Highlights of ESTA's events at LDI98 in Phoenix, Arizona included the introduction of the association's incoming president and presentation of the Swan Award during ESTA's annual member dinner and the presentation of the Dealers' Choice Awards in conjunction with the LDI awards ceremony. ESTA activities also included an informative day of seminars organized by the Business Practices Committee and several days of LDI Institute programming organized by the Technical Education Committee.

ESTA members had clearly taken time out from their other LDI preparations to get in the Southwestern spirit, polishing boots, belt buckles and the silver on their bolo ties, and most were appropriately turned out for the annual dinner which featured Southwestern fare and decorations. A few people remembered to bring their own big hats while others were seen sporting straw centerpieces.

A lively cocktail hour afforded networking opportunities for attendees and the dinner offered a brief chance to relax before the trade show got underway.

Association President for five years, Paul Vincent of Vincent Lighting Systems, bade farewell to the membership and, after displaying numerous humorous badges of office collected over the years, passed the gavels (one was battery operated, complete with sound effects and the other was said to be a full tracking backup) to President-elect Mike Wood of High End Systems. Following the resolution of slight technical difficulties, Mike displayed proficiency with the gavels and claimed to be looking forward to his term of office.

Zoe Paine of Production Arts then took the podium to introduce the recipient of ESTA's annual Swan Award, named in honor of former ESTA and Production Arts employee Eva Swan whose courageous battle with cancer and inspirational attitude are memorialized by the award. Zoe's moving speech painted an eloquent portrait of award recipient John McGraw of JTM & Associates, and former President of Production Arts, whose generosity and commitment have helped shape our association.

ESTA's second President, John has chaired the Business Practices Committee which organized the long running Business Survey and the Ethics Committee which formulated the new Code of Conduct. He has also participated on the By-Laws Revision Committee and the Long Range Planning Committee.

Perhaps his greatest commitment to the association has been in supporting Executive Director Lori Rubinstein in countless ways. His assistance has included putting up with having the association headquartered in their living room, extending Production Arts discounts and credit lines to the association, providing computer support and working as the #1 sherpa at trade shows and meetings, hauling around Lori's huge briefcases.
stressing again the importance of good documentation and consistent management in avoiding and defending employment related lawsuits. Having solicited samples of participants’ handbooks in advance, she provided real-world advice pointing out strengths and weaknesses in each of the examples.

Scott Mendel, also of Bell, Boyd and Lloyd, addressed a standing room only crowd about details of antitrust law, pointing out that it is a myth that small businesses don’t have to worry about these regulations. While governmental actions against large companies are well publicized, more actions are filed against small companies which may be less sophisticated and/or less likely to put up a fight.

After the seminars, David Saltiel of Bell, Boyd and Lloyd reviewed ESTA’s new Code of Conduct and the enforcement policies that have been established. He reminded members that the Code was developed because ESTA membership carries certain responsibilities and confers credibility in the marketplace. The Code is not an alternative to litigation, nor is it an easy way to file frivolous complaints. A complaint takes some work to file and should not be undertaken lightly. Four levels of sanctions, up to expulsion, are available depending on the seriousness of an offense.

In accepting the honor, John challenged other ESTA members to qualify themselves as nominees for future Swan Awards. He noted that ESTA constantly needs the participation of new people with fresh ideas, and reminded potential volunteers that the time spent is well rewarded. In addition to the personal satisfaction John has received from his work with ESTA, he has enjoyed an ongoing education and an exchange of information and ideas that have assisted him in improving his business.

Earlier in the day, Wally Blount of Columbus McKinnon had kicked off the Business Practices programming presenting “Making Meetings Work Effectively,” a CM seminar he has previously shared with a grateful ESTA Board of Directors and Rigging Working Group. The techniques outlined can help any organization keep a project on time through a system of advance preparation, maintaining a single focus, and involving all the participants.

Past presenter Nancy Bertoglio of Bell, Boyd and Lloyd returned for a session on employee handbooks, stressing again the importance of good documentation and consistent management in avoiding and defending employment related lawsuits. Having solicited samples of participants’ handbooks in advance, she provided real-world advice pointing out strengths and weaknesses in each of the examples.

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New this year was the LDI Institute, a joint venture between ESTA and LDI, offering three day-long technical seminars preceding the trade show. ESTA Technical Standards Manager Karl Ruling chaired a discussion on “Netulous Effects: Theory and Technology of Modern Atmospheric Effects,” which offered an in-depth look at the advantages and disadvantages of various fog making techniques. Karl was joined by a number of industry experts including Eric Tishman ofRosco, Mike Wood of High End Systems, Larry Schoeneman of Interesting Products, Martin Michaud of MDG, Gary Fails of City Theatrical, David Petcan of Le Maitre, Martin Becker of Reel EFX and Gary Crawford of CITC as well as industrial hygienist Greg Raymond of The Cohen Group.

Bob Luther of Lex Products moderated a discussion on the “Basics of Power Distribution,” covering topics from balancing a load to code requirements to proper installation of standard connectors. Bob was ably assisted by panelists Ghassan Nasrallah, Mitch Stein, Bill Grand and Leslie Lindenstrauss of Leviton Manufacturing, Rich Fullen of Hollywood Lights, Andy Topinka of Technical Group Services, Ron Dahquist of Dadco and Don Carey of Litton-Veam.

A session on “Electronic Field Service: Making House Calls,” explored methods of trouble shooting and system analysis with input from both factory and independent service technicians. Dave Johnson of Theatrical Lighting Service and Carmel Alston of Lightech Service Company moderated the discussion and panelists included Scott Volk of Colortran, Tracy Underhill and C.T. Oakes of BDI, Mike Meskill, David North and Sarah Spencer of ETC, Milton Davis of Strand, and Frank Stewart of Specialty TECH Services.

ESTA would like to extend sincere thanks to all the presenters for their hard work in getting this great new series of seminars off to an excellent start. Plans are underway to repeat the sessions and several of the organizers are already discussing ideas to refine the programming to best meet the needs of the participants.

When the LDI show floor opened on Friday morning, ESTA Dealers’ Choice Award Nominee easels could be spotted in many booths. After the inaugural success of the awards last year, the number of products nominated increased dramatically and voting dealers were faced with a slate of 42 products in the equipment category and ten in the expendable category. When the votes were tallied, Gray Interficon’s DMX Ultimate Converter, which handles DMX512, AMX192, K96, ECMax, Colortran, AVAB and MicroPlex protocols, won in the equipment category. Future Light’s TileMount, which drops in place of a suspended ceiling tile providing a hanging position and optional electrical outlet won in the expendable/widget category.

The Dealers’ Choice Award winners were announced during the LDI Awards ceremony on Sunday, and a number of ESTA member companies were honored with LDI awards. A tie for Lighting Product of the Year was announced between ETC’s Source Four Zoom and Vari-Lite’s VL7 spot luminaire. City Theatrical won Scenic Effect Product of the Year with its EFX/Plus effects machine while the Scenic Effect Honorable Mention was awarded to Riedel EFX for its RE Pan II variable beam fan. Jack Rubin and Sons was the winner of Widget of the Year for its Rite-Lock. In the Lighting Tools and Software category, honorable mentions were presented to Artistic Licence for its Micro-Scope 3 and Avolites America for its Focus Finder System. The Best Large Booth Award was a tie between Vari-Lite and Martin Professional with Rosco Laboratories receiving an honorable mention.