA National Convention, or just to have dinner when he was in town. I was always struck by his intelligence and breadth of knowledge. Prior to the 2004 Convention, Dell sought out advice on how the Association could be changed for the better. I felt both lucky and honored to be one of those folks that he trusted. The Convention did not go as expected and Dell's work was not incorporated, but as I think back, it is refreshing to know that even during the pinnacle of AMFA's success, Dell sought out change for the better.

Dell offered me many pieces of advice over the years, but what stuck with me most was his personal request that I always put my family first. He mentioned it as parting words every time we met. I thought then and now that this came from a deep personal regret over his sacrifice of family on behalf of the Association. I have no doubts that they suffered immensely as Dell was forced to be away much of the time and income was spotty at best. But it is because of their suffering that we have AMFA today, alive and well. They deserve thanks for their part in this Association, and I tip my hat to them. As for me, I have done my best to heed his advice over the years and put my family first. Unfortunately, I have not always been successful in my endeavor to do so, but I continue to strive towards that end. I have and will continue to preserve his tradi-

tion and offer that same advice to AMFA's dedicated Offices, Representatives, and Staff.

As we go about our daily lives and time marches on, I am sad but sure that his memory will fade. Already, many of our current members have never had the chance to meet Dell and witness his charisma firsthand. If this is you, then trust me when I say that you are better off because of him. He and his family's sacrifice over the last fifty plus years has given our craft open negotiations, democratic elections, and direct member control over their union, just to name a few. Although he was not able to see his ultimate goal of AMFA representing the entire craft come to fruition, his influence will be felt for generations. It is because of AMFA's success and the yearning of the craft for change that the industrial unions have adapted their model to incorporate some of his ideals.

Dell represented many things to the Association and its members: leader, teacher, and friend. He taught us to persevere. He taught us that to elevate the craft we had to be professionals. He taught us to be transparent, no matter how much it hurt. He taught us to listen to the minority, even as we made decisions on behalf of the majority. He taught us that one person can have such a great impact on a cause, and for that and the so many more that I have not listed, I am grateful. Dell, you will be sorely missed, but never forgotten. May you rest in peace with the knowledge that you did awe-inspiring things for a profession, and more so for those in it. I thank you, and my family thanks you. Until we meet again...

# Labor of Love

By Lee Seham,

Seham, Seham, Meltz & Petersen, LLP  
To the aircraft maintenance technician reading this – know that you were loved. You were loved with the intensity of a father who would cheerfully endure any sacrifice or his only son.

I once asked Dell what kept him going through all the personal attacks and vilification he suffered. “Hate!” he exclaimed, pounding his clenched fist into his open hand. “I hate those bahh-stards!”

And, certainly, there have always been an array of characters who fully earned our hatred: managers demanding that unairworthy aircraft be returned to service, union representatives conspiring to have technicians paid below market rates, NMB officials zealously seeking to deny the technicians their voice.

But hate is the wrong word to apply to someone with as big a heart as Dell's. Dell was a happy warrior fiercely determined to promote you and your craft

He believed in your knowledge, skill, and integrity. He admired how you bore the heavy responsibility of maintaining aviation safety. He felt to the marrow the wrongs you suffered.

He was also so proud of you and would constantly remind you to be proud of yourself. I remember him taking hold of my tie and cinching up the knot so that it would cover the top button of my dress shirt.

“Remember,” he enjoined, “we are professionals representing professionals.” No one was going to disrespect his technicians.

To this day, I have never known anyone personally who gave so much of himself for a cause. This cause reduced him from economic comfort and independence to poverty. And his cause was you.

He must have felt these sacrifices keenly. As I have written, Dell was not an ascetic. He enjoyed a fine meal, a good cigar, and the view of a shapely waitress as she walked away.

But he never complained and, with a few other brave souls, kept the flame alive.

When word got out that his passing might be imminent, technicians throughout the country started sending “Thank You” cards to Dell. They came from men who knew Dell at Ozark, Hughes Airwest, Southern, Northwest, Southwest, Alaska, United – and even from airlines that AMFA has never represented.

Many cards thanked him for measurable improvements in their standard of living: higher wages, a more comfortable retirement, better work rules. Others thanked him for things less tangible. With words sometimes direct, sometimes poetic, they thanked him for inspi-



ration, for pride restored, for lasting hope.

When I finally met Dell's daughter this year, I felt moved to apologize to her for our having leaned so heavily on her father for so many years. Showing herself to be her father's daughter, her response was a gracious one.

In mid-April, she wrote me about the Thank You cards her father was receiving:

*Dad always said there was a lot of hate in his business. I told him yesterday, as I was holding a stack of cards: You may have experienced hate in your career, but these cards represent a lot of love for you now!*

For those in the craft, cherishing Dell's memory should be a labor of love. It means taking pride in your knowledge, skill, and integrity. It means remembering every day that airline safety rests in your hands. It means looking out for your fellow airline mechanic even as you press him to meet the highest standard of which he is capable.

Dear Dell – rest in peace. We've got this.

# In the Beginning

O.V. Delle-Femine (pronounced Dell-Fem-a-knee), commonly referred to as “Dell,” spent a stint as an Air Force mechanic during the ‘50s, and then was hired by American Airlines for a job at LaGuardia Airport in New York. Naturally gregarious and inclined toward politics, Dell began attending union meetings. The Transport Workers Union (TWU) represented American’s mechanics; back then (and currently), the TWU was a broadbased union that represented more bus drivers and subway workers than aircraft mechanics. In 1968 Dell left American Airlines to devote his time to building a union that solely represents airline mechanics, and thus AMFA’s journey began.

In 1961, Dell and two mechanic friends from American Airlines, John Manchester and Dave Herr, became increasingly distraught over the representation of the TWU. “Mechanics were a minority, and we didn’t have the numbers to get a good contract,” Dell recalled. “We’d go to meetings and there would be other crafts here that had nothing to do with us. They wouldn’t even listen to us... I’m not saying we’re elitist; doctors and lawyers are elitist. But mechanics have been shortchanged.” And with this motivation the three founders set out to start their own union. In November of 1961 along with 40 members, they held the first national convention in Des Plaines, Illinois where they named this new organization the Aircraft Mechanics Fraternal Association (AMFA). At this National Convention, they wrote and adopted the AMFA

National Constitution and elected O.V. Delle-Femine as the first AMFA National Director. The first AMFA local chartered was Local 2 (Boston, Massachusetts) in 1963.

Martin Seham, a New York lawyer, had helped American Airlines’ pilots establish their own independent union. With knowledge regarding Seham’s success with the pilots, Dell and three others (dressed in their work cloths) visited Seham in his midtown Manhattan office to discuss work with AMFA. Martin Seham became AMFA’s attorney in the ‘60s. “They were deferential, they were respectful, and they were absolutely unmovable in terms of the principles they were pursuing,” Seham recalls. “They were in trouble financially and yet at the same time they were getting more and more members.”

Seham says their passion awakened his own dream of helping the working class. The lawyer agreed to represent AMFA and let the union pay him when it could. He would represent AMFA for more than 20 years; his son, Lee Seham, who is widely respected amongst the membership and leadership, still represents AMFA today.

A showdown occurred one day in the mid-‘60s in St. Louis. Two courting unions and Dell (representing AMFA) spoke to mechanics from Ozark Air Lines, who would soon be choosing a union. The other unions tried to limit Dell’s time at the microphone, but the more they tried to stifle him, the hotter the audience grew. AMFA won in an upset.

By 1964, AMFA had its first successful union representational election, at Ozark Airlines, where it would serve the mechanics for the next 20 years. AMFA’s organizing activities were not welcomed either by the companies or the unions that already possessed mechanic members. “In the ‘60s, during a meeting with American Airlines in Tulsa, the incumbent representatives arrived with chains and baseball bats,” Dell recalled. “There was a case of empty Coke bottles nearby. I was ready to throw them if I had to.” He recounts anonymous calls to his wife: “they told her I was out with another woman. Even women called my house. Fortunately, I had a strong Irish wife who was very tough.”

## Effects of the Airline Industry in the Wake of Deregulation

AMFA soon was winning elections at other airlines beyond Ozark, including Braniff, Hughes Air West, and the Trump Shuttle. The Association was obtaining members raises, better pensions, and pay premiums for special skills. But, success proved elusive.

As smaller airlines merged into bigger ones, the government would hold an election for workers to choose between competing unions (single carrier status election). Since a much bigger airline was always buying the carriers that AMFA represented, the new bigger airline’s union would win those elections. One by one, AMFA lost the smaller airlines it had represented.

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AMFA had represented mechanics at Southern Airways and Hughes Air west, which merged with North Central to later become Republic Airlines by the early 1980s. Although larger unions ended up representing mechanics at Republic, AMFA-inspired provisions in their contract remained until the Northwest-Republic merger in 1986.

In 1986, Trans World Airlines gobbled up Ozark, and for the next several years, Dell was a union leader representing only associate members (the backbone of AMFA) who kept the Association alive.

### Tough Times

The stories of how Dell sacrificed to build the union, including sleeping in airport terminals on organizing trips when he had no money for a room to living out of a suitcase for over a decade, has won converts at airline after airline. During the two years of Northwest contract negotiations (and the preceding organizing drive), he lived out of a budget motel near the Minneapolis-St. Paul Airport.

Dell has been a pillar of strength to all of the mechanics in the airline industry. It is believed that few people, if any, would be able to go through what Dell has gone through personally and professionally, and rebound time and time again. The adjective “tenacious” best describes his character in over 45 years of focus towards AMFA’s philosophies.

The Associate Membership spanning across the United States supported Dell and AMFA in keeping its beliefs alive. Contemplating at one point to concede, Dell’s wife

Marie is credited with refusing to allow him to give up.

### The Tide Turns

Things began to turn for AMFA in the ‘90s; after a year of deliberations, in 1998 the National Mediation Board in Washington, D.C. ruled that the aircraft mechanics and related could finally be represented solely by the classification of the “Mechanics class and craft” This ruling made it harder for industrial unions to “inflate” the voting populace with members represented in other classifications; thereby, nullifying AMFA’s representational efforts in organizing their own class of Mechanics and Related.

AMFA was expanding at an increasing rate and was in need of professional administrative support. In 1995 AMFA enlisted the services of the McCormick Advisory Group (MAG) in Laconia, NH to fulfill the administrative aspects of the Association. MAG assisted in all areas of administration from financial services, officer elections, organizing, facilitating the AMFA National Conventions, assisting the NEC, and economic advising during airline contract negotiations.

AMFA won the right to represent the mechanic & related class at Mesaba, the regional carrier that operates as Northwest Airlink from Detroit and Minneapolis-St. Paul in 1996. Another victory followed at Alaska Airlines in 1998, AMFA was certified as the representative agent for 10,000 mechanics and aircraft cleaners at Northwest in 1999. An industry leading contract was achieved by the members at Northwest on May 9th of 2001.

Southwest was won a year later in 2002 in three months. Horizon Air also joined AMFA in 2002. United Airlines was added in July 2003. AMFA, “The little union that could” now represented 3 of the top 5 and half of the top 10 major Airlines in the United States.

In August of 2006, AMFA National took over responsibility of the administrative functions and moved the National Office to Aurora, Colorado.

After almost a half-century of guiding AMFA, Dell retired in 2008. His efforts and sacrifices for the Aircraft Maintenance Technician and Related are legendary and cement a legacy that continues on today through the elected officials at AMFA.

### The More Things Change, the More They Stay the Same

Although the airline industry and its unions have faced recent struggles due to the trend towards consolidation, AMFA’s members enjoy quality representation from a craft-specific union dedicated to their profession. AMFA’s Constitution is still one of the most, if not the most, democratic in the airline industry today. It is because of Dell and many nameless volunteers who personally sacrificed for the Association that we enjoy our unique brand of craft-specific unionism. For that and so much more, we honor you Dell.



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# The Future is Bright

Today, AMFA is proud to represent Aircraft Maintenance Technicians and Related at Alaska Airlines and Southwest Airlines. Our members enjoy industry-leading pay and benefits as well as programs unique to AMFA, such as the Accident Investigation Team, Professional Standards, and numerous other craft-based goals and initiatives. The leadership at AMFA is steadily guiding the Association into the future while remaining aware of the past and never forgetting that together we are strong.



**Knowledge - Skill - Integrity**