

# ETCP: Building a better industry through knowledge

ETCP Certification and continuing education promotes a culture of on-going learning, safety, and professionalism

I AM SURE MY STORY IS FAR FROM UNIQUE. I started working backstage in junior high school. It was the perfect way to be involved with the energy of live production and not have to be in front of all those people out there (sort of an honor-not-glory thing—but, if you are reading this journal, I am sure you know what I mean). While the drama teacher focused primarily on the actors, the older backstage students coached us new folk on the lay of the land and how to work. That method of learning was the most important lesson I ever learned: Part of your responsibility is to share what you know with those around you. In doing so, you make the industry a better and safer place. I have carried this forward into every workplace and production since.

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Fourteen years ago, after much cajoling, no small amount of pestering, and a goodly dollop of begging (all on my part), I was fortunate to join Electronic Theatre Controls, Inc. in its Technical Support department. The prospect of being paid to answer the late-night help calls that I had been getting for years was thrilling enough, but I found an added bonus in the event that happened during my first week at ETC—a training workshop.

At that time, ETC hosted a yearly event



that brought all of our installers and sales force to ETC for a week of classroom instruction—teaching configuration techniques, technical troubleshooting, and (in that session) a newfangled thing called “IP networking.”

Networked systems were fledgling at that time, and ETC had discovered that IP addressing was a new concept to the majority of our workshop attendees. As this training constituted the majority of their continuing education, there was no other venue in which to learn about this new technology. So, rather than offer a table of IP addresses and an instruction chart on how

to set them in ETC products, we developed a curriculum to teach the concepts of networking and addressing. I still teach this class, and have updated it to include the newest, newfangled technology—wireless networking. Why give a one-time just-do-this-type answer when, with a little more effort, you can teach people the means to solve problems themselves?

The high value placed by ETC on customer service has always included a deep-rooted education component. Every system we sell includes product-specific, focused user education. Over the years, we have grown our internal training offerings

from that single yearly course in Middleton to over 30 sessions a year worldwide.

As we develop each session, we start by asking ourselves the same questions: What do we want our guests to be able to do after attending? What new concepts are occurring in the marketplace that may offer challenges to our customers and how can we help them meet those? Examples of trending course topics have included DMX, fluorescent dimming, wireless networking, RDM, sACN, and dimmable LED technology. Quite simply, if you can help someone understand a new concept, they can, in turn, teach others, and thus the unfamiliar becomes commonplace.

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In 2006, when the ETCP Electrician Certification became available, we were excited to see what direction this would take the industry. We found that the skills needed to achieve ETCP Certification either in rigging or electricians set a knowledge standard. If someone had the knowledge base to pass the test, we could remove those building blocks from our sessions and focus more time towards installation technique and advanced curriculum. When our existing Authorized Service Providers began obtaining ETCP Certifications, or new applicants were already certified, we saw a marked difference in conceptual understanding during ETC training sessions.

In 2008, Abby Tutorow, Authorized Service Provider, Beck Studios, Inc. (ETCP-EE#204), approached me with a question. She needed to earn continuing education credits to maintain her certification and said it would be nice if ETC offered that. As I started researching ETCP Recognition, I found that (at that time) there were no approved classes for stage electricians. *Hmm, I thought, this is a problem ETC can help solve.* We started working with

Meredith Moseley-Bennett, ETCP Certification Manager, on the possibility of offering our classes as continuing education. It was new for both sides: ETCP had never incorporated such a diverse existing training program, and we had never had another organization consider accrediting the lighting and rigging courses we offered. While the ETCP Council discussed this, we at ETC modified classes to make them less about ETC product (where appropriate) and more about recommended industry standards. ETC developed a curriculum that met everyone's needs and gained ETCP Recognition.

In January 2009, ESTA's ETCP Certification Council approved ETC's application, establishing ETC as the first lighting manufacturer (and one of a handful of rigging manufacturers) to have courses approved as part of the ETCP program.

When I asked Dan Boggess, ETC's Field Service Manager, why it was so important to him to see this partnership succeed, he explained it this way:

“We recognized that ETC's established technical training courses presented an opportunity for both ETC and the PLASA ETCP effort. ETCP-Certified attendees could now gain renewal credits by participating in one of our technical training sessions. We are very proud and excited to offer this expertise and professional aid to the industry. It's beneficial for all involved, with the end result of raising the bar in installation knowledge and system integration in our industry.”

After we had created the program, Abby Tutorow returned with her appraisal:

“I'm elated that ETC decided to support ETCP by offering ETCP Recognized training. I hope more training providers in the industry go the extra mile and join up with ETCP to offer Recognized training. I think ETC's training programs are top in the industry. Coupled with ETC's existing commitment to safety, the training is a win-win for me. I look forward to ETC's courses to keep my skills sharp, help me stay on top of new information and technology, as well as to provide the credits I need for the

education portion of my ETCP Certification.”

As ETC's Eos-line consoles became one of the lighting-control boards of choice, stagehands, programmers, and electricians began contacting us looking for local sources of console training. Additionally, trade unions began contacting us seeking a way to include training as part of their internal education programs.

To address these requests and expand our training programs, ETC launched a broad initiative—the ETC Education Center. The mission of the center is to focus on product knowledge for end-users. The Education Center presents regional training events and creates online-training resources on ETC's website and YouTube channel.

As we started performing these sessions, we discovered that many participants were already ETCP Certified and were looking for a source of renewal credits. Because ETC Technical Training was already approved as an ETCP Recognized Training Program, it was an easy decision for the ETCP Council to add these console-programming classes for continuing-education credits. Now when people attend our Education Center's regional training events, they can receive one renewal credit per training hour.

Since we entered the program, we have seen more than half of the technicians we train either become ETCP Certified as electricians or riggers (many holding both certificates) or come to us after having obtained ETCP Certification, looking for classroom instruction to maintain their status. Many of our service providers return once a year (as opposed to biannually, as we ask them too), specifically to fulfill their continuing education requirements.

Tripp Oliver, Regional Sales Manager for Mainstage Theatrical Supply (ETCP AR&TR #111, ETCP-EE #246), uses our sessions as a way to stay current and certified:

“I feel ETC training furthers my education both as an ETCP technician and in my career. ETC's education programs are an industry asset, serving the mission of ETCP by helping maintain a knowledgeable professional group of technicians. Having



ETC support the ETCP program and offer renewal credits is a great solution.

“ETC requires ETCP rigging certification for a person to become a member of their Prodigy installer program. This ensures that the installer has an understanding of rigging practices, and further emphasizes ETC’s support of the ETCP program. It also assures me (and my customers) that projects are installed safely by certified technicians who will follow industry practices.

“ETC’s training has proved to be invaluable to me. Attending factory training sessions keeps me abreast of the newest technology and practices for the industry as a whole and is a great opportunity to learn new methods and ideas from my industry peers.”

Tripp and several other technicians now alternate yearly between our rigging and lighting sessions, letting them keep certified by ETC and obtain needed credits for ETCP. The combined training and education elements of our program allow our installer network to provide exceptional service not only on ETC products, but through the industry as a whole. “I believe at the end of the day ETCP is about safety,” says Steve Welsh, of Miami Stagecraft (ETCP TR#160,

ETCP-EE#274):

“Customers and co-workers alike expect a high level of expertise. Precisely through meeting their expectations, we create the high standard of safety and performance you expect from an ETCP-Certified technician. The training we receive makes this possible.

“In this day and age, it is more important than ever to spend your training dollars wisely. We cannot expect technicians, stagehands, or anyone for that matter, to perform at a high level without a broad personal knowledge base and real tangible experience. Continuing education contributes significantly to this. The fact that ETC’s training results in ETCP credit makes it an even better value than it already was.”

Looking at the last three years we have collaborated with ETCP, I have seen firsthand how people who come to our sessions return to their offices and teach what they have learned to their coworkers, who in turn can come here and learn more advanced topics, returning and again sharing what they learned with others. It is always gratifying to see it come full circle. I think ETCP Certification plays a large role in this, as it sets a standard for behavior

as well as knowledge. Knowing we are providing ETCP Recognized training, we hold ourselves to the highest standard when developing materials.

I look forward the future of training at ETC and a continued collaboration with ETCP. You can expect us to offer more classes and additional opportunities for certified electricians and riggers as well expanding our offerings to the industry-at-large. It is exciting to see ETCP grow and become the recognized industry standard, and I look forward to whatever part I can play in continuing to promote education, safety, and professionalism throughout the industry. ■



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Stage Lighting, and as Master Electrician for UCLA School of Theatre, Film, and Television. David has also worked as a production electrician, console operator, lighting designer, and monitor engineer.