

Tech Know

ETCP certification enhances safety, reduces workplace risk and recognizes entertainment technicians

By Russell Read

E-T-C-P. DO YOU KNOW WHAT IT

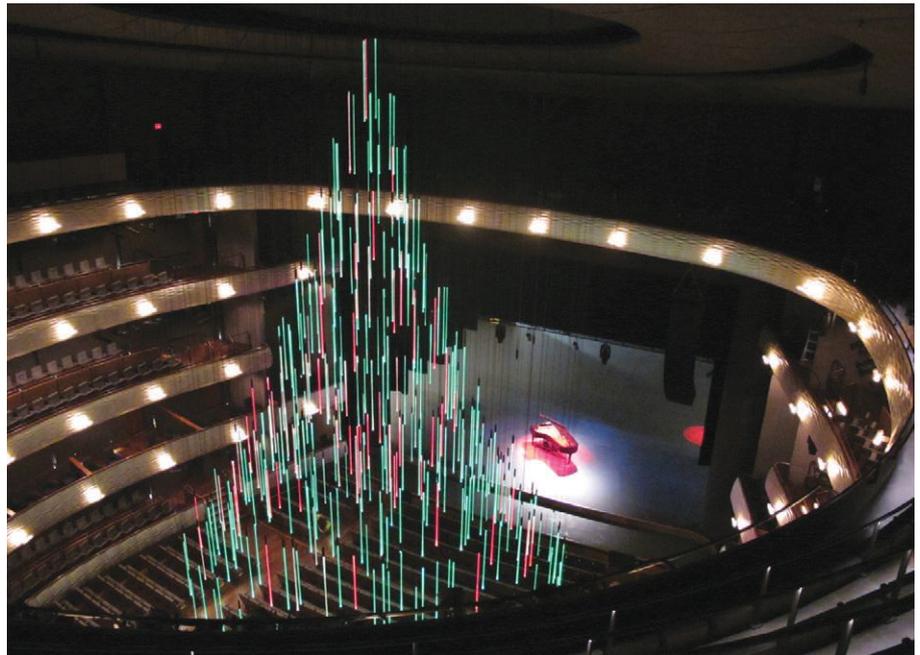
stands for? Well, if you've grabbed your issue of *Facility Manager* magazine on the way to Happy Hour at the local watering hole, enjoy your libation while you come up with a few words. Don't have it yet? Let me help you out...

E-T-C-P stands for the Entertainment Technician Certification Program. Now that we've got that established, let me explain how important I think this is and why you should care about it.

The Entertainment Technician Certification Program (ETCP) focuses on disciplines that directly affect the health and safety of crews, performers and audiences. By providing an independent assessment of knowledge, skills and abilities for entertainment technology disciplines, ETCP enhances safety, reduces workplace risk, and gives real recognition to the professional skills of entertainment technicians. Now where was that 20 years ago when I was an entertainment technician? I was like Rodney Dangerfield... no respect!

Over the last couple of years, many venues and employers have made the commitment to safely serve the entertainment industry by requiring ETCP Certified Technicians in lead positions. When the venues and employers take this stand, they are proving that they take the safety of their audiences, performers and crews very seriously.

Sounds great, but what does it really mean, and why should you care? Well, once upon a time in a far off land, I worked for a company called Vari*Lite – THE moving light company. I started out as part of their training department, and had the great pleasure of working with folks from IASTE, Disney, most all of Vegas and pretty much any individual that touched a



The AT&T Performing Arts Center in Dallas is all aglow as its chandeliers provide a Christmas tree look during the holiday. Photo by Russell Read.

Vari*Lite or any Vari*Lite employee that worked in high steel.

My job description was fairly basic. I think it went something like... train folks Vari*Lite systems and help them be safe and keep others around them safe. My team and I were successful, but we kept thinking that an industry standard should be established. About the time conversations were starting to happen at ESTA meetings about this, I left the world of Vari*Lite and ventured on to become what I am today ... a facility manager. Sorry, I mean a FACILITY MANAGER. (Hey, I am a Texan. We aren't shy about things we care about!)

This history is why I was so honored to receive a call from Robyn Williams, executive director of the Portland Center for the Performing Arts and a Life Safety Council member of IAVM. Robyn asked

if I would take over her position as liaison to the ETCP Certification Council. Wow... after 15 years, I can come full circle with what we wanted to do back at Vari*Lite. No surprise that my answer was, heck yeah!

Just think about it for a second. With the Entertainment Technician Certification Program (ETCP), venue managers have a way of measuring the knowledge of riggers and electricians in our industry. This is a far cry from the old days when we relied on the industry rumor mill to find the best people. Today if your electrician has the nickname of Sparky and they have been certified you can feel confident that person has the knowledge and the training they need and that they abide by the best practices of the industry. You should still find out how they got the nickname as I'm sure it will be a good story.

I like what Thomas Fields, building superintendent of show operations at the Los Angeles Convention Center (LACC), said about ETCP. "Proper knowledge of rigging principals, components/equipment, related engineering and the application thereof is vital to assuring public safety." Those strong words are probably why LACC revised their criteria for companies to qualify for placement on their list of approved rigging contractors, including requiring that all rigging supervisors be ETCP Certified.

Other venues have followed suit, including the Anaheim Convention Center, San Diego Convention Center and the California Academy of Sciences. Oh, and in Texas, my venue - the AT&T Performing Arts Center – included ETCP in our criteria almost immediately after we opened.

It is beholden on us as venue managers to stress the importance of ETCP credentials for electricians and riggers. If your venue isn't comfortable in working towards 100 percent certification, perhaps do what 20/20 Theatrical (Theatrical Equipment Installation Services) is doing and require that all lead installers be ETCP Certified and that secondary installers prove that they are working towards their certification.

Not convinced yet? About a year ago, an OSHA inspector came by my venue for a surprise visit. During the tour, I introduced the Inspector to my Lead Rigger and noted that my Lead Rigger was ETCP Certified. That was all the Inspector needed to hear – no more conversations were required about rigging, and we were off to investigate other parts of the venue. Whew.

It is exciting that after only five years, ETCP has gained true support from almost every aspect of the entertainment industry. Employers seem to recognize that there are inherent risks in this business and hiring qualified personnel shouldn't be one of those risks. Insisting on ETCP Certified Technicians in lead positions means that they are insisting on professional technicians who have proven that they have the skills and knowledge to provide the safest work environment possible.

And really, isn't that what we should all be striving for as venue managers? So, in true Texan spirit, I challenge each of you to become a "Recognized Facility" and pledge to hire ETCP Certified personnel in lead positions. For more information about ETCP call me or look up <http://etcp.plasa.org>. Heck – as my hometown team Dallas Mavericks (and reigning NBA champs) would say, it is a slam dunk! **fm**

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