

Sharon Stone Gilyeat, P.E.



*Principal
Koffel
Associates*

The field of fire protection engineering has offered me an exciting career — full of growth and challenge. As the first woman to graduate from the Department of Fire Protection Engineering, University of Maryland, in 1979, neither I nor anyone else in the field could tell me what to expect from my career, or what would be expected of me as a young woman in a field dominated by men. That was now over 30 years ago. Since that time, I've worked as a consultant with some of the largest fire protection consulting firms in the country, served as an engineer and manager for six years with the Federal Government, and returned to consulting with Koffel Associates for the last 20 plus years of my career. I am currently a Principal for the firm, and manage a team of seven engineers who provide a wide variety of fire protection and life safety services.

During my career, I have had numerous mentors. Without the support of Dr. John Bryan, then Chairman of the Department of Fire Protection Engineering, and his support of women in the field of fire protection engineering, I may never have moved from a math major to a Fire Protection Engineering major. My first manager, William Webb with Rolf Jensen and Associates, taught me customer service and technical writing skills that continue to serve me. He also showed, expected, and taught me, and the other junior engineers, a very strong work ethic. William Koffel, my current manager and long time friend, gave me a part time position with his firm while I was still trying to juggle a very demanding career and raise my three children. He has supported me through many life challenges and, in the process, enhanced my career both in his firm as well as in professional organizations.

I have been honored to serve on and Chair various NFPA technical committees, to develop curricula and provide instruction for the Centers for Medicare

and Medicaid Services, to serve as a Commissioner for the Maryland State Fire Prevention Commission, and to serve on the State of Maryland Rehabilitation Code Committee.

I have had the opportunity to provide fire protection engineering and consulting services on some very large and exciting projects. As an engineer, I am often responsible for the overall design of sprinkler systems and ensuring the overall sprinkler design ties in, and is coordinated with the other fire protection and life safety features of the building. Often, I have been fortunate to work closely with the owners and sprinkler contractors to ensure the sprinkler systems are installed in accordance with applicable codes, and that unique design challenges are evaluated and sound engineering solutions are implemented in the field. Some of the large design/build projects have provided unique opportunities to work with the sprinkler contractors more directly and to learn more about the field work associated with our designs. Most recently, we have worked on the design/build contract for Gaylord National Hotel and Convention Center, National Harbor, Maryland, and the new Walter Reed National Military Medical Center, Bethesda, Maryland.

Each of our lives are formed and shaped by a series of events, choices we make, and, most importantly, by the people we meet and relationships we form. Looking back now, I can see how many critical decisions have brought me to where I am today as well as the many people who have influenced my career. I am thankful for each of the opportunities I have been given and for the exciting career I have. Not everyone has the ability to enjoy a career and actually contribute to the overall fire safety of the general public.

For more information contact: Sharon Stone Gilyeat, P.E., Koffel Associates, Inc., Fire Protection and Life Safety Engineers, Elkridge, MD, E-mail: sgilyeat@koffel.com.