

Uncle Bill Talks With... Tim Hansen

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Interview with Tim Hansen

Ok kids. Gather round. Uncle Bill wants to tell you a story. Now, now, don't worry. It's not one of those "stuff falling down" stories. I'm as tired of those as you are. This story is about one of the good guys. As you probably (should!) know, ESTA is working on a certification program for riggers and electricians in the entertainment business. The program is made up of Working Groups and a Certification Council. If you aren't familiar with this program, get off your butt and go to www.ESTA.org and check it out.

When ESTA formed the council, they knew they needed a strong chairperson. They knew that they would need to find a person of brave heart and stout constitution. (Long meetings. Very few potty breaks) They knew they would need to find a person with the courage and fortitude to lead the Council into places that no one has gone before. They needed Tim Hansen and they knew it.

Who?

There. Did you hear that? When you read his name you said "Who?". You don't know who Tim is, do you? Here's a guy who's helping to shape the future of our industry and you don't know him from Adam. That, in my book, is a very unfortunate situation. One that I intend to correct right now. Here then, with no further ado, is an interview I conducted with Tim in December.

(Sorry about the lead in, Tim. But I had to get their attention somehow.)

The interview took place in a very pleasant restaurant in Salt Lake City. Yeah, they have one or two. I just wish I could remember the name of the place. OK Tim. Let's start off with the easy stuff.

Bill: Did you vote for George W Bush?

Tim: I was in St. Petersburg, Russia, during the last election. I sent in my absentee ballot here in Utah, but they didn't bother to count it. The powers that be decided the absentee vote numbers would have no effect on the outcome of any election contest.

Bill: Geez. First question and already we're into controversy. (Notice that he didn't answer the question?) Ok. How about telling us a little about your self. Where'd you grow up?

Tim: I was born and raised on the south side of Chicago, which makes me a White Sox fan, not a Cubs fan. Then I became a cheese head in College outside of Green Bay Wisconsin.

Bill: And how did you get into this business?

Tim: I read in an interview somewhere that you got started in the theatre because your girlfriend was in a show. Me too. I started out as a stage manager and a board op and eventually got to design lights for a touring company.

Bill: Where'd you go to college?

Tim: I got my Master degree from the University of Utah in 1979.

Bill: Why Utah?

Tim They offered me a scholarship.

Bill: Right. So what happened after school

Tim: Since then, I have worked at various times for Electro-Controls, Strand Lighting, EDI and now - for the last 15 years - Oasis Stage Werks. So, I guess I've been around this industry for about 30 years. I've enjoyed almost all of it, and have even managed to pay the rent for all that time.

Bill: Well, that puts you ahead of a lot of us. So tell me a little about ESTA and why you hooked up with them.

Tim: I have never been a person to sit in the background when things need to get done. ESTA is the best way to help get our industry recognized as a "real" industry, rather than some kind of fringe. The efforts made by the Technical Standards Program are already having an effect, as more manufacturers realize that the theatre industry has been using their products for years, sometimes without them knowing exactly what we were doing. ESTA has brought these companies together. We have also had an effect in other areas, such as the fog testing campaign. There is now a national standard for the use of glycol and glycerin fog, and a way to test it, to assure the actors that the fog they are performing in is not harmful regardless of the anecdotal evidence they have heard. This is a national campaign, by ESTA, that lets other people know that we are serious about what we do.

Bill: Which leads us nicely into the Certification Council. Care to fill us in a bit on that?

Tim: For several years, I have been concerned that a lot of the people in this industry who do actually know what they are doing, have no way to prove it. I have seen cases where someone (from outside the theatre industry) with no knowledge of how a rigging system works, for instance, will override a decision of a knowledgeable person. The knowledgeable person has no recourse, no good way to say "Wait a minute, let's think about this, I really do know what I am talking about." The Certification Program will allow people to show that they are knowledgeable about their craft, and allow them to use that knowledge in other parts of the country where they might not be known. It will allow venue managers to know that the people coming in with a tour really do know their stuff. I see this as another way to advance our industry, and to gain recognition for the individuals who do their jobs safely and with pride every day.

Bill: What was one of the most rewarding projects you've been involved with?

Tim: It's really hard to single out one specific project. I am most rewarded when the end user is happy. Probably the most personally rewarding recent project was the lighting design for a junior high production of Les Miserables. The director had no idea that her stage could look like that with a few extra lights and several hours of programming. This was not a typical junior high production. It was very well done, with all of the music performed live, and performed well, by students.

Bill: OK tell us about the dumbest thing you've ever done.

Tim: Many years have passed since then but that would involve the golf cart, the water hazard and several adult beverages. Let's not go there.

Bill: Too late. We just did. Care to gaze into your crystal ball and see where the industry is heading in the next 5 years or so?

Tim: I see more technology entering the industry - more moving lights, more motorized rigging, more projected and video effects, more LED's, for instance. This is not a bad thing but it will require more savvy technicians. It will also allow bigger and better shows in smaller spaces. As the technology becomes more affordable, the things that the High School drama teacher has always wanted for a show now become possible. Helping people execute their creative vision is a really great thing. As the equipment gets more complex the need for qualified operators and installers grows, and employers will begin to look for individuals who can prove their knowledge, and certification is the perfect way to do that. Touring will always be a major part of the industry, and I think that we will see it continue to add more innovation.

Bill: Cool. Well, I see that the server has brought the check. That's my cue to skidaddle on out of here. Thanks for the chat, Tim. I'll see you at the ESTA meetings in Long Beach.

(Sound of chair legs scraping on the floor followed by very fast footsteps <mine> fading into the background)

There ya go. Tim Hansen at dinner. Hopefully this gives you a sense of what Tim is about and his commitment to ESTA. And why. And there are many more dedicated people doing just what he's doing. You should also know that, with the exception of a small, overworked and underpaid staff, everybody working in these programs is a volunteer. Not only do they give up their free time, they also pay their own way to the meetings. I know I do. Wait a minute. I better not be the only one paying for these trips. You guys pay for your own expenses, right? Guys? Damn.

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