

Richard A. French

Class of 1974

Columbia High School

Mr. Richard A. French is currently serving as the Chief of Logistics with the New York State Office of Emergency Management. He has been a volunteer, instructor and supervisor in emergency management and life safety agencies—locally, statewide, and nationally—for five decades.

Mr. French, a 1974 graduate of Columbia High School, who earned subsequent degrees in Construction Technology from HVCC and Fire Science Technology from Corning Community College, found his calling early in life. In high school, he had already begun volunteering with the DeFrestville Fire Department in North Greenbush, NY. His duties after graduation were diverse, and thus countless hours were spent learning about firefighting, emergency medical care, inspections, and taking on a whole host of clerical and administrative tasks. Everyday experiences and extensive certified training sessions proved his mettle and honed his expertise, and thus Mr. French moved up the ranks, culminating in his two stints (1987-1991 and 2006-2008) as the Chief of the Department. His stellar reputation and service to the community, as well as passion for life-long learning, were recognized in 2003, when he was named NYS Fire Educator of the Year by the NYS Association of Fire Chiefs.

Beyond his hometown, Mr. French has demonstrated his remarkable service as well. Since 1998, he has been employed by the NYS Office of Emergency Management. In our state and nation's greatest hours of need, he has been there, offering his expertise. Following the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, Chief French served as State Liaison Officer at the Incident Command Post and Emergency Operations Center located near Ground Zero. He has brought his leadership and management skills to several major hurricane sites, working as Operations Section Chief in Florida for Hurricanes Frances and Ivan in 2004, and Operations Branch Director for Hurricane Dennis in Santa Rosa County, FL and as the Safety Officer for Jackson County, MS during Hurricane Katarina.

When Hurricanes Irene and Lee made their way to New York State in 2011, followed by Hurricane Sandy in 2012, Mr. French was there, serving in a variety of capacities through the Office of Emergency Management to facilitate response and recovery efforts. In December 2012, Mr. French was promoted to Incident Commander of the IMT, overseeing the ongoing response and recovery work that is taking place in Breezy Point, Queens, NY.

Mr. French, a true hometown hero, lives in North Greenbush with his wife. His two sons, Brendan and Ryan, both graduated from Columbia High School.

Heroes summon energy, courage, and selflessness whenever a crisis arises. Our heroes also guide us, and they should inspire us as well. Mr. French is such a hero on all counts. His career in public service has been extraordinary, inspirational and unwavering—and remember, it all began when he was a volunteer firefighter in high school. This evening, the East Greenbush Education Foundation is honored to recognize Richard A. French—for his outstanding service to our community, state, and nation—and welcome him to the Columbia High School Alumni Hall of Fame.