

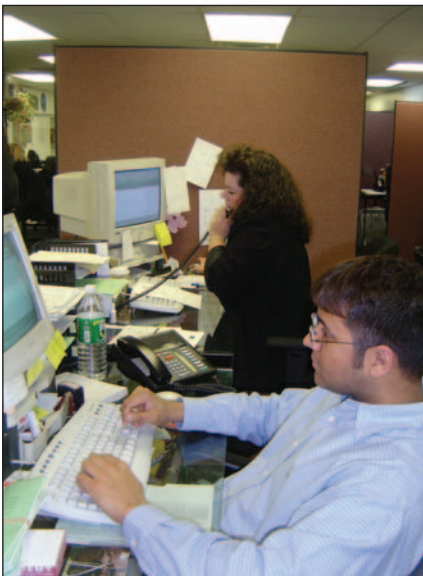
THE FIRE WITHIN

Owner and CEO Michael Rose credits his hardworking staff for the success and growth of Academy Fire Protection.

Jo Marks Rifkin

At 5:10 p.m. on one of those rare, spring-like Fridays in March, three people are busy at their desks in Academy Fire Protection's Teaneck, New Jersey, office. Five more are scurrying around, making certain all is in order. No one's rushing to the door or even looking at the clock. Academy Fire Protection's owner and CEO, Michael Rose, Jr., expects future employees — and there should be many within the rapidly expanding company — will do no less.

"They stay. They're getting the job done and working hand in hand with our corporate office in Maspeth, New York," says Rose. "If taught right and nurtured the right way, people go beyond expectations to get their jobs done. Academy couldn't do it without them."



Academy Fire Protection is based in Maspeth, New York.



Academy Fire Protection encourages a team environment.

By "it," Rose is referring to the services offered by Academy Fire Protection (AFP), which include national fire protection and life safety services to more than 300 chain stores. The 50-year-old company provides the installation, maintenance and service of fire alarm systems, fire sprinklers systems, portable fire extinguishers, restaurant suppression systems (also known as "Ansul") and backflow testing nationwide.

In addition, Academy Fire takes care of all types of exit and emergency lighting, exit doors and panic alarms for its clients, which consist of both national chains and local businesses.

"My grandfather started this company and no matter how big we get, I won't forget that this was once a local small business. Never forget your roots," Rose says of the business where

he started at the bottom sweeping floors, and then worked his way up to technician, to branch manager and now to CEO.

Academy Fire Protection has been acquiring its vendor database and within the last several months has purchased six fire protection businesses throughout the U.S. More than 21 acquisitions have been slated for Academy Fire Protection over the next 18 months. And, within the next 5 years, Rose hopes to have 132 offices in Canada, the U.S. and Mexico.

"[The expansion] helps Academy Fire Protection offer better services for our clients, and it is cost-efficient for both them and us," Rose says. "It gives us more control in making certain our standards are maintained."

When Rose first looks at an acquisition target, he evaluates personnel, poli-

cies and procedures they have in place, ensuring that this potential partner can run with the ball and follow direction. "We perform a due diligence check that would blow your mind," he says.

Rose says the new acquisitions or Strategic Business Units (SBUs) are so well run that he is learning more about the business from them. "We look hard at the procedure and are able to manipulate our system so that we can take the best from the best and offer it to the client. We already get it right 97% of the time, but no one's perfect — although we're getting closer," he says jokingly.

Prior to the new acquisitions, Academy Fire has had more than 500,000 calls handled by the management teams in New York and New Jersey, all of whom have been with the company for more than 7 years. Each of the employees — who come from all over the world from different backgrounds and heritages — is responsible for profits, losses and the well-being of its clients.

"They all work as a team; it's what exhilarates me day in and day out," Rose says.

"My management team helps drive us every day," Rose explains. "This is absolutely an employee-driven company. The merit system works well. People need to know when they're doing something right."

And, according to Rose, that's one important way through which Academy Fire Protection stays ahead of the competition.

"Our broad array of products and services can help retailers reduce their liability and more cost-effectively manage this important life-safety investment," says Rose, noting that the equipment runs the gamut of price points and that Academy offers up-front, flat-rate, customized pricing.

"It makes it easier for retailers to forecast costs and provides a tight control on services," he says. "We give retailers the ability to budget accurately. They pay one price. There are no hidden costs."

AFP's fire protection designs for new construction and retrofits are engineered by experts in code compliance.

These are the same engineers who, when necessary, can offer code-compliance consultation as well.

Academy pays for continuing education, certification classes and training classes with manufacturers for employee associates, as well as compliance classes for technicians. Because compliances vary from city to city and change often, the professionals at AFP keep on top of governmental updates.

Like the fire department, Academy Fire Protection offers 24/7 customer support, services and troubleshooting via a toll-free telephone number as well as through the Internet and Net Serve. Clients also have direct access to Rose, via his cell and, in many cases, his home phone.

Academy Fire Protection offers a single point of contact for all store corporate offices and locations, making it easier to immediately dispatch a technician to the site. Emergencies, such as a faulty alarm system or dripping sprinklers, are usually tended to within 60 minutes or less. No matter what a visit incurs, follow-up calls from Academy Fire ensure that the customer is satisfied.

AFP also offers 24-hour station monitoring, as well as tracking of equipment inventories, equipment standardization and pre-scheduled maintenance calls (PMs). The calls AFP receives are about fire extinguishers, which need yearly certification, as well as a countless number of calls relating to sprinklers and alarm systems. When an annual sprinkler inspection flow test is initiated, the folks at Academy Fire make certain that everyone is alerted prior to the test, including the fire department, store managers and corporate headquarters.

Rose insists that all employees are hard-driving and always communicating with clients. "I tell them, if you can't meet a deadline, tell the client," he says. "And if you're able to exceed their expectations, don't let them know it until it's done."

"We like to be heroes for our clients," he explains, noting that facilities departments are sometimes cost centers, not profit centers. "We like to get the job done and perform within budget and on time. That's why I think our clients



Like a fire department, Academy Fire Protection offers 24/7 customer support, services and troubleshooting.

use us."

It is not unusual for Rose to be on the scene as well. "I've been known to jump on a truck to see the right job is being done," he says. "Being on the front lines keeps me informed as to the client issues and helps me see what we can do better. It also shows the technicians that I understand their job. I wouldn't ask my people in the field to do something that I wouldn't do myself."

Aside from the latest acquisition of companies under the Academy Fire Protection umbrella, AFP has a tried and true vendor base, which has been around for a long time and is the leading source of the acquisitions. Maintaining this base is one of the responsibilities of AFP's vendor relation department.

Rose believes honest pricing, excellent communications and skilled experts set AFP apart from the competition, as does the feeling that AFP, although growing, performs like a family business. Most clients become part of that family, a tightly knit group of people working together.

"We're a good, honest company with fast, reliable service," Rose says. "We offer a good honest price. We get our work done." **PRSM**