

ESTA Directions March 2003

by *Mike Wood*

It's been a busy month so welcome to a longer than usual 'Directions' column – there have been some very recent important decisions made concerning the certification program and I want to take this opportunity to bring you up to date.

First, the regular news – there is a new ESTA board member. David Taylor from Theatre Projects Consultants Inc. has been appointed as Affiliate Director replacing Jason Friedman. David is well known in the industry as both a Lighting Designer and a Theatre Consultant. He's a great addition to the board and we are delighted to welcome him.

The Biz-Ed committee has had a number of requests to repeat the business survey that was last done in ?????. The data gathered was extremely useful but is now somewhat dated – time to look at updating it. After some initial research on the timing and logistics it has been agreed to proceed, but not this year – this will now be a major project for Biz-Ed in 2004. This survey is as important to Dealer and Affiliate Members as the Market Research Program is to Manufacturers so watch out for this next year.

The March Technical Standards meetings held at USITT in Minneapolis were important in many ways however two items in particular stand out. Firstly 'BSR E1.5, Theatrical Fog Made with Aqueous Solutions of Di- and Tr-Hydric Alcohols' (more commonly known as the Glycol Fog standard) was approved by the Board for submission to ANSI. As you may know this standard, although short, is the result of 8 years of research and has been responsible for the introduction of the fog testing program and the birth of the Product Stewardship program. It's a critical standard for many aspects of our industry and should help dispel many fears and uncertainties. Congratulations to the Fog and Smoke Working Group for their persistence. By the way, the fog testing program continues to be well received with some significant participants such as the Guthrie Theatre and Oregon Shakespeare Festival using it to ensure they are working at safe levels.

Secondly ESTA is now working on its 25th standard! The honors go to E1.25. Over the last 8 years many hundreds of interested and dedicated people have participated in the Technical Standards Program and the results are cumulatively staggering. The whole industry has come together, set aside competitive pressures, and worked for the common good. The motives are not just altruistic of course, a safe working environment where equipment from different manufacturers connects and works together makes for good business too. Many congratulations and thanks to everyone working in the TSP and to those who have helped fund it.

Turning to Certification, a critical decision point was reached in Minneapolis at the Board of Directors meeting with the presentation and subsequent unanimous approval of a business plan to go forward and establish a personnel certification program for entertainment technology technicians.

Under the guidance of a Certification Consultant, Mike Hamm, two key areas have been identified for initial development - electrical skills and rigging skills. In addition, a curriculum based certificate program will be created to address entry-level essential skills.

These two types of programs - certificate programs and certification programs - are closely related but have different goals and outcomes; it's worth spending a moment to explain the subtle but important differences. The goal of the Essential Skills Working Group, which is to define the core knowledge needed by an entry-level entertainment technician, will be best served by creating a certificate program, which is more focused on education while the goals of the

Electrical and Rigging Skills Working Groups lend themselves to the development of a certification program, which is more concerned with the assessment of skills, abilities and knowledge.

A certificate program will define a curriculum or syllabus which will identify the core knowledge required. A successful candidate in a certificate program will access information and/or training based upon the curriculum developed, will take a written test based upon that curriculum, and will receive a certificate acknowledging he or she has successfully passed the test.

A successful candidate in a certification program will have achieved eligibility requirements to take a test, will successfully pass a test of skills, abilities and knowledge (which is planned to include both written and practical sections), will receive a formal designation as a skilled technician, and will achieve on-going requirements to maintain his or her designation.

Key to moving forward with these projects is funding, and it is considerable funding. Of the two it's the certification program which requires most resource and therefore a workable business plan for the certification program was critical. This plan has been developed under the guidance of a professional certification consultant using detailed research and extensive market surveys and the Board believes it is realistic and achievable.

In order to implement this business plan, the Board has defined the administrative structure needed to establish and run the program, including the management skills that are essential to the governing body. Over the next few months a Certification Council will be appointed by the Board to take on this role with ESTA reaching out to other industry associations to join us in this important industry-wide effort. In addition, individual members, selected for their specific skills and talents will be appointed. The direction and charter of the new Certification Council is substantially different than that of the original Certification Program Committee as the Council will be charged with a new set of duties with emphasis being put on fundraising, financial management, marketing and public relations.

It would not have been possible to reach this point without the work of the original Certification Program Committee in establishing the solid foundation on which the business plan has been built. The work that the original group did was substantially technical in nature and those tasks now need to devolve into the various working groups. This is a parallel evolution to that which happened within the Technical Standards Program where the original Technical Standards Committee substantially changed its makeup as the working groups took over the technical lead.

I'd like to take this opportunity to thank all the members of the CPC for their substantial efforts on behalf of this program and the Association. Without their hard work over the past two years this just wouldn't have happened.

As should be clear from the above – finding ongoing funding is now critical. ESTA cannot support this program from existing resources. The Certification Councils main initial role will be establishing sources for this funding and building industry wide support and you'll see a lot more information in this journal and elsewhere as this plan progresses.

The surveys from last year showed overwhelmingly that the entire industry thinks ESTA is the right organization to establish this important program. With increasing pressure from government, both local and federal, to ensure qualified staff are in place we need to be in charge of our own destiny and establish our own program before someone else imposes a program on us. ESTA and its members have the ability, knowledge and enthusiasm to lead the charge.