

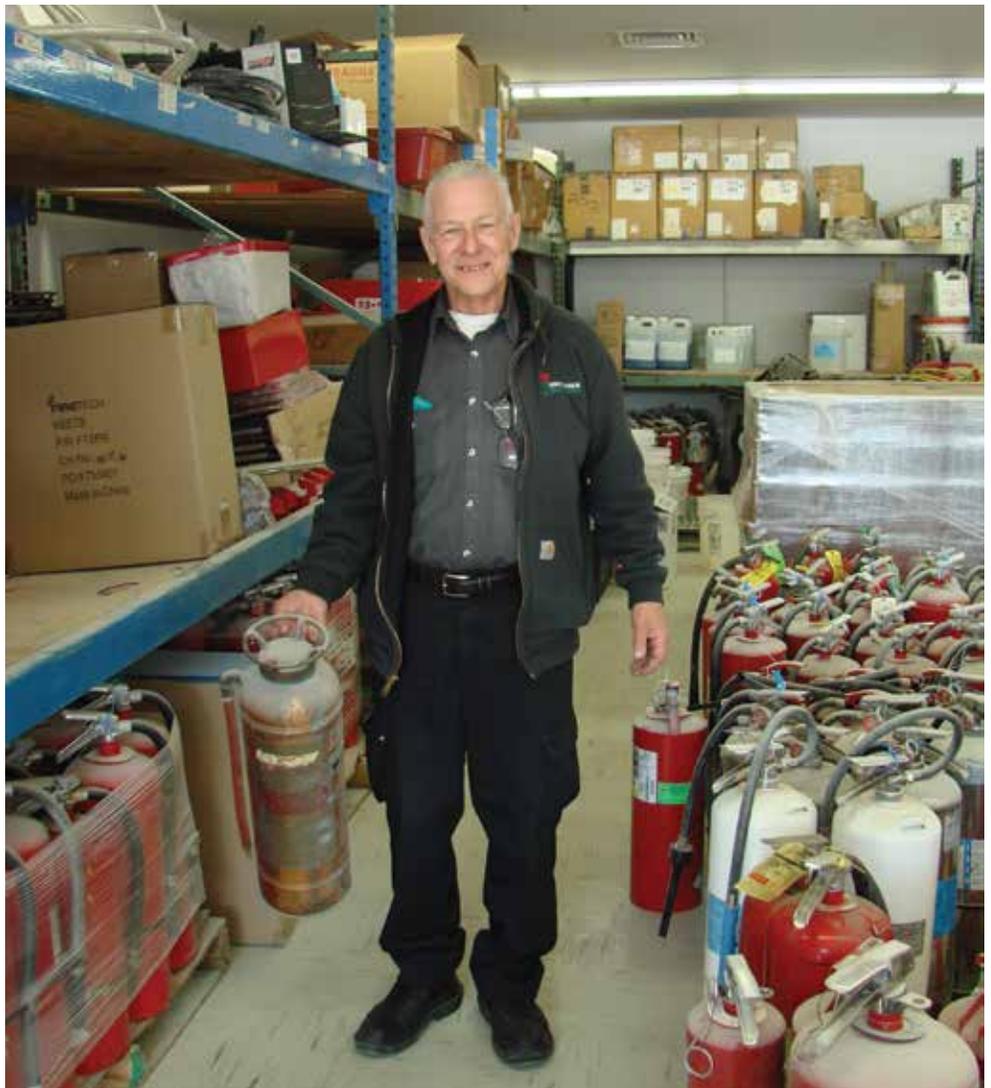
# Half a Century as a Service Technician

There's a time in everyone's career when a big decision needs to be made: how and when to end it. After forty-eight years as a service technician for Fredriksen Fire Equipment in Wood Dale, Illinois, Bill Persig heard the call for retirement and answered it, somewhat reluctantly but in the spirit of curiosity. "I want to feel it out for a while first. Few months. Stay in bed, listen to the snowplows coming by..." he said on the clear January morning of his final day. "Financial advisor says I'm really good to go. I turned 66 today. So while I'm still kind of healthy, that's why I'm retiring. That's forty-eight years I gave. I gave a lot of my life there."

NAFED itself was just a fledgling association when Bill first started in 1969. That was a time when carbon tetrachloride was on its way out, soda acid extinguishers were still prominent, and leather sand buckets were still a thing. "But the job in itself, not really, hasn't changed. It's pretty much the same as when I started."

Like today, techs were assigned routes and faced a variety of clients. For Bill this meant "ma and pa grocery stores to huge hospitals with seven-eight hundred extinguishers." To talk with Bill of the jobs he's done is to take a tour of Chicago manufacturing industries come and gone. Radio Flyer. Schwinn. Brach. Stewart-Warner. Machine shops, sheetmetal, die casting. More frequently, now, Bill has had to service computer server rooms rather than a factory floor. "I'll miss that part, too. Seeing how things are made from scratch, from start."

Fortunately for an aging tech, the job has gotten less physically demanding over time. "The work was a lot harder back then." Soda acids especially were a beast to handle. "Every year you'd have to drag them down to a boiler room, dump them out whether they're used or not, put new chemical in it, mix them up."



Some of these buildings were four stories high without an elevator." A combination of efficient and well-stocked trucks, code enforcement that keeps businesses cleaner and tidier, and just overall better technology has made the job go more easily.

Even when it was demanding, Bill knew that he had found his calling. He turned down a managerial position because "I know what it's like... My office is parked out there." The variety keeps it interesting and time in the truck provides a sort of freedom and respite. When asked what he likes most about his job, he doesn't hesitate, saying "The people I meet."

Customer service will always be paramount to the job, and Bill has some advice to give new techs. "Shake those hands. Look them in the eye, smile. Get a good rapport with your customers or clients. Let them know you're there for them."

As the industry prepares to take in the next generation of hires, employees like Bill are getting scarcer. Pretty soon not a single employee will be around anymore who has even touched a soda acid. Hopefully, his work ethic will live on in the dedicated, helpful technicians of today. All NAFED companies should be so lucky. "I will miss it. And I did tell the boss don't lock the doors." ❖