

A Lifetime of Advice for the Future of the Profession

WHEN ROGER BOURGEOIS BEGAN HIS CAREER IN THE INDUSTRY, he'd never heard of fire protection engineering. Now, 43 years later, he has built a business around "Engineered" Fire Protection Suppression Systems and hot sauce!

A native of Raceland, Louisiana, Bourgeois graduated from Louisiana State University earning a B.S in industrial technology. After a stint in the U.S. Air Force, he joined Humble Pipeline Company, the predecessor of Exxon Pipeline Company, a division of Exxon Corporation. His initial work focused on pipeline projects, but as his job evolved he got into fire protection projects. "Rookie employees were handed fire protection projects because nobody understood fire protection. I had

a degree in industrial technology, not fire protection, but I learned on the job (OTJ)," Bourgeois said.

"Delta Fire Systems made me an offer after I worked for Exxon," continued Bourgeois. "I did not learn things immediately, just as today's professionals have a broad spectrum of solutions to learn, but many of them have a formal education or training options. Our options were limited. So, I learned OTJ. The bad part about OTJ is that you only learn what the person who

is training you knows. If he or she is doing it wrong, you will too. It's better for the fire protection industry that we have formal education and training for our designers, installers, and engineers."

In 1984, Delta's parent company declared bankruptcy and Bourgeois found himself faced with the decision of what to do next. At the urging of his wife, Carolyn, he decided to start his own company and Bourgeois & Associates, Inc. opened its doors for business on October 15, 1984.



Bourgeois's Hot Sauce became the official calling card of the company. To date, hundreds of thousands of bottles have found their way into offices, kitchens and hot sauce collections around the world...including SFPE Headquarters.

WHAT ABOUT THE HOT SAUCE?

SO WE KNOW BOURGEOIS IS COMMITTED to the profession and ensuring a pipeline of future fire protection professionals, but what does that have to do with hot sauce and why do many know him as “The Hot Sauce Man”? In the early 1980s, the oilfields were in a deep recession. Headed to the Lafayette Oil Show, Bourgeois wanted to do all he could to stand out from the other vendors at the show. He decided that spices—hot sauce, in particular—would be a more notable tradeshow giveaway than pencils, keychains or other

run-of-the-mill items, so he and his staff purchased a bulk shipment of hot sauce, removed the labels, and applied the Delta Fire Systems’ logo to the bottles. The “Delta Hot Sauce” was an immediate success at that trade show and subsequent ones. Bourgeois eventually incorporated it into Bourgeois’ advertising. Bourgeois’ Hot Sauce became the official calling card of the company and, to date, hundreds of thousands of bottles have found their way into offices, kitchens and hot sauce collections around the world... including SFPE Headquarters.

Bourgeois & Associates, Inc., specializes in the sales and installation of special hazard fire suppression systems for the petrochemical, paper, utility offshore and technology industries. The company has installed and serviced fire detection and suppression systems throughout the southeastern United States and the Gulf of Mexico.

Recruiting the Next Generation

Bourgeois believes every person should give back to the industry from which he earns his livelihood, and he has done this over the years as he’s operated Bourgeois & Associates, Inc. Not only has he been a member of SFPE since 1975, his company has been a Corporate 100 Partner since 1991. His dedication to professional societies extends beyond SFPE; he is a past president of both the Fire Suppression Systems Association (FSSA) and the Automatic Fire Alarm Association (AFAA) and is the recipient of the Lifetime Achievement Award from both of those organizations, and is a Certified Fire Protection Specialist (CFPS). He is involved with the profession on a local level as well and was instrumental in establishing licensing laws for Louisiana fire protection contractors and has served on the State Fire Marshal Advisory Board.

Bourgeois feels getting the next generation interested in fire protection is key to the profession’s longevity. “Future fire protection professionals don’t know about all the career opportunities in special hazards fire protection. Everyone complains that they cannot find good people to fill jobs but fail to steer

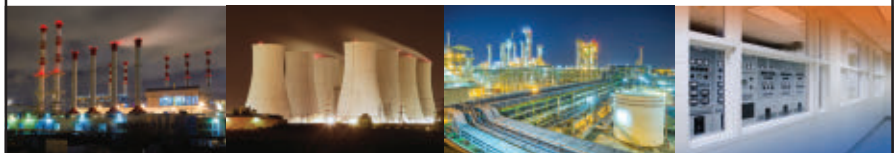
them into programs to train them for this field,” stated Bourgeois. “The entire fire protection industry doesn’t toot its horn enough. When we were first married, my wife used to tell people that I ‘installed halon systems’ and she would get a blank look. I told her ‘tell them I save lives and property.’ Then, people understood what I did for a living,” he said.

Bourgeois believes that SFPE members can work together to promote the profession to attract the next generation of fire protection professionals by

highlighting the diversity of career options available across the industry. “We can talk to the next generation about career opportunities such as research engineers, fire protection engineers, a designer of suppression systems or an AutoCAD operator, a sales engineer, a technician or an installer. We should market all of the career opportunities from our profession so that the next generation might be more interested in our profession.”

Another opportunity available to fire protection professionals is taking a cue

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from Bourgeois and many other SFPE members and owning/running a small business. Bourgeois believes there is merit in keeping a business small and nimble, and was never interested in expanding the size of his company to become so large that he was not involved in business decisions. “We do not have to get a second and third opinion or management approval

have to fly in a helicopter to a worksite and stay on an offshore platform for days. One job site might require a two hour drive to and from, including eight hours on the job site, which turns into a 12- hour day. This job is not for everyone. Doing it right is critical to our business, so hiring and retaining good employees is key. People’s lives and property depend on us doing our job cor-

special interests. “Our mission is to protect lives and property. If we all came together under the common goal of life safety and property protection, the industry would grow. However, everyone seems to be more interested in protecting their turf. You see it in codes and laws, mandating certain solutions. There’s enough business for everyone because fire protection solutions are often a cross-section of solutions. Balanced fire protection systems have a place for all different kinds of systems because most often, buildings have different kinds of needs.” ▲

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al – we just do the jobs. Whether we make good or bad decisions, I am responsible for it,” he said. “We live and breathe fire protection, which is key to quality fire suppression systems. Our employees might

rectly and in accordance to codes, so I am not always the easiest business owner to work for,” he said.

Bourgeois would also like to see the fire protection industry move beyond

If you know of an SFPE member you’d like to see showcased in a future issue of *Fire Protection Engineering*, please reach out to Maggie McGary, managing editor, at editor@sfpe.org.

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