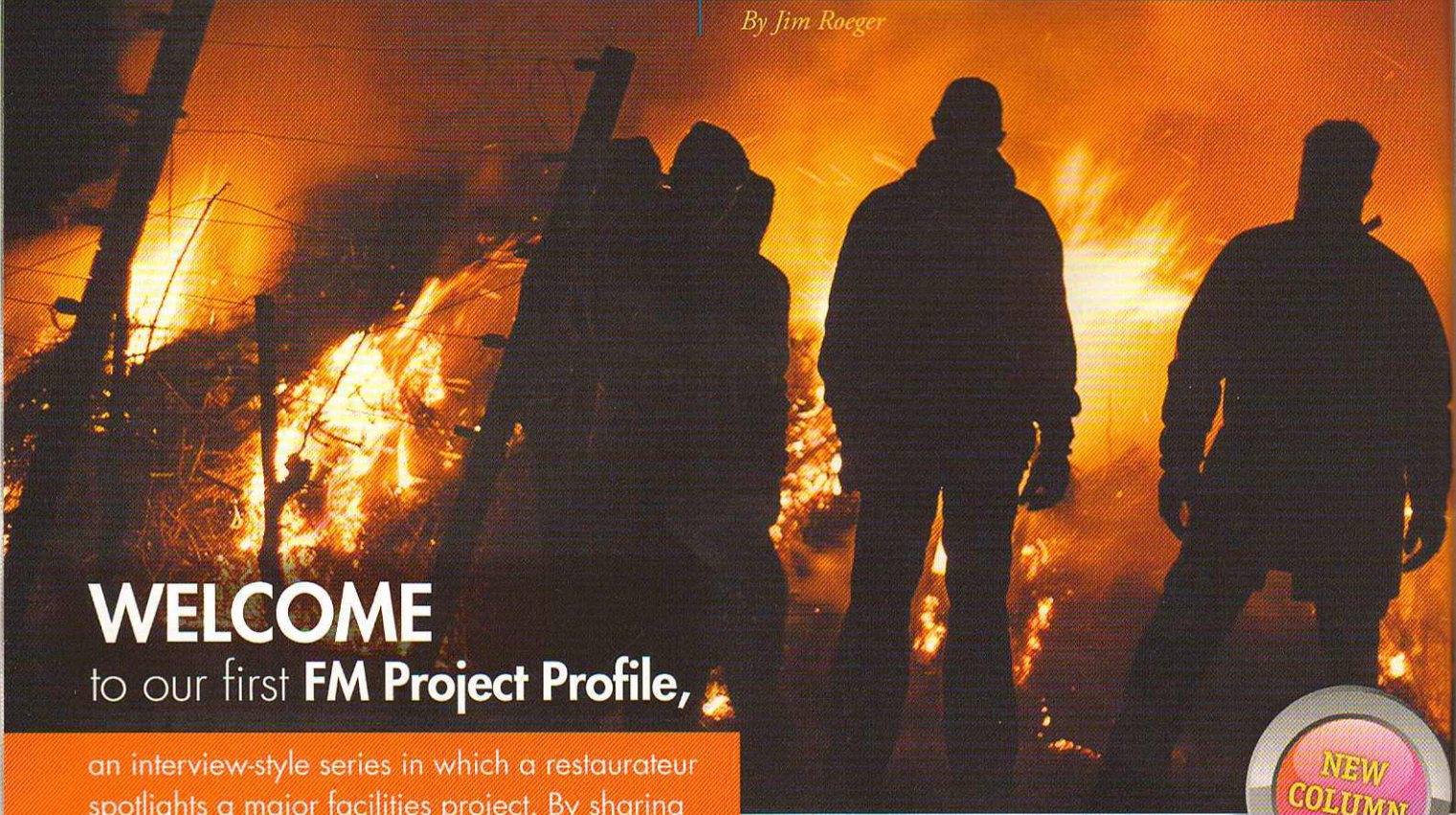


By Jim Roeger



WELCOME to our first FM Project Profile,

an interview-style series in which a restaurateur spotlights a major facilities project. By sharing one of their most memorable facilities jobs, our members hope to share insight and inspiration.

This month's profile comes from Jim Roeger, a Facility Manager for Olive Garden.



Where is the restaurant located?

3701 McKinley Pkwy., Blasdell, N.Y. (a suburb of Buffalo).

Briefly describe the events that led to the project.

The building caught fire a half-hour after the closing management team left the building after midnight, June 14, 2014. The fire resulted in a total loss of the building.

How were you contacted regarding this issue?

I had received several calls and texts on my cell phone in the middle of the night, which I didn't hear because the phone was charging in the office. My boss made me aware of the fire first thing the next morning, which was a Saturday.

How long did it take you to get onsite?

I booked a flight within 45 minutes and was at the airport in about an hour and a half. I made it onsite by 5:30 p.m.

Where was the fire's point of origin?

Two sets of firefighters with thermo-imaging cameras came in at the same time; one through the front door, the other through the back door. They both determined that the fire started in the vertical shaft of the exhaust hoods, right below the roof line.

What was the official reported cause?

The official cause of the fire remains undetermined.

Did the fire suppression system release?

The fire suppression system did release at 1:03 a.m., roughly 30 minutes after the management team left. Since the origin of the fire was so high in the ductwork, the closest fusible links were about 4 feet further down. By the time this link let loose, the ductwork up top was compromised.

When was the last time the hoods/ductwork/fans were cleaned?

The hoods are cleaned on a quarterly schedule and were last cleaned in early March. They were due for another cleaning.

Briefly describe the scope of work for rebuilding.

Because the fire made it to the trusses below a metal seam and Duro-last membrane roof, the firefighters informed us that it was the hardest fire they had to put out. They simply couldn't get to it. Ultimately, the building was a total loss and was demolished. We are in the permitting process now to build a new Tuscan farmhouse-style building.

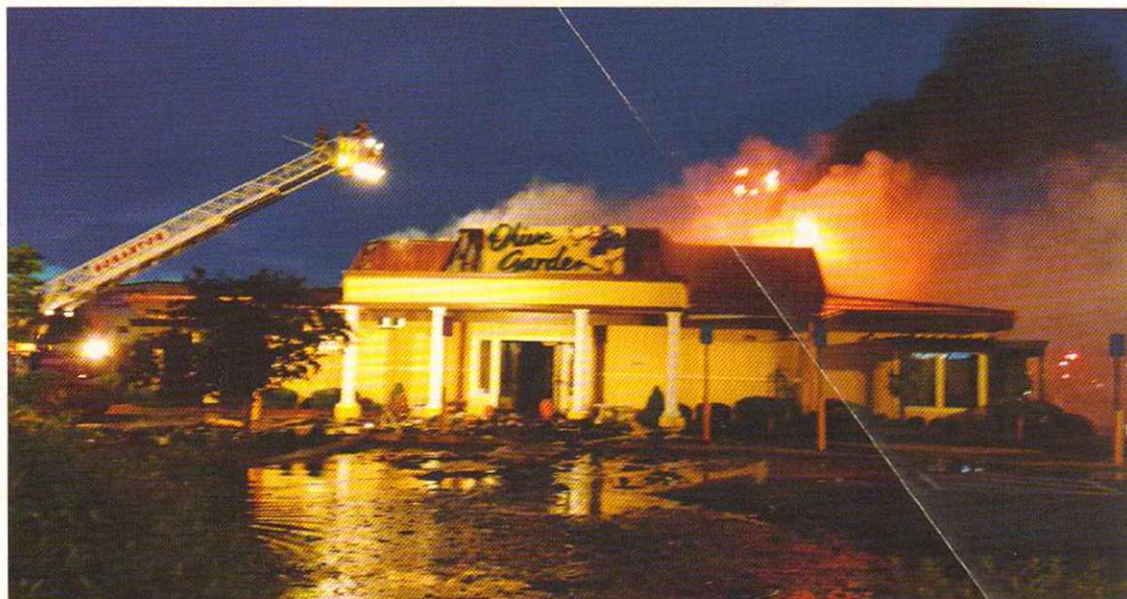
Was there any involvement from the city or county for this project, other than permitting?

There was no involvement outside of the typical permitting process.

What internal departments were involved with the rebuilding decision?

Olive Garden operations, the legal department (for landlord lease negotiations), real estate (to identify potential other sites) and the new construction department.

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Was there any hidden issues during reconstruction?

No, new construction started in mid-April.

How long was the restaurant closed?

When we open back up, the restaurant will have been closed roughly 15 months.

Is the same hood-cleaning company being used at this restaurant?

No.

In hindsight, what, if any, could have been done to prevent the fire?

The hood companies, in general, did a good job of cleaning the vertical runs of the hoods (from the top down, as well as from the kitchen floor up). It is the horizontal runs that get overlooked. (Although in this case the fire was detected in a vertical run.)

The operations teams have been versed on what a good detailed hood cleaning

consists of. In particular, before-and-after pictures of the cleaning, access panels that are accessible for all horizontal runs, open communication between the facility manager and the hood cleaners, and making sure that if there are any issues at all with the hoods/exhaust fans the facility manager is notified immediately.

If there was a section of hoods that the cleaners couldn't get to, many times the hood cleaners would just leave it uncleaned and go on to the next restaurant. Every hood-cleaning company was contacted and made aware of the issue with horizontal runs. We went back and installed additional access panels in restaurants that had horizontal runs that were inaccessible.

What were the main lessons learned?

Although the restaurant management cannot be experts in all aspects of the building, they have been instructed to ask

pertinent questions of the hood cleaners, such as **a)** How dirty were the hoods? **b)** Do we need to clean them more often? **c)** How are the horizontal runs and could you get to them? **d)** How are the electrical connections on the exhaust fans on the roof (exposed wires)? **e)** Did you take photos? **f)** Any concerns you see? 🌱

Interested in spotlighting a project in our FM Project Profile series? Please contact Heather at heather@rfmaonline.com.

Jim Roeger started with General Mills (Darden) Restaurants in 1982 and has held various positions in point-of-sales, telecommunications, Olive Garden restaurant management, and strategic planning, as well as his current role of Facility Manager, which he has held since 1996.

