



The storied career of Roy Bickel included adventuring as a human cannonball in the circus.

Roy Bickel: Innovator and teacher

Roy Bickel receives the ESTA Lifetime Technical Achievement Award

The ESTA Technical Lifetime Achievement Award was presented to Roy Bickel April 6th, in the New World Rigging Symposium.

ERIN GRABE, ESTA EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, opened the presentation: The ESTA Board of Directors and Technical Standards Council created the ESTA Technical Lifetime Achievement Award in 2017 to recognize individuals whose technical contributions have had a significant impact on our industry. The criteria include significant and sustained technical contributions to the entertainment industry over at least 25 years. Contributions may be related to the development of innovative products,

tools, technology, safety improvements, interoperability, or processes, but commercial success of these items need not be a primary qualifier. When reviewing candidates for this award the selection committee will also consider characteristics such as “Wow that’s really cool,” or, “I wish I’d thought of that.” Past recipients include Bob Goddard, Scott Fisher, and Rocky Paulson. This year’s winner is no less legendary. Roy Bickel has been a pillar of our community for over half a century and this picture provides the tiniest glimpse of his illustrious career.

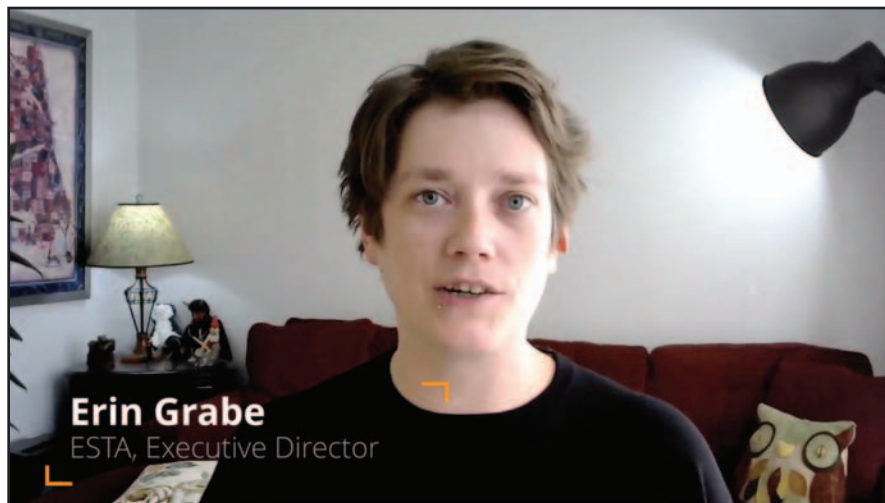
Chris Schmidt, Stage Rigging, and an ESTA Technical Standards Program Above and Beyond Award recipient, explained:

When the call went out for candidates for the ESTA Lifetime Technical Achievement Award, I could think of only one person and he came to mind immediately. Roy Bickel is a consummate professional, with a career that has spanned well over five decades. I’ve been fortunate to work closely with Roy over the years. His contributions to the industry go back as far as the early Disney on Parade days, developing many of the techniques still current and in use today—all created by none other than Roy Bickel. Now, I’d like to hand it over to Rocky Paulson.

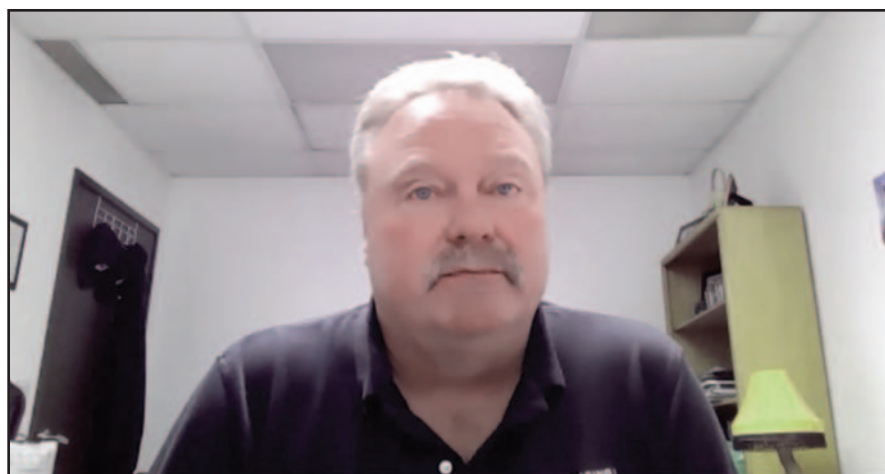
Rocky Paulson, 2019 recipient of the ESTA Technical Lifetime Achievement Award, shared: I’d like to mention a few of

the things that make Roy most deserving of this award. I met Roy in 1972 when I was a local rigger and he came in as head rigger of the new *Mary Poppins Disney on Parade* show. Back then there weren't that many of us in the business and those few were a pretty cocky group of young men. We all thought we were bulletproof—except for Roy. He never thought he was bulletproof because he, in fact, was the bullet. Roy has always been an innovator and done things his own kind of way, which is one of the things that made him such a great contributor to our industry. I have to mention one innovation that created a sea change in the way we do rigging. Roy was a circus rigger and when he was hired as the head rigger of the first Disney on Parade show he had to set up his own rigging department and train his riggers. Instead of doing it the old-fashioned circus rigging way, he did it a new way. (See screenshot on page 60.) The old way on the left is wire rope around beams with clove hitches and circus hitches wrapping the beams with wire rope and crossbeam back to themselves. This method was a royal pain. Roy had the company buy several kinds of press tools including a hydraulic Nicopress, so we made our own. Roy came up with the idea of making 5', 10', 20', 30', and 50' color-coded red, white, blue, green, and yellow shackling slings that together you could make whatever length you needed and then all you had to do was wrap the top one around the beam and shackle it back to itself. It was an amazing revelation and cut the rigging time at least by 50%. If there's one biggest change in rigging in my five decades, it would have to be Roy's idea of coming up with slings and shackling them together.

For these early shows, we used Sky Climber hoists which are cable climbing devices mainly used on man lifts for window washing, and you could get whatever length sling you needed from the Sky Climber company. Roy just bought two sets of slings so we could go off and do the advanced rigging. In those days, rigging took so much time we couldn't really work



Erin Grabe, ESTA's Executive Director



Chris Schmidt, Stage Rigging



Rocky Paulson

during the normal load-in, so this was an excellent way the advanced rigger didn't have to take too much equipment with

them and the show didn't have to spend extra money on hoists. As the first Disney rigger, Roy had to decide what kind of

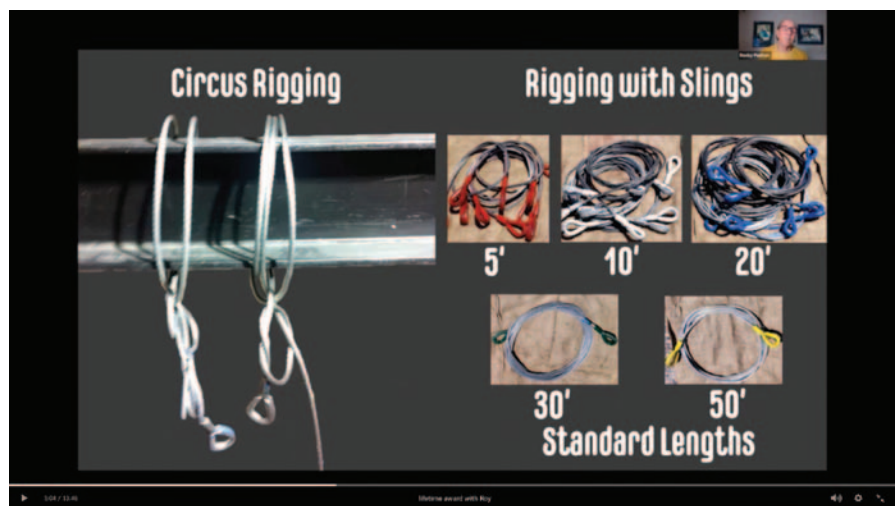
equipment was going to be used and set up the whole thing—and, he also had to train the entire cadre of riggers because once the Disney shows got going, there were two to four shows touring at a time, and Roy had to manage the breaking-in of all these things. When Roy hired me, he taught me a lot: climbing techniques, technical rigging procedures, use of the equipment, all the limitations and rules about the equipment, and about inspections. We had to rigidly inspect equipment all of the time. Plus, all these shows had aerialists; in addition to the regular rigging work we learned how to spot aerialists during their performances. And, we were taught how to do daily and weekly inspections of all the aerialist paraphernalia. Later on, all these skills taught to many of us during these Disney years went on to define what it meant to be an arena rigger. Because of this excellent training, when the rock and roll explosion came along there was a well-qualified base of riggers trained by Roy that allowed for the rapid expansion of our industry in a very safe and sane fashion.

In the early 2000s, Roy joined the ETCP development team and his contributions, because of his vast rigging experience and knowledge, went a long way to make the certification exam the best it could be. To this day, I know Roy is a proud and loud proponent of the ETCP program. For these and many, many other reasons, I'd like to present Roy Bickel, the godfather of rigging, the ESTA Lifetime Technical Achievement Award.

An honored **Roy Bickel** expressed: Wow! Thank you Rocky. I'm honored, humbled, and proud that Rocky and I have both received this award. And, thank you to ESTA. There's a few people I'd like to thank in my long 50-year career. First, would be Hal Elgin. He ran the Aquamaniacs Waterski School; we did shows all around Florida and when we started doing pyramids of different kinds, frontwards, backwards, etc., Hal asked me to fix the ropes to the right lengths. I did it on land first, then made the lengths all look nice with splices. Then in my first professional rigging job, I was a human cannonball (See screenshot on page 58.)



Roy Bickel receives his ESTA Lifetime Technical Achievement Award.



Roy Bickel's idea of different length slings and shackling them together created a sea change in the way rigging was done.

We were in Montreal, I think, and it was the first venue where the net that I would land in, instead of being on net poles, was hung from the ceiling. I looked up, and said "I wonder what's holding that net up there; I'd hate for something to fall and let me hit the ground." I climbed up to look, and Casey Gibbs was up there. He was the boss, and he said, "Roy, you are a pretty good climber. Would you want to come rig in the circus?" I said, "Wow, sure! What's it pay?" He said, "I think \$100 a week." I'm thinking to myself, "I got \$250 a week for doing the cannon and another \$100 to rig!" I had really big money in those days.

Next I went to Disney on Parade, where I was hired because I was a rigger. Then I went to New York and worked for Pete Feller Scenic Studios in the '70s. He built all the

Broadway shows, so of course, he put me on them. I did automation for shows including *The Wiz*, *Chicago*, *Truckload*, and *Pippin*, and from there I went into rock and roll.

I also want to thank the International Alliance of Theatrical and Stage Employees. I've been a member for 51 years. I transferred here to Las Vegas Local 720 in the mid-'90s where I was able to start convention work and go back and forth between conventions and rock and roll. A big thank you to 720. I want to thank Mike Edgeworth for making me a foreman at the Las Vegas Convention Center. And most of all, I'd like to thank my wife Diana for almost 38 years standing by my side and taking care of me. Guys and gals, thank you all. ■