

# Mediterranean Towers West

If you are a resident of the Mediterranean Towers West (MedWest) luxury co-op apartment building in Fort Lee, New Jersey (owned and operated by Mediterranean Towers West Owners Inc.), you can expect to receive a very high level of convenience, comfort and safety—and you get just that. Unfortunately though, if you were a resident of this property a couple years ago, you also came to expect the unwelcome sound of a noisy false fire alarm about once a week. The alarm was certainly a nuisance and, in this case, a symptom of a much larger problem.

With 507 units on 26 floors, the MedWest building was built in 1973 and converted to co-op units in 1981. MedWest is home to about 1600 residents, 75% of which are daily commuters to nearby New York City. In addition to a community of co-ops, the complex also houses a variety of commercial establishments and services conveniently located right on the ground floor, including a dry cleaner, a convenience store, hair salon and even dentist and doctor offices. MedWest also offers its residents a swimming pool and sun-deck, a playground and children's room, as well as a basketball court and two tennis courts.

According to Steven Curry, fire marshal for the town of Fort Lee, MedWest did not stand alone in having its alarming problem. "We have 45 high rises in Fort Lee, more than any other city in new Jersey," he said. "At one point, between all these buildings, we had up to 200 false alarms due to alarm systems that were in need of updating."



*The Mediterranean Towers West, a luxury high-rise co-op apartment building in Fort Lee, New Jersey, upgraded its fire alarm system with a Silent Knight IFP-1000 integrated voice evacuation system and addressable fire control panel, and new alarms in every unit.*

As fire marshal of Fort Lee, it is Curry's job to make sure that all buildings have the proper protection in the event of a fire. Each town and city has its own fire protection professional responsible for ensuring that area's fire safety. To determine who this person is, [www.first-sourceonl.com](http://www.first-sourceonl.com) is a helpful resource.

Working with the building superintendent at MedWest and investigating the problem, Curry learned that the scope of the old safety system's problems extended beyond false alarms and included other problems that resulted from the outdated alarm system.

Many of the high rise buildings built in

the 70's and 80's are not up to current fire codes," Curry explained. "The life expectancy of these older fire alarm systems is just 10 to 20 years. Plus the fire codes have changed a great deal within the last two decades and systems need to be updated. It's difficult to support or update these older systems due to the difficulty of getting replacement parts. When purchasing a new fire alarm system, it's important to work with a vendor that has parts and service readily available. Like many of the Fort Lee high rises built in the 70's, the older MedWest system had actually become obsolete and parts were no longer available."

To address MedWest's needs and bring

the building up to current day standards, Curry and the building's management team turned to United Federated Systems (UFS), a specialist in fire and security systems and a distributor and installer of Silent Knight fire alarm systems. Silent Knight, part of the Honeywell Fire Solutions group, offers industry-wide compatible fire alarm solutions for small and mid-size institutions and commercial sites. Curry was already very familiar with the effectiveness of Silent Knight systems, as a number of other high rises in Fort Lee had replaced their outdated systems with Silent Knight. In fact, according to Curry, over half of the high rises in Fort Lee utilize systems from Silent Knight.

"The Silent Knight products offered everything we needed to stop the false alarms and bring the building up to code," said UFS president, Terry Mostyn. "One of the principle advantages of working with a Silent Knight system is that parts and service are always readily available. I've been working with their systems for almost 19 years and some of their original panels that I put in are still working, and I'm still able to get parts for them quickly. Silent Knight has never made a panel for which they don't supply parts whether over the counter or direct. Also, their support people are exceptional. When you're talking about fire safety, you can't afford to wait for parts or service."

Some of the issues that needed addressing at MedWest beyond the false alarms, included problems with decibels and overall system monitoring. Also, several common areas were in need of more up-to-date monitoring devices. To solve these problems and bring MedWest up to code, UFS specified a Silent Knight system which included an IFP-1000 integrated voice evacuation system and addressable fire control panel, 600 Intelliknight SD 505 smoke detectors, 90 SD 500-PS pull stations, and alarms in every unit.

The all-in-one IFP-1000 combines feature-rich fire control panels with the convenience and functionality of a voice evacuation system. It can support up to 1016 addressable devices that allow the user to determine precisely which device has been activated and/or needs attention. The IFP-1000 also uses a distributed amplification scheme to enable power sources to be linked directly to appropriate areas of evacuation, rather than having to institute a complex wiring scheme.

"We placed the IFP-1000's main fire alarm panel next to the building's main electrical room over the front lobby," said Mostyn. "To make sure that the entire building was protected, we installed power supplies on every fourth floor."

"If anything should ever go wrong with a panel, the main panels immediately send a signal to King Alarm, which is the monitoring company we use. Same thing with the voice evacuation system. The Silent Knight system is really streamlined and simplified. If there's trouble, the alarm sends out a signal to King and right away the problem area is serviced."

Six hundred smoke detectors and 90 pull stations are now spread out through the building's common areas and commercial spaces (such as the stores and offices). Each of Silent Knight's Intelliknight® addressable photoelectric smoke detectors has a unique address which is recognized by the system panel. These units are particularly well-suited for detecting dense smoke typical of fires involving soft furnishings, plastic, foam or other materials which tend to smolder, materials that can be common to apartment building common areas. The Intelliknight addressable pull stations also feature pin-point location identification, as well as easy installation and operation.

In fact, everyone involved in this project, from building management to UFS, appreciated the speed of installation that

the Silent Knight system allowed. Mostyn, explained, "Because the building had alarms going off weekly, we had four months to complete a high rise installation that would usually take five to eight months. A combination of extra manpower and the simplicity of installing Silent Knight, with its minimal wiring, helped us to come in under our tight deadline. That complete installation, with the 507 apartments, probably went the smoothest of any job I've done in my career."

MedWest board member, Andrea Liebowitz, greatly appreciates both the speed and the effectiveness of this Silent Knight solution. "We had initially tried a different vendor who had only installed a system on about 6 floors and clearly wasn't going to get the job done correctly and on time," she said. "The speed at which UFS was able to do the job saved us a lot of headaches as well as money."

"But what was truly paramount for me was the safety of our residents. Since the Silent Knight system was put in place, we haven't had one false alarm, and we've had zero resident complaints. Every single apartment is now safe and protected, which means I have no complaints either."

Fire marshal, Steve Curry, is not surprised at everyone's satisfaction with the Silent Knight safety system. "We've had very good results with Silent Knight, and an altogether satisfying experience. Service is readily available. Panels are easy to operate. Codes are being met."

With the absence of annoying false alarms and a newly installed fire safety system, the MedWest residents are more than satisfied as well. They are also sleeping more restfully knowing that, for their building's management team, the best fire safety is not a luxury at all - it's a necessity.



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