

When Preparation Meets Opportunity

“IT’S JUST LUCK.”

Jacob Friedman will try to tell you his career and successes in fire engineering all came down to luck.

Starting and successfully running his own business for almost 20 years? Luck.

Working on projects such as US Senate Office Buildings, Washington, D.C.; Modi’in-Jerusalem railway line, including 21 km of tunnels, Israel; Dulles International Airport, Dulles, Virginia; and Michie Stadium, West Point, New York? Luck.

Even his recent interest in accessible design?

“I got into this field by luck,” says Friedman, president of JFPE LTD, in Ganey-Tikva, Israel. “I started seeing more and more clients who wanted one consultant for disability and fire. At first, I didn’t think they had much in common; certainly some of the codes and requirements weren’t similar. Then I started to see how being involved in fire opened the way for more solutions for accessible design.”

As with the old adage about rising tides and boats, Friedman notes that accessible design benefits everyone — abled and disabled alike.

“Some people think it is only about designing spaces so everyone can use them,” he says. “That’s part of it of course, but especially with fire engineering, when you’re talking about widths and egress, accessible design is better for everyone.”

Accessible design isn’t Friedman’s focus. In fact, trying to pin down a single area



of expertise for Friedman might be difficult.

“I like to solve the most complex problems,” he says. “This is what I love about our profession. I love to find those problems that cross many disciplines, they are so complex that their solutions are likewise very complex.”

Friedman credits his involvement in fire engineering to his instructors and mentors in mechanical engineering. “I started working in mechanical,” he says. “It was pure luck some of my first projects involved a lot of fire engineering. It was something I had never studied or really even heard of. Once I got some experience with it, I realized it was so much broader than I ever could have imagined. I knew right then it’s

what I wanted to do.”

Before beginning his own business, Friedman worked for Rolf Jensen & Associates, where he served as a consulting engineer for approximately 100 projects in the three years he was there. Before that, he worked for three years for Elco Fire Detection (currently Orad) in Israel as a fire alarm and detection systems designer.

Friedman earned a BS in mechanical engineering from the University of Tel Aviv, Israel, in 1993, and a MS in fire protection engineering from the University of Maryland, USA, in 1998.

In 2001, he returned to Israel and started JFPE LTD. Now almost 20 years later and with more than 20 employees, he and his

business are still going strong. In fact, in some ways things are better than ever.

“Because of the coronavirus, we had to do virtual meetings, even just among our own team,” Friedman says. “We found out we are way more efficient working virtually. Our projects are getting done significantly faster than in normal days. The only good thing about this virus is that it made us find a design solution we will continue long after the virus is gone. I see the industry never really going back to the old way — not completely.”


However, a little uncertainty about the future doesn't bother Friedman, who serves as the president of SFPE's Israel Chapter and chairs committees with the

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Society of Israeli Fire Protection Engineers, Association of Cantonal Fire Insurance Establishments, and the Israeli Standard Institute.

“Being part of SFPE means that when things happen in our industry, I know of them,” he says. “This field is not static. It is changing all the time, and you have to stay

up to date. The more we learn, the more we realize there is still so much for us to learn.”

“It is exciting to me to see all the new and complex problems we are finding and the new and complex ways we'll be able to solve them,” he says. “I am just very lucky to be here.” 



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