

Improving Lives through Disaster Response, Work Force Development, and Partnerships – Meet Tim Murphy

Born in the city of Butte, Montana and raised in nearby Anaconda, Tim Murphy never expected to wander far from his family home. Instead, after 25 technical missions to southern Africa, Tim may have more friends in South Africa, Namibia, and Botswana than in the United States.

For the past 15 years, Tim has been at the helm of the **Southern Africa All Hazards Program**, a partnership supported by both the U.S. Forest Service and U.S. Agency for International Development Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance, which ended in 2018. In collaboration with the South African company Working on Fire, the program helped several southern African countries develop a national approach to prevent, protect against, mitigate, respond to and recover from disasters.

Through the Southern Africa All Hazards Program, seasoned U.S. disaster response specialists like Tim trained more than 5,000 young men and women to become emergency responders. The preparation and training should put an end to devastating fires like the 2001 Kruger National Park fire that killed 21 people and caused extensive damage to villages and infrastructure.

Tim was inspired by the success of the programs and by the progress of the course participants.

“What moved me continually was seeing young kids coming out of informal townships, the poorest of the poor, getting jobs, making an income, taking pride in their work and helping to support their families. These young South African firefighters brought a powerful warrior spirit to fighting fire, singing and dancing as they trained and worked; their attitude was impressive, and an important lesson for the American instructors,” said Tim.

Sixty U.S. instructors contributed to the Southern Africa All Hazards Program. They taught rural farmers and ranchers, urban and structural firefighters, the all-hazard community, and the private sector. They shared their experiences, their best practices and a shared drive for protecting people, land and resources.

Instructor Mike McPartland, Deputy Chief of Fire Department of New York City Division I (FDNY), recounted how much he enjoyed teaching basic forcible entry techniques to Zulu firefighters. “Sharing fire stories and learning from them along with having the privilege to ICS (Incident Command System) was very rewarding. After 40 years in the FDNY, I will cherish that memory forever.”

Tim is proud of the collective accomplishments of the Southern Africa All Hazards Program and humbled by the respect and friendship offered by the many partners. A Zulu Chief gave him the name Chief Tim. Others called him “Themba,” meaning trusted one or Uncle Tim.

The excitement and willingness of partners and course participants to advance emergency response and safety have fed his passion.

Philip Prins of Table Mountain National Park and Pierre Gallagher of the Cape Peninsula Fire Protection Association issued a joint statement extolling Tim's contribution to the project:

“As much as the significant funding and support has been channelled our way through the generosity of the U.S. government, we all know that it takes the individual champion to conceive, campaign, develop, administer and roll out a program such as this, and for this we thank Tim Murphy. He has taken southern Africa under his wing and guided us through this journey with exceptional results.”

Thanks to Chief Tim and the many people who partnered with the U.S. Forest Service to make the Southern Africa All Hazards Program a success!