

SFPE-CSRA Chapter History

In 1995, a small but energetic group of fire protection engineers working at the Department of Energy Savannah River Site (SRS) organized the first meeting of what would soon become the Central Savannah River Area (CSRA) branch of the Charlotte, N. C. Chapter ('s Chapter)of SFPE. The branch was open to anyone in the area interested in fire protection, but the membership was dominated by fire protection engineers from SRS. This became both a strength and a weakness of the branch.

Mr. Hal Cohen became the first president of the branch and presided over a fast growing organization that regularly had more attendees at the meetings than the main Chapter. When Mr. Cohen moved away, Mr. Michael Davenport became president and served for a year. At the end of his term, Mr. David McAfee was elected as president.

In the early years, the meetings were moved around until finally settling into the Wilmont Hotel in Aiken, S.C. Eventually, as the branch grew, the Chapter allowed it to retain its own treasury and fundraising activities with the idea that it would become a Chapter. Several meetings were held concerning the forming of a new Chapter in the CSRA, but before they could be finalized, several fire protection sub-contracts ended at SRS. A large number of the members worked at SRS, and with the cutbacks, the branch shriveled up and died a quick death in a matter of a couple months.

The strong core of engineers from SRS was what made the branch cohesive and active, but it also tended to discourage those who did not work at SRS. Once SRS cut back, the core persons left the area and no one was willing to pick up the effort.

The branch was moved to an inactive status for several years. Then, in January 2003, another small group of SRS engineers decided to form/reform a Chapter of SFPE. They had tired of the long drive to Charlotte to attend meetings. The first meeting started out modest, but showed lots of promise. There was sufficient interest, that the group pushed hard for Chapter status. The first meeting consisted of 9 members with attendance being impacted due to a winter storm. The attendees included the core group responsible for trying to restart the chapter - Bernie Till, Tom Allison, and Mark LeGrand.

Mr. William B. "Bernie" Till was elected president, Mr. William Farmer was elected vice-president, Mr. Thomas Allison was made treasurer, and Mr. Mark LeGrand became Secretary. Mr. Allison had been safeguarding the treasury of the now defunct branch, so the Chapter was able to open with some financial capability.

The organization achieved Chapter status March 2003 and became the Fifty-First Chapter of SFPE. Community projects included an exhibit at the National Science Center for approximately 2500 middle school students. Recently, a Habitat for Humanity project provided 3 houses with automatic residential sprinkler systems. The success of the project has prompted initiatives for a statewide project for all Habitat houses. Efforts are underway to provide educational opportunities in fire protection as well as support other projects.

In 2004, William J. "Bill" Farmer was elected president. Bill began his term in January 2005. Among Bill's accomplishments as president was the chapter winning the Gold level Chapter Excellence Award - one of four SFPE chapters to do so, the youngest chapter to win the award. 2005 was the first year this recognition was provided to chapters and the CSRA chapter was proud to be a recipient at the highest level on the very first time this was awarded.