

# Education—training—certification: Rig safer and increase your value!

THE FOUNDATION OF A successful career is a commitment to continuing education. Even if you have only been in the business for a short while, you’ve probably heard of the Live Design International tradeshow in Las Vegas. LDI is an important convention for our industry, and there are many reasons you should consider attending, including seeing companies exhibiting their latest technology, training with some offering ETCP continuing education credits, as well as seeing friends and building new relationships. As an IATSE Local 720 member, I think another reason to attend the convention is the opportunity to admire the great rigging that IATSE Local 720 installs for all the booths.

Global Experience Specialists (GES) is the general contracting company that has managed the LDI show for 20 plus years. GES has a contract with the Las Vegas stagehands union, IATSE Local 720, to install many of the impressive displays that the LDI show has to offer. The IBEW Local 357 and the Teamsters Local 63 also have a large role to play in the setup of the convention. After all, if it were not for their expertise behind the scenes, freight would not move, nor would power run to the booths.

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At LDI working for GES, I’ve had the pleasure of working as a Stagehand Rigging Foreman since 2014. In addition to other qualifications that I possess, my ETCP Rigger – Arena Certification enables me to handle this important position.

The Rigging Foreman position affords me the platform to share my knowledge and experience with my union brothers and sisters, which is something I do enthusiastically. When I roll up to their booths on my cart, they know I’m going to inspect and critique their work, give out compliments where they are due, and probably offer more unsolicited advice than a one-ton motor can lift.

During the 2025 load-in of LDI, I made sure to let stagehands know that a rigging hardware manufacturer would be hosting a FREE two-day, sixteen-hour Fundamentals of Rigging class in Las Vegas during the month of February. This particular course is an excellent way to prepare individuals working towards initial ETCP certification, as well as for those requiring continuing education credits to maintain their certification. It’s really amazing that we’re getting to learn from the global leader known for manufacturing

high-quality rigging hardware used every day at our job.

Despite knowing that a few people wouldn’t be able to attend when the time came, twenty stagehands were excited to sign up for the class with my encouragement. We all know that when working from gig to gig, it’s hard to turn down work, especially if it’s only two days of work that week, or if those two days interrupt a five-day run. This is problematic for stagehands who are on the bounce, but how is one supposed to get better at their job if training never works with their schedule? We need to be sure to prioritize education.

Out of the ten individuals who made it to the class, there were nine who have been around for many years, three of whom have their ETCP Rigger – Arena certifications, and one rigger who is earlier in their experience. This shows that education and training are vital for any level of expertise.

A nice thing about preparing for an ETCP exam is that you’re able to study during your own time, such as on those union lunch breaks, or after work in the evening. However, if you want to get solid at the math, which you should, committing time to additional study sessions is also a good idea. Those can be with other certification candidates or with certified technicians or by attending formal training modules offered by established companies. A list of certified technicians can be found here: <https://etcp.esta.org/find-technicians/search.php>

My first experience with the rigging education class was in March 2012. A few months before I’d been hired to be the Head Rigger at the 16,000-seat Thomas & Mack Center on the UNLV campus in Las Vegas. At this point I’d had very little formal training in my rigging career; I had previously attended some math preparation classes at my union hall when ETCP came about, but that was it at the time.

Class started at 8:00 a.m., and by the time I arrived the room was already packed with people from various industries. At each seat there was a product catalog and a rigging fundamentals workbook based on OSHA/ANSI standards. I was impressed by the level of professionalism and grateful to have the opportunity to attend.

The first few hours were pivotal, because while I had been doing entertainment rigging for almost fifteen years, I realized with awe that there was so much more to be learned about my job. If it hadn’t been for the knowledge gained in 2012, I wouldn’t have known that eyebolts cannot be welded. If they are welded, the manufacturer

no longer considers the eyebolt a rated piece of hardware, due to the heat from the welding affecting the alloy of the eyebolt. This knowledge averted a possible rigging accident on a job I was managing years ago, a situation that is still talked about in Las Vegas. I followed this up by writing a series of articles in an international trade publication regarding these circumstances.

In those two days the trajectory of my career was altered, and it set me on a path to become a highly trained and educated rigger.

After that experience I wanted more, so I started studying diligently for the ETCP Rigger – Arena exam. Shortly after passing that exam, I sought out and located Industrial Training International in Woodland, Washington. With ITI, I completed their Master Riggers course with exams. Next was the Rigging Hardware Inspection course, followed by the two-day Accident Investigation course. These classes were a fantastic learning experience that included a lot of hands-on training. In fact, for the ITI Master Rigger exam, there is a practical component to the test in which the rigger must demonstrate their knowledge by doing assigned rigging tasks. You can pass the written exams, but if you don't pass the practical rigging component, there's no Master Rigger certificate earned. It's a system of applied knowledge that I cannot recommend enough.

Just like the ETCP, the Master Rigger certificate from ITI requires recertifying every five years. The big difference between the two is that the Master Rigger certification requires you to attend four days of classes, with exams on the fifth day at an ITI training center. While that may be a time commitment for a certificate, it's worth the investment.

When it comes to ETCP certifications, completing 10-20 hours of continuing education is required for recertification, which can even be online training at your convenience. Two to four hours of continuing education a year should be easy for everyone since there is always new content to learn, and it's a good idea to revisit what we haven't had the opportunity to practice for a while, especially considering the impressive amount of work being performed daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly in our industry without accidents.

Twenty years in, the ETCP certification is still the standard because the clients we serve know that educated, trained, and certified riggers make their events safer. New entertainment riggers and lighting technicians need to set ETCP certification as a goal. The ole salty entertainment riggers and lighting technicians who aren't yet ETCP certified should do the same, though, because it's the right example to set. No matter how long I've been in the industry, each time I've been in a rigging class, there are always moments that make me sit up in the chair, realize something new, or remember something important which I had forgotten. Either way, I am grateful for the knowledge, because it definitely has made me a safer and more aware rigger.

So, remember, this coming LDI 2026, we will be celebrating twenty-one years of ETCP. If you're not yet ETCP certified in your discipline, start educating yourself now, and set the goal of taking

the test. If you are certified and need continuing education credits, then be on the lookout for some interesting skill building opportunities at the show as well. ■



**Andrew Fulton** (Master Rigger Qualified) (ETCP Arena Certified) (Crosby – Train the Trainer) has rigged for film & television, events in stadiums, arenas, theatres, and tradeshows. He was Lead Production Rigger at the Thomas & Mack Center from 2011-2021 and was part of the PRG management team at the Sands Expo and Venetian & Palazzo Hotels from 2012-2015. A highlight of Andrew's career was being part of the Kish Rigging team that went to Moscow, Russia, to install Miss Universe in 2013. For adventure, Andrew paraglides and is often soaring the skies of California, Nevada, and Utah.

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