

Park Tower Profile

Hoan Le - Aviator, Executive, and Runner

by Monique Fouant



Frequently, when I bike or run along the lake front or swim in our health club pool, I encounter the familiar, smiling face of Park Tower resident Hoan Le (pronounced Juan Lee). Suspecting an interesting life's story, I asked him one day if he'd sit down and share it with me. He good-naturedly agreed, and a few days later we had the fascinating conversation that led to this profile.

Hoan was born and raised in Vietnam. Upon graduating from college, he enlisted in the Vietnam Air Force (VNAF). This being shortly before the start of the Vietnam War, he was sent to Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio, Texas, to study English, then on to the Naval Air Station at Pensacola, Florida, for training as a fighter pilot. (Remember An Officer and a Gentleman? It was filmed at that facility.)

Back home now, Hoan piloted the legendary Douglas A-1 Skyraider attack fighter. "In fact," he notes with obvious pride, "I was one of 24 VNAF fighter pilots to bomb North Viet Nam for the first time."

Hoan stayed with the VNAF for the next 14 years, rising to the position of chief of staff for the fighter branch at command

headquarters, where he and his team were responsible for 19 fighter squadrons.

When the war ended in 1975, Hoan was among the many Vietnamese who, deemed to be at risk, were evacuated to the United States. Jobs were tight, but he soon found his way to Chicago where he was able to combine work with continued education: a BA degree in Business Management from Northeastern Illinois University and an MS degree in Management of Public Services from DePaul University.

Upon graduation, Hoan sought to find positions that utilized his air force experience and management skills. First came a year at Fort Sheridan (Highwood, Illinois) as an operations research analyst, then two years with an American team in Saudi Arabia, at the King Khaled International Airport in Riyadh.

Returning to Chicago, Hoan worked briefly as a city planner, then landed a prestigious position at O'Hare International Airport where, as General Manager of Operations from 1987 to 1993, he and his 800 unionized employees maintained the facility and handled millions of dollars annually in parking revenue.

Hoan continued to serve airports in executive positions and as a management consultant until 2004, when he took the position from which he recently retired, Project Manager at SourceAmerica.

SourceAmerica, itself a non-profit, works with other non-profit agencies throughout the country to employ people with significant disabilities. Hoan's job, requiring more than 400 trips these past ten years, was to train these "helping" agencies to conform to federal regulatory guidelines in matching employees with jobs.

Hoan retired in 2015. So far he is enjoying it and is still very active in volunteer work with AARP, Salvation Army and Catholic Charities

Throughout his career and travels, Hoan managed to maintain an active exercise routine that began in the Navy. "The US Navy trained my body to become the fighter pilot and that is why I keep running."

Hoan has completed 24 marathons in various locations, including Lake County, Chicago, New York (his favorite), Los Angeles, Wisconsin, Texas, Saudi Arabia and Paris, France.

For several years, he was group leader for the 9 minute-per-mile running group, a project of the Chicago Area Running Association (CARA). He has coached his own physician as well as given tips to several Park Tower residents on running marathons.

Hoan no longer runs marathons but does still run, swim and lift weights five times a week. He credits the Jacuzzi and sauna for recovery from long runs and extending his athletic longevity.

Hoan and his wife, Sang Le, have been married for 40 years and lived the last 28 of them here at Park Tower. They enjoy the convenience of our market, health club, pool, and nearby grocery stores; the lakefront path and public transportation; and proximity to Saint Ita Catholic Church.

Sang Le is a nurse (RN, BSN) and will retire this year from Weiss Memorial Hospital. She and Hoan met when he was a Vietnamese liaison officer and flight instructor at Randolph Air Base in Texas.

Their son, John, works for United Airlines at Willis Tower and is pursuing an MBA degree at Northwestern's Kellogg School while serving as a program manager on United's business development and media team.

Like father, like son! John has opened a gym near University of Illinois Chicago, where he recently created a class that uses analytics and algorithms to determine daily workout routines.

Hoan is grateful for the opportunities he and others have had when they came to America as immigrants.

And I'm grateful for the opportunity to have gotten to know this accomplished gentleman with such a positive view of life. Please, if you run into Hoan, introduce yourself and let him know we appreciate his long residency at Park Tower Condominiums ■

