

FIRETECH

Experience sparks success for St. Louis fire suppression contractor

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Design-build fire suppression contractor FireTech LLC has been providing leading service throughout the Midwest since 2003.

The St. Louis-based company specializes in the design, service, sales, maintenance, fabrication and installation of fixed fire suppression systems, making FireTech a one-stop shop for all of a customer's fire suppression needs.

Founded by principals Jamie Howes, and Rich Fasching, the company grew considerably in 2005 with the acquisition of St. Louis-based Fire Sprinklers Inc. Howes leads the business, overseeing sales and project management and Fasching leads the installation and fabrication teams.

Today the company is active throughout the Midwest market, completing work in Missouri, Nebraska, Indiana, Kansas, Illinois, Wisconsin, Georgia, Oklahoma, Colorado, Kentucky, and Delaware with a number of high-profile projects under its belt. FireTech specializes in the design and installation of a number of different fire suppression systems, with an experienced team that can help customers pick the right product for any application. These include wet and dry pipe sprinkler systems, preaction sprinkler systems, deluge sprinkler systems, Aqueous Film Forming Foam (AFFF) systems and clean agent systems.





FireTech is adept at working in a range of diverse markets and has the capabilities to tackle an estimated 95 percent of the available work in its market. From institutional clients such as hospitals and industrial projects like waste water treatment and electrical generation plants to commercial projects such as retail shopping centers and casinos and residential high-rise and condo developments, the company has gained experience in a wide array of specific building niches.

Meeting challenges head-on

The abrupt decline in the housing market took hold just as FireTech was starting to gain its footing in the mid-2000s. The recession required the company to take a more diversified approach, expanding into the institutional and industrial market and leaving the slumping residential market behind for a time.

“We focused on the market we had a strong in road to and were able to feed the coffers and keep people busy through that,” says Howes, owner and managing partner at FireTech.

Now, as the company continues to grow from its humble roots to logging more than \$12 million in annual revenue, the FireTech team is looking to break back into the residential market, eyeing projects in the multifamily, high-rise market specifically.

“It’s a different housing market for us today. We continue to do a lot of power plant and hospital work, but the housing sector seems to be coming back, so we’re doing a lot of high-rise condominium buildings and senior centers as well,” says Howes.

Carving out a niche in the health care market

While the multifamily residential market holds great promise for the future, FireTech is currently focused on a marquee project in the institutional sector. The fire suppression system contractor was recently picked to complete a two-phase, \$700 million expansion to St. Louis’ Washington University Medical Center (WUMC) which includes the Barnes-Jewish Hospital, St. Louis Children’s Hospital and Washington University School of Medicine.

As St. Louis’ largest health care provider, WUMC is looking to expand its footprint in a bid to improve patient care as well as the overall hospital experience in general. “We’re doing this all on a design-build basis and using a lot of 3D business information modeling (BIM), which has really given us an advantage,” Howes says.

The first phase of the project includes the construction of a new building which will house the organization’s obstetrics and gynecological services, expansion of clinical care space at the Siteman Cancer Center and renovations which will allow the St. Louis Children’s Hospital to increase its number of inpatient beds, diagnostics, treatment and support services as well as outpatient clinics.

The second phase of the project will see a new inpatient tower at the Branes-Jewish Hospital, including an expansion of the heart and vascular; neurology and neurosurgery; transplant; trauma and critical care; and general medicine programs.

“We’ll be on the job for probably 20 months for Phase 1. The next phase is the tower, so we’ll see what happen there,” he says.

In addition to its work in the health care sector, FireTech has ample experience in the multifamily residential, retail, power plant and nursing home markets. A frequent subcontractor of Von Maur, FireTech has followed the department store chain around the country, completing fire suppression systems on many of its new locations.

Retaining top talent

Howes says it’s FireTech’s commitment to staying up-to-date on the fire codes and emerging fire suppression technologies — this truly sets the company apart in the market. A member of the International Code Council and National Fire Protection Association, FireTech places an emphasis on ongoing staff training, ensuring that every member of the team can be considered an expert in their field.





With well-trained staff at the center of FireTech's approach, recent trends in the labor market have presented a challenge for many in the industry who are looking to retain experienced, qualified workers as unemployment drops to a 10-year low. This hasn't been so much of a struggle at FireTech, where an emphasis on employee satisfaction has allowed the company to hold on to some of its best and brightest.

"We're actually continuing to add staff at a moderate pace which will allow us to grow, but that still requires raises and bonuses, which only come from growth. If you have a stagnant company it's very hard to give raises and bonuses and if you don't, employees start looking elsewhere," says Howes.

With a strong reputation in its home market and experience across a wide range of industry sectors, FireTech LLC can be expected to retain its position as one of St. Louis' leading design-build fire suppression contractors. •