

TOM LIA

Biography

NIFSAB -- Northern Illinois Fire Sprinkler Advisory Board

Tom started in the fire service as a paid-on-call firefighter for the City of Oak Forest in 1977. At Oak Forest, Tom was trained as an Emergency Medical Technician (EMT) at South Suburban Hospital then as a Paramedic through Ingalls Memorial Hospital. During his tenure there, Tom became President of the Firemen's Association and helped organize a citywide fundraiser for an Advanced Life Support ambulance. His full-time firefighting career began in Chicago Ridge in 1982 where he earned the rank of Lieutenant and eventually Director of Emergency Medical Services (EMS) and Emergency Services and Disaster Agency (ESDA) concurrently. He participated in Regional Emergency Services Organizations and developed a district-wide (1st District) Emergency Weather Response System for fourteen communities. During his tenure at Chicago Ridge, he coordinated the Fire Prevention and Public Education Program where they received recognition from the state as having the number one rated fire prevention bureau for a town with a population of less than 25,000. Concurrently with Chicago Ridge, Tom also began working at the Orland Fire Protection District as a Plan Reviewer and New Construction Inspector. In 1989 Tom became employed by Orland Fire Protection District on a full-time basis and within the first year was switched to day shifts in the fire prevention bureau as the New Construction Inspector. In 1992 the District appointed Tom as Fire Marshal with a staff of four full-time personnel and sixteen part-time inspectors.

Formal education includes an Associates Degree in Fire Science from Moraine Valley Community College, a Bachelors Degree in Business Administration (Management Major) from Chicago State University, and a Masters Degree in Public Safety Administration from Lewis University. In regard to State Certifications, Tom also earned his Fire Officer III and Fire Prevention Officer I and II. Other related efforts included working as a field instructor for the Illinois Fire Inspectors Association, Illinois Fire Chiefs Association, University of Illinois, and Moraine Valley Community College. In 1989, while with the Chicago Ridge Fire Department, Tom was appointed as Coordinator of the Fire Science Program at Moraine Valley Community College and held this position until 1994. He worked to correlate college classes to the state curriculum requirements and personally educated over 1200 fire students in fire prevention classes. Tom re-entered the program as the interim Coordinator in 2000 until 2004. Tom has been involved with the State Fire Marshal Committees to develop the new Fire Prevention Officer I classes and an improved Fire Prevention Principle I Class for firefighters and inspectors.

During his tenure at Orland FPD, Tom was a member of the Illinois Fire Inspectors Association and held the offices of Secretary, Treasurer, Vice-President and President. Locally he worked for more progressive codes in Orland Park and was a grassroots originator for the State School Fire Sprinkler Legislation with Orland's Fire Chief Bob Buhs, columnist Phil Kadner, and former State Senator Bill Mahar. An Underwriter's Laboratory certification program for fire alarm systems was instituted in Orland Park to reduce false alarms (the first district in the state) including the dangers to the public. The Orland Board/Administration also fought and won State Appellate & Supreme Court cases involving water supply to fire sprinkler systems and the right for a fire district to enforce its codes over a county code, (Orland Fire Protection District versus Intra-State Piping). In the area of grants, Tom applied for the NFPA Learn Not-To-Burn grant and was awarded one of two presented in the state that year for implementation into district elementary schools. Tom also worked on a committee for a grant towards a fire safety trailer from the Andrew Foundation, also for use in the district schools. NIFSAB also obtained a FEMA Grant to educate and inform the public on residential fire sprinklers. The State Chamber of Commerce and later the Illinois Fire Safety Alliance voted Orland the Grand Award for the best Fire Prevention program in the State in 1992 and as the number one fire prevention bureau in its population category in 1993, 1994, and 1995. As the carbon monoxide (CO) problem arose in 1994, the Orland FPD mitigated the challenge by developing a nationally recognized emergency response procedure to CO calls which is in widespread use today. In 2008, Tom was awarded the Illinois Fire Inspectors Association "Dick Arthur" Lifetime Achievement Award, named after their first President.

Tom joined the Northern Illinois Fire Sprinkler Advisory Board as Executive Director in 1999. Tom concentrates on fire and building code issues, provides training and educational classes, contractor liaison, and plan review assistance/interpretation assistance to any member of the fire service community or public who requests it, continuing his strong fire service career sprinkler advocacy.

In this time the fire sprinkler trailer program has been expanded, an educational Side-By-Side burn program developed with over 230 successful separate demos completed to date, demonstration house publicity program and fire official scholarship classes were also developed.

(At this time, 85 communities/districts have zero fire tolerance or "0" square foot ordinances and 59 political entities have NFPA 13D single-family home fire sprinkler ordinances following the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) *America Burning* and FEMA *Firefighter Life Safety Summit* recommendations.) A total of 175 political entities have made progressive fire sprinkler code amendment threshold changes. At the start, three communities had -0-, two communities had 13D and 28 had progressive fire sprinkler code threshold changes. In addition, the State adopted the LSC 101 2000 Edition (retroactive), a College Dorm Retrofit Act, followed by a Chicago High-Rise retrofit Ordinance.