



JACK MURPHY



JERRY TRACY



RONNY COLEMAN



ALAN BRUNACINI



TOM BRENNAN  
LIFETIME ACHIEVEMENT AWARD  
WINNERS



RICK LASKY

## **Five Tom Brennan Lifetime Award Winners Speak.**

**And As More Cities Adopt Appendix L,  
It Seems The Fire Service Is Listening**

*by Joseph D. Rush III, MS, EFO*

This year in Indianapolis, IN, Fire Engineering Magazine will honor Fire Chief (ret.) Rick Lasky with FDIC's annual Tom Brennan Lifetime Achievement Award.

Chief Lasky is a second-generation firefighter and 36-year veteran of the fire service. Starting as a line firefighter and firefighter-paramedic, he rose through the ranks serving as a company officer, training officer and command-level officer. He has written over 200 fire related articles, two best-selling books and co-hosts the radio talk show "The Command Post."

Lasky joins an ever-increasing list of Tom Brennan Lifetime Achievement Award winners who have distinguished themselves amidst their peers. Collectively, these fire service icons share a common bond in their desire to improve our profession and their foresight in moving the fire service into the 21st Century one small change

at a time.

Several winners also share a common cause: each has been an advocate for firefighter air replenishment systems (FARS).

One of the earliest and most vocal champions of FARS was 2014 Tom Brennan Award recipient Ronny J. Coleman. Over his more than 50-year career, the former California State Fire Marshal has only pushed for two changes to the International Fire Code: the requirement of residential fire sprinklers (RFS) and FARS.

Coleman's first introduction to FARS came from his Fire Marshal while he was the Interim Fire Chief of Fremont, CA. Coleman says his first reaction was, "What a great solution to a vexing problem!"

Since then, Chief Coleman has spent more than a decade as an advocate for the concept, writing the first FARS training manual and producing the first FARS training video.

Another early supporter of FARS was 2001 Brennan Award recipient Alan Brunacini, the former Fire Chief in Phoenix, AZ. Near the end of Brunacini's tenure, Phoenix firefighter Brett Tarver ran out of air, became disoriented and died in a fire at the Southwest Supermarket.

FARS technology was relatively new at the time, but Phoenix adopted one of the first FARS codes in the country as part of the department's "never again" strategy.

Brunacini says when he first saw the system, he backed it right away. "It was a no brainer," he said. "What isn't there to like about it?"

Brunacini found a unique way to communicate the need for air, and a FARS code, to the numerous stakeholders involved in building codes and health and safety in Phoenix. He recently told the story during a presentation at the NFFF Technology Summit.

"In a couple of discussions we had with people who were dragging their feet," Brunacini said, "my response to them was, 'It's going to take us a few minutes to come to a decision here -- let's all just hold our breath. Because that's what we're doing, two football fields up in the air.'"

Phoenix was experiencing explosive growth at the time, and with Brunacini's blessing FARS was adopted into their fire code in 2004. "It wasn't much more complicated than that," he said.

A number of cities in the Phoenix Metropolitan Area followed suit. To date, more than 65 buildings in the Phoenix area are equipped with FARS, including mid- and high-rises and large horizontal structures like big box retail buildings and

manufacturing plants.

Lasky's initial reaction to FARS was similar to Coleman and Brunacini's. "The concept is phenomenal. Finally, someone has come up with a great idea." He adds that the reaction to FARS from his colleagues familiar with the system has been very positive.

The 2012 Brennan Award recipient, International Fire Protection Consultant Jack Murphy, stumbled upon the system at the FDIC West Conference in 2000. FARS was installed at Murphy's hotel and he was so intrigued he contacted Sacramento's Fire Marshal for a more in-depth explanation of the air management system. Murphy has been sold on FARS ever since, writing on FARS technology for numerous publications and lecturing on FARS at conferences across the country. He also introduced the concept to 2016 Brennan Award winner Jerry Tracy years later at the same conference.

Tracy recognized the value of FARS immediately. As a Battalion Chief (ret.) on the FDNY he has fought more than his share of high-rise fires. He notes that "the majority of fire departments throughout the nation have limited resources," and they cannot afford to waste time and energy shuttling SCBA bottles.

FARS, he says, "alleviates that physical aspect of operations" and in turn "provides additional personnel for the efforts of suppression."

Lasky's summation is both simplistic and profound. "You don't have to refill your tools, once you have them up there, you have them there." This is not the case with SCBAs. Their usefulness is limited and often dependent upon the availability of additional resources. "Not everybody has the staffing."

Coleman agrees, explaining that the job of any fire protection system is, "reducing a fire problem down to the point where we can handle it with our available staffing and resources."

After more than a decade, FARS has been installed in more than 500 buildings across 10 states nationwide and is required by code in more than 80 jurisdictions.

Tracy says, "it is difficult for a fire department to convince building owners and managers to spend funds not required by code" and "the fire service has not involved themselves in the process of code change nationally or locally."

According to Murphy, "code cycles are time-consuming and never ending." Just because something has been accepted in one cycle does mean it cannot be removed in a newer cycle. It takes constant advocacy to ensure that safety measures are adopted and enforced.

This comes as no surprise to Coleman who says we in the fire service are notoriously slow to accept change. “It can take 20 years to be an overnight success in the fire service,” Coleman says. He should know. He and Murphy were instrumental in securing FARS' adoption into Appendix L of the 2015 ICC International Fire Code.

Coleman says, “Any built-in technology put in a building to increase the effectiveness of the fire ground operations is a step in the right direction.”

Lasky, Coleman, Brunacini, Murphy and Tracy all agree that FARS fits this billing and recognize the value of requiring its installation in mid- and high-rises, tunnels and mega structures.

Maybe when so many Tom Brennan Lifetime Achievement Award recipients speak, the fire service should listen!

***To access articles, video clips and more featuring these Tom Brennan Award winners discussing FARS, please visit [rescueair.com/education-and-training](http://rescueair.com/education-and-training).***

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