Before a capacity crowd at the Las Vegas Hilton, six ESTA member companies and one individual were recognized by their peers for their outstanding work. The setting was ESTA's annual dinner where over 300 members and guests enjoyed the opportunity to catch up with one another before the start of the hectic LDI tradeshow. As they traded war stories, projected photographs of previous parties evoked comments and laughter. Meanwhile, anticipation mounted about which companies would be named as this year's winners. As dinner wound down, the presentations were made and those questions were answered.

Dealer Winners

The awards voted on by ESTA Manufacturer members for the Dealer members that "just do it right" all went to first time winners.

In the 1-6 employee category, Miami Stagecraft was named the winner. President Andrew Martin and Vice President Steve Welsh would like to dedicate the award to the company's founder, Frank Martin, who died earlier in 2002. "He started this whole thing up 30 years ago and he taught us all about the business—ethics, customer relations, working with our suppliers. Without Frank, none of this would have been possible," Steve reminisces.

StageLight, which recently opened an office in Nashville to complement offices in Houston and New Orleans, took the honors in the 7-25 employee category. Owner Jerome Dunn remarks, "The award is a tremendous shot in the arm for all of us. Our staff wishes to offer a sincere thank you to the manufacturers for their consideration of StageLight for this award. I know it sounds like a cliche, but this award was simply not possible without their tremendous support."

Vincent Lighting Systems, with four offices in the Midwest, was the winner in the over 25 employee category. When asked to comment on the award, owner Paul Vincent replied, "It's an honor that belongs to all of our great team members. We appreciate being recognized by the suppliers that we work with." And, ever the careful businessman, he concluded, "Maybe we're paying our bills too fast!"

Manufacturer Winners

There were two very familiar faces accepting awards voted on by ESTA dealers for the best customer service, but one new company managed to break into the top tier in 2002.

Named best in the 1-6 employee category for the third year in a row was Doug Fleenor Design. "We are very appreciative of the recognition..."
ESTA’s dealers have bestowed upon us. We continually aspire to provide exceptional support to all DMX512 users,” says company President Doug Fleenor.

In the 7-25 employee category SSRC, a previous finalist, was a first time winner. SSRC President Dennis Kinney says, “As a small manufacturing company, our primary goal is to provide an extremely high level of customer service. Each day, we strive to provide reasonable pricing, on-time delivery, and the highest quality products available in the industry. We are extremely pleased to have received this honor and would like to thank ESTA and our loyal following of theatrical dealers for making this award possible.”

Apollo Design Technology was named the winner for the fourth consecutive year in the over 25 employee category. Company founder Joel Nichols is grateful for the ongoing support and comments, “I would like to thank ESTA for the opportunity to participate in its annual awards program. Also, our dealers for all their support during this economically turbulent year.”

Since new products were still under wraps at the time of ESTA’s dinner, the Dealers’ Choice Product awards were given out during the LDI awards ceremony following voting by ESTA dealers attending the tradeshow. In addition to recognizing innovative product design, these awards underscore the critical role dealers play in the success of any new product. The awards were expanded this year to include separate Expendable and Widget categories.

Apollo Design Technology’s PerfGel was named the winner in the Expendable category. PerfGel is 20”x24” color filter sheets with easy-to-tear perforations that offer time and labor savings before and during load-in. Apollo’s VP of Marketing, Monty McWilliams explains, “PerfGel offers the user significant convenience in terms of no more measuring and no more cutting tools while getting clean, consistent gel squares every time. Maximizing gel yield and gel frame compatibility were also important considerations when determining the different sizes we offer. And in keeping with Apollo’s customer service priorities, PerfGel is available in any ApolloGel color at no upcharge.” No stranger to the winner’s podium, Apollo took home a previous product award for its Colour Scenic Gobos.

The award in the Widget category went to Le Maitre Special Effects for its innovative Rapid Change Technology (RCT) heat exchanger design that ingeniously overcomes a fog machine’s biggest service issue: a plugged heating block, due to normal wear-and-tear. The technology premiered on Le Maitre’s Show Fogger Pro and Stage Fogger DMX. According to Sales and Marketing Manager Adrian Segeren, “Now, you can quickly and easily
make tube changes on the fly, wherever your fogger is. No more expensive shipping costs to return your machine to the manufacturer for servicing. No more inconvenience of having to go fogless for two weeks while your machine is being repaired.

Future Light, a previous winner in the original Expendable/Widget category, won this year in the Equipment category for PoleCat, a new selection in its line of versatile mounting devices. "The PoleCat provides a temporary yet secure method for mounting lighting, fans, or other elements to structural supports such as tent poles, building columns and utility poles," says Future Light's Director of Marketing and Sales, Rob Rowlands.

Swan Award

The final presentation of the evening was a special award that is not given out every year. Instead, it is given on a discretionary basis to individuals who have made extraordinary contributions to ESTA through their work as volunteers. The presentation of the Swan Award, commemorating former ESTA employee Eva Swan, was made by a previous winner and past ESTA President, Paul Vincent. In describing winner Bill Groener's work for ESTA Paul observed that Bill has represented at one time or another every membership category except international. Paul explained that Bill's "honest, straightforward manner and unswerving dedication brought money and additional volunteers into the standards program. He became an integral part of the Executive Committee through his forward thinking and his ability to get to the heart of an issue. In the fall of 1998, Bill became the chair of the Technical Standards Committee and served the program well and with style until the spring of 2002. His many years of steady volunteer service to ESTA, despite the changes and commitments in his work life and personal life, have had a major impact on the members of our trade association and our industry."

Thanks

In closing, ESTA would like to extend heartfelt thanks to the many companies that made extra contributions to enhance not only the dinner, but also ESTA's hospitality suite and the World-ETF lounge. Thanks to PRISM for hosting a new member reception during the cocktail hour, to Grand Stage Company for contributing backstage passes and a t-shirt giveaway, and to 4 Wall Entertainment and Martin Professional for providing equipment and support for the dinner. At the Hilton, ESTA's suite was sponsored by Musique Xpress Lights, L.E. Nelson Sales Corp., Osram Sylvania and Switch Lighting Performance. On the showfloor, the World-ETF lounge was sponsored by Advanced Lighting & Production, Osram Sylvania, Stage Equipment & Lighting and TentTec. To cap things off, an ice cream break in the World-ETF lounge was sponsored by Future Light.
John Salti and Tom Tyler of Lighting & Electronics catch up with Bill Mainen of ESTA.

Mae Perkins of Seattle-based PTA had to fly out of state for a chance to talk to neighbor Ted Ross of Stagecraft Industries.

Greg and Glenn Becker of Grand Stage Company appear to have found a new employee, but Tony Scheonem of Interesting Products (center) isn't fooled anyone with Grand's backstage pass.

Diane Grant of DNA Lighting and a PLASA Committee member shares a joke with ESTA's Lori Rubenstein.

Dave Higgins of Pathway Connectivity chats with Woody Pyatt and Tom Fowlston of AV Pro.

ESTA President Mike Wood of High End Systems enjoys an informal chat with Affiliate Director Greg Mees of Jauken & Meeh.

John and Cheryl Cox of Sacramento Theatrical Lighting enjoy catching up with cross-country colleagues Vivian and George Gill of Stage Equipment & Lighting.

Musique Xpress Lights traditionally brings a big group to LDI. This year owner Enrique Nunez bravely brought his wife and mother (group on right) for a grand tour of Las Vegas.

Zoe Paine, Peter Finder and George Jacobstein of Rose Brand anticipate a relaxing evening before having to host their own party the following evening.

Founding ESTA members Glenn Becker and Bob Cannon. Thanks go to their companies, Grand Stage and 4 Wall Entertainment, for helping make the dinner a big success.

Lycan is well represented by Richard Logothetic, Steve Costu, Kevin Gradocki and Maureen Gillon who are all happy to relax after getting their booth ready to go.