



## UPSTAGING LIGHTING Is Happy To Be a Part of Something Bigger

by MICHAEL A. BECK

In a recent conversation about what's going on with Upstaging Lighting, John Huddleston came off with a style that is as humble and down to earth as the company's Sycamore, Illinois address. John told *Tour Guide Journal*, "We don't think of ourselves as the company that's out there giving the audience what they paid for. That's the job of the artist. We are just a small part of that."

However, the people who do get their money's worth are the productions that hire this company. While the other major lighting companies have offices worldwide and Upstaging only has its one office, one has to ask how it can keep pace.

"By keeping it all under one roof, we are able to stay much more focused on what we have to do to keep the quality of the product as high as we do," Huddleston replied. "It also allows us to cut out much of the administrative infrastructure needed to maintain multiple offices in multiple countries. It keeps it more personal."

John admits to being caught in the '70s when it comes to doing business, "Not

only do I remember when deals were cut by two people leaning on a road case chatting over a cup of coffee, but I still do that."

For a writer, trying to get in touch with Huddleston can be a daunting task. While he doesn't try to make it that way, he does admit that it's because he tends to spend more time getting close to his clients, which takes up an enormous portion of his time.

When asked what he brags to his friends about regarding Upstaging, his answer was quick and easy, "I love the people who work here and the way we do things both on the road and here at home."

There is a strong focus for keeping it light around the shop. Every Friday (weather permitting) there is a company cookout - garage doors that separate the outside world from the full-sized kitchen open, and everyone eats on the house.

When asked where this idea came from or how it came about, Huddleston simply said that it's just the right thing to do. "Back in the beginning when it was just a few of us, we'd put a grill out on a sunny day and make lunch," he reminisced.

But once lunch is over, there is still work to be done. And this place is built for speed and comfort. The rehearsal/programming facility is a joy to behold. It can hang three shows at a time. It



has an isolated programming room so that the LD and programmer can work outside of the noise of the rest of the building.

The company has also recently begun its own fabrication work. "We're not into building huge sets or anything like that," Huddleston explained, "We just don't want to be limited to where we put gear in a system by standard building blocks of the industry. So if we can do our own fabrication, we have that much more freedom to put gear where the designer wants it."

When talking about the projects the company has, John lit up. "Hannah Montana is an amazing production. I love what that show is doing. Everything

on the show is absolutely first rate. They could have cheaped out and made it a little kid show. But they went all the way with a top line crew and the best of everything. It's a great show that people can take their kids to and not worry about what's going to happen on stage, and this is going to be the first concert experience these kids will have. I can't say enough about that show."

The humble way that this company strives to fit in and is a part of something bigger than itself is also evident in how involved it is at its home base. Upstaging was recently honored by the town of Sycamore for the work it has done through its involvement with local schools, not to mention lighting parts

of the town (such as the historic courthouse) for various occasions throughout the year.

Whether on the road with Walking with Dinosaurs, Hannah Montana, The Police, or Paul McCartney (to name just a few of its clients) or keeping the home fires warm, there really is no way to look at this company and see anything that isn't appealing. When world class LD Dino DeRose passed away, one long time friend described him as having done his work with a lurking cool that seemed to always keep him out of the political light of the gig. Those words are as applicable to Upstaging Lighting as they were to Dino. ☺

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