

ETCP POV: The early years

BY EDDIE RAYMOND AND BILL SAPSIS WITH LORI RUBINSTEIN

IT'S HARD TO COMPREHEND that it was 20 years ago that the first ETCP exams were held at LDI in Orlando. That said, the process started years before that and involved many, many people across the entertainment spectrum to bring it to that point. It seems now is a good time to remember and recognize the efforts that made ETCP the success that it is.

In the late 1990s a group of people affiliated with the Technical Standards Program (TSP) at ESTA, in answer to a question about what qualifies our technicians to perform the work they do, started a group interested in evaluating the potential for a certification program. They found that, although there were some existing programs, these lacked geographic scope. They failed to reach all the affected participation groups, lacked the financial resources to do so, and/or lacked fundamental program efficiency. A Certification Programs Committee was formed in 1998.

In 2001 the actual recruitment of working group members began in earnest. At the time the CPC consisted of: David Boevers, Louis Bradfield, Randy Davidson, Eddie Kramer, Tim Hansen (Chair), Neil Huff, Roger L. Lattin, Kam McCormick, Richard Nix, and Ken Vannice. In 2002, three co-chairs were added to the CPC: Ken Vannice, Marilyn "Cookie" Hetzel (both electrical), and Rocky Paulson (rigging).

The formation meeting of the Electrical and Rigging Skills Working Groups, then still part of the TSP, was announced to take place February 14, 2002, at the Hyatt Hotel in New Orleans in conjunction with the USITT conference. That was also the first meeting of the Rigging Skills Working Groups, Vision and Mission Group, and the Primary Skills Group. The members of those groups were David Boevers, Jerry

Gorrell, Robert Grenier, Kent Jorgenson, Shawn Nolan, Eddie Raymond, and Harvey Sweet. Two new co-chairs were named for the Rigging Skills Working Group: Bill Sapsis, chairing the Vision and Mission Group; and Baer Long, chairing the Primary Skills Group. While the formal meeting was significant, the subsequent casual gatherings in New Orleans really kickstarted the work.

Later that year, ESTA hired Mike Hamm, a certification consultant, to work with us to develop a certification program that would meet the highest criteria for fairness and integrity. A small committee of five (volunteers Wally Blount, Chris Kaiser, and Tim Hansen, and staff Executive Director Lori Rubinstein and Program Coordinator Bill Maiman) was tasked with working closely with Mike to do the initial groundwork for the program. They met frequently for over a year, developing a business plan for the ESTA Board of Directors to approve. They also developed a draft fundraising plan, budget, and vision and mission statements for approval by the new Certification Council. The decision was made to reconstitute and formalize the oversight body for the program, inviting organizational members to represent the varied industry stakeholders, individuals recruited for their specific expertise in areas such as legal, financial, fundraising, et cetera, and the subject matter experts leading the working groups. This task group then identified potential Council members and needed subcommittees.

During this time, Mike also spoke to the ESTA Board and the working groups about certification programs, the National Organization of Competency Assurance, and what certification is and is not. The difference between a certificate and a certification was made clear and became one of the early mantras for those working on the program.

In the Spring of 2002, Wally Blount was added as co-chair of the CPC. Wally was key to keeping the nascent project moving forward effectively. He was a leader of unusual skill and patience. The first Vision and Mission Statements were introduced at that Spring TSC meeting.

During the summer, we determined that we needed to know if there was enough interest in certification to justify the time, effort, and expense of the program envisioned. We would ask potential candidates, and employers, that very question via a survey. The survey was scheduled to launch in November of that year. Our goal was to determine the candidate pool to which we would market our program.

We knew the program would need to be an independent industry-wide program involving many groups that were not members of ESTA. To that end, the Certification Council was formed to govern the program, and several key groups were invited to join. CITT, IAVM, IATSE, TEA, USITT were the first invited Council members.

By the Spring of 2003, the first organizational Certification Council Members and their alternates were named: IAVM (Don Hancock and Robyn Williams), IATSE (Tony DePaulo, Brian Lawler and Tim Wade), and USITT (Dennis Dorn and Joe Aldridge) had all accepted. Tim Hansen was named Chair of the new Certification Council. Eddie Raymond was named as a co-chair of the Rigging Skills Working Group, along with Bill Sapsis and Rocky Paulson. Ken Vannice was named the chair of the Electrical Skills Working Group. They developed and presented a business plan to the ESTA Board of Directors.

New Council Members were named to the council in the Fall of 2003: CITT (Ron Morrissette), Clear Channel Entertainment

(Alan De Zon and Steven Ehrenberg), TEA (Gene Jeffers). We also created four seats for ESTA: the Chair of the Council (Tim Hansen), the chair of the Budget and Finance Committee (Chris Kaiser), a representative from the ESTA Board of Directors (Wally Blount), and a representative from the TSP (Ken Vannice). Other individual members were appointed based of what they would bring to the council: Alfred T. DeMaria, partner on the legal firm Clifton, Budd and DeMaria; Dr. Marilyn “Cookie” Hetzel from Metropolitan State College; Kent Jorgenson, IATSE Safety and Training Representative; and Jackie Tien, publisher of *Lighting Dimensions* and *Entertainment Design* magazines.

The Initial meeting of the Certification Council took place on September 19 and 20, 2003, in New York City. ESTA President Mike Wood began the meeting and then turned it over to Chair, Tim Hansen. It was one of those occasions that you realize you’ve entered something meaningful and life-changing. Everyone there knew this certification endeavor was now a reality with a life of its own, and we were charged to oversee and nourish it.

Committees of the Council were adopted at this first meeting. They were Appeals, Budget and Finance, Candidate Qualification, Disciplinary, Marketing and Fundraising, Provider Recognition, and Test Administration. The Marketing and Fundraising Committee, chaired by Jackie Tien, introduced the official name and logo of the program, the newly minted Entertainment Technician Certification Program. We all knew that the real first order of business was to figure out how to pay for it!

That fall we set a fundraising goal of \$750,000. The first donors were:

Executive Level (\$75,000)

USITT

Orchestra Level (\$15,000 to \$25,999)

JR Clancy
Martin Professional
Syracuse Scenic

Mezzanine Level (\$10,000 to \$14,999)

Barbizon Lighting Company
Stage Rigging, a Freeman Company

Balcony Level (\$5,000 to \$9,999)

IATSE Local 80
John T. McGraw and Lori Rubinstein
Strong Entertainment Lighting
Sapsis Rigging
Texas Scenic Company
TLS, Inc.

Upper Deck Level (\$1,000 to \$9,999)

Brian Lawlor
Ken Vannice
Associated Theatrical Contractors
Steven Ehrenberg
In House Productions
Wally Russell Lifetime Achievement Fund

Bleacher Level (\$100)

Frances Thompson

Now that we had an actual program and some funding, it was time to hire our first Program Manager. After an exhaustive search, we hired Katie Geraghty. A graduate of University of Madison, Wisconsin, Katie was new to New York City and looking for a job. She had assisted the Executive Director of the Board of Sleep Medicine in Chicago and was ready for a new challenge. She turned out to be a great fit.

Our fundraising efforts continued, and we received two of our biggest contributions to date:

Executive Level (\$100,000)

IATSE
Clear Channel Entertainment

The Council continued to fill available seats with significant members. The Association of Motion Picture and Television Production accepted their invitation to join the council (Dennis King), as did the International Communications Industries Association (Tom Stimson and Lou Nanni). Later that summer PRG joined the council (Fred Gallo and Jere Harris).

In the summer of 2004, Local One contributed \$50,000 toward our goal; we were starting to feel like we really had the industry’s approval. That summer we began the test development process by performing job and role delineation analyses for what had now become two rigging areas: Arena Rigging and Theatrical Rigging.

By the fall of 2002, ETCP announced that we would be conducting a job analysis survey. The survey was to go out to those identified in our first candidate pool survey. It was vital that we hear from those who practiced the crafts what were the most important parts of their jobs.

At this point our fundraising efforts reached \$600,000 in support! We continued to receive significant contributions from the heavy hitters in the industry with \$100,000 from PRG and \$25,000 from ETC.

Next we needed media partners to help us spread the word. Many of the most significant industry publications joined the effort, including:

- Entertainment Design*
- Lighting Dimensions*
- Lighting & Sound America*
- Protocol*
- Pro Lights and Staging News*
- Theatrical Design and Technology*
- Total Productions US*
- Tour Guide*
- Venues Today*

Near the end of 2004, the League of American Theatres (Seth Popper) joined the Council, filling one of the last available seats.

By the winter of 2005, we had a final list of Rigging Subject Matter Experts (SMEs) were. They were many of the best-known riggers in the North America:

- Roy Bickel
- John Bleich
- Eddie Blue
- David Boevers
- Olan Contrill
- Jim Doherty
- Harry Donovan

Kelly Green
 Glenn Hafford
 Ed Kish
 Stephane Mayrand
 Joseph McGeough
 Brian Miller
 Walter Murphy
 Rocky Paulson
 G. Anthony Phillips
 Eddie Raymond
 Michael Reed
 Bill Sapsis
 Peter Scheu
 Karen Seifried
 Scott Sloan
 Sammy Stokes
 Jack Suesse

With the SMEs in place, the Council felt confident in announcing that the first exams for Arena and Theatrical Rigging would be scheduled for the fall of 2005. There was still a lot of work to do to make this a reality.

The first meeting of the SMEs took place in the fall of 2004 in Lenexa, KS, at the AMP offices. Their first task was to develop the job analysis survey, defining the body of knowledge, skills, and attributes that would define a rigger in the top third of all riggers. The survey enjoyed wide participation across the country and provided the basis for the content outline and exam questions.

The SMEs reconvened in Kansas at AMP for instruction on how to write good exam questions. What followed was one of the most humbling experiences that this stalwart group of riggers had ever faced. How hard could it be to write exam questions? Right? Well, it turned out to be very difficult indeed. The next two days were spent writing, critiquing, and rewriting questions. I'm sure if you ask any one of the people in that room that first day, they would all admit that it was so much harder than they had envisioned. Everyone proved to be up to the task, and by the time everyone left for home, they were assigned portions of the content outline to turn into specific kinds of questions with a modicum of confidence that they were up to the task.

Over the next few months, the questions for both exams were written, argued about, modified, and accepted. The question that remained was how the larger rigging community would feel about them.

While the SMEs were developing the exam questions, the ETCP Council was also defining the qualifications to sit for the exams. First, a substantial amount of work experience was required. There were also credits offered for educational experience. The Council also realized that a re-qualification was necessary to account for industry updates like codes, products, and methods. This recertification process would require continuing professional education. This requirement has led to an increase in education programs throughout the industry. Prior to this, there were very few education classes.

By spring 2005 there was enough confidence in the progress to announce the actual test dates. It was decided that the first exams would be held in conjunction with the LDI Show in Orlando, FL, on November 12 that year. To that end, qualifications to sit for the exam were announced and the Content Outline was published in *Protocol*. Candidate handbooks were published.

Having made such great progress, and eager to make headway on the Electrical exams, AMP and the Electrical SMEs began work on the electrical exam job analysis in the summer of 2005, with a goal of LDI in 2006 for the first exam.

The SMEs chosen for this were:

Rick Baxter
 Eric Bouchere
 Jeanette Farmer
 Ian Foulds
 Tony Giovanetti
 Daved R. Hatch
 John Huntington
 Dave Loftin
 Jim Maloney
 Alan Rowe
 Nancy Shaw
 Ken Vannice

At LDI in November 2005, as some of us outside the test room debated heading for the hills before the test-takers had a chance to chase us down the street with pitchforks, over 200 brave souls sat for the first ETCP Arena and Theatre Rigging exams. Most came out feeling that the tests were difficult but fair. With that, the Age of Entertainment Certification became a reality.

At the beginning of 2006, over 800 Entertainment Electricians agreed to participate in the first Electrical Job Analysis Survey, and the Electrical Exams were on their way. ■



Eddie Raymond graduated from Bishop O'Dowd High School in 1969 and attended San Francisco State from 1969 to Spring of 1972. He transferred to UC Berkeley to complete his undergraduate degree in English Literature and then returned for Graduate school in Education. After

receiving his teaching credentials, being unemployed, he took advantage of a position in the Scenic Shop of the American Conservatory Theatre. The rest is history.

Eddie has acted as ACT's Scene Shop Foreman/Technical Supervisor and was instrumental in the rebuilding of the Geary Theatre after the Loma Prieta earthquake. Among other activities in the field he has been a Construction Coordinator and Special Effects mechanic at Industrial Light and Magic.

In 1996, he moved into a union leadership role as the Vice President and Safety & Training Director of IATSE Local 16. He retired from that position in 2014.

He is the Past President of ESTA, a founding member of the IATSE Crafts Advancement Program committee, a member of the ETCP Council, and was co-chairman of the ETCP Entertainment Rigging program. He has been an OSHA outreach instructor and is a weekend musician at a coffee shop in Pacifica.



Bill Sapsis has been leading the charge at Sapsis Rigging, Inc. since 1981. He is the chair of ESTA's TSP Rigging Working Group, a member of the ETCP Council, and Chair of the Subject Matter Expert committee for ETCP Certification. Bill has produced three successful North American Theatre Engineering and Architecture Conferences. He is the founding member of the Long Reach Long Riders and was named the recipient of the Eva Swan Award in 2010, ESTA's highest honor.



Lori Rubinstein is Executive Director of the Behind the Scenes Foundation.