

Memorial for Frank Gargione and Review of the Ka and Broadband Communications and Joint ICSSC and Ka-Conferences' History,

by Tom Butash, *Chair of the AIAA Communications Systems Technical Committee (CMSTC) which has organized and conducted the ICSSC for almost 60 years and supports the Joint ICSSC and Ka-Conference Planning and Organizing Committee.*

Frank Gargione conceived the Ka and Broadband Communications Conference in 1993 while he was the Project Manager for the Advanced Communications Technology Satellite (ACTS) development at Martin Marietta Astro Space (later Lockheed Martin Space Systems) to serve as a forum for the presentation of Ka-Band systems R&D, experimental results and the exchange of innovative new ideas, designs and technology. Aware that Franco Marconicchio, Italian Space Agency ITALSAT Program Manager, and Francesco Valdoni, a Telecommunications professor at the University of Rome, were developing similar Ka-Band systems and technologies, Frank collaborated with Franco and Francesco to co-found the Ka and Broadband Communications Conference, the first edition of which was held in Rome with great success in 1995. Although the Ka Conference and the ICSSC were held separately for the first 10 years of the former's existence, Frank clearly recognized the common interests and potential synergies between the Ka Conference and ICSSC. Hence, together with Space Systems Loral's Ed Elizondo (CMSTC Secretary at the time), Frank proposed, planned and organized the first Joint ICSSC and Ka-Conference which was held in Rome in 2005. Offering a personal anecdote, Tom recalled how Frank, learning that Tom had a free afternoon before the Joint Conference was scheduled to begin, took him on a non-stop, four-hour, fast paced walking tour of many of Rome's most celebrated historical sites and monuments. Ever Italy's proud son and easily ten years Tom's senior, Frank literally wore Tom's feet and legs out, but showed absolutely no fatigue or evidence of slowing down.

By all measures, the 2005 Joint Conference was a phenomenal success, but pre-existing commitments of both the ICSSC and Ka Conference precluded holding the second Joint Conference for another seven years. The ICSSC and Ka-Conference were successfully held jointly again in 2012 (Ottawa, Canada) and 2013 (Florence, Italy) further reinforcing the partnership between these two esteemed communications satellite systems conferences.

A second hiatus in holding the next Joint Conference, again due to pre-existing commitments, occurred in 2014 and 2015, but planning for the 4th Joint ICSSC and Ka Conference – to be held in Cleveland, Ohio in October 2016 – began soon after the two separate conferences were completed in 2015.

Frank, always the dedicated, passionate father and champion of both the Ka and Joint Conference, worked tirelessly to organize the 2016 Joint Conference. He arranged a meeting with Badri Younes, NASA ScaN Program Administrator, and his staff at NASA Headquarters in Washington, DC in early February to explore how NASA might participate in and support the Joint Conference. Tom met Frank, who had taken a train from his New Jersey home, at a subway station a few city blocks from NASA Headquarters to discuss agenda items during their walk to the meeting. Several times Frank asked Tom to slow down, but each time Tom subconsciously resumed his rapid, natural walking pace. Finally, Frank confided he had a defective valve in his heart that needed repair or replacement and that he had scheduled the required surgery to take place after the 2016 Joint Conference because he did not want his two-month recovery from the surgery to detract from Joint Conference planning and organization.

Tragically and sadly, it proved to be a delay (link) too long for even Frank to close.

On October 3, 2016 – exactly two weeks, almost to the hour, before the Joint Conference was scheduled to begin – a regular Monday morning planning and organizing telecon had just begun when Frank joined the discussion, and abruptly and uncharacteristically said he'd have to drop off the call but would rejoin soon. However, Frank did not return to the telecon and, as usual, several issues and questions arose that only he could address or answer. Tom took the action to call Frank to get his directions, but when he did, he was connected to Frank's home office voicemail and left a message. Uncharacteristically, hours passed without Frank's return call. Later that evening, Frank's wife, Lucy, returned Tom's call with the tragic news. When Frank dropped off the telecon he was in cardiovascular distress. He was breathing heavily, perspiring, weak and laid down on his bed. Lucy frantically called 911 twice requesting immediate emergency medical transport. She asked Frank if he was in pain. He replied he wasn't but passed away within a few minutes.

Thus Frank sadly made the ultimate sacrifice for the Joint ICSSC and Ka Conference that he dearly loved. Not coincidentally, the ICSSC and Ka Conference have been held jointly every year since and will continue as a Joint Conference for the foreseeable future, thereby realizing Frank's dream.

This Sunday, October 3, will mark the 5th anniversary of Frank's tragic, untimely passing. As you enjoy the 2021 Joint Conference and when you appreciate future Joint Conferences, please remember the conference's dedicated, passionate father who made the ultimate sacrifice to make it all possible.

Delivered by Tom Butash to 2021 Joint Conference attendees at the Crystal Gateway Marriott during the event's September 28 Luncheon.

