The Eva Swan Award is presented to an association member who has put forth exceptional effort in time, expertise, and personal resources on behalf of ESTA; been instrumental in shaping and promoting ESTA’s strategic direction; made major contributions to the realization of ESTA’s mission, goals, and objectives; and enhanced the value of membership for all.

This is not an annual award but rather a special award that is presented only when a worthy recipient is nominated. At ESTA’s AGM meeting on the eve of LDI, Mitch Hefter and Steve Terry presented the Eva Swan Award to Ken Vannice.

Hi, I’m Steve Terry . . .

Today, we are extremely pleased to present our longtime friend and colleague, Ken Vannice, with ESTA’s most prestigious honor: The Eva Swan Award.

Putting forward exceptional efforts in time, expertise, and efforts on behalf of ESTA and our membership.

The list of Ken’s contributions is long, and we’ll just touch on just some of them here in order to set the stage for the most important part of the discussion (more on that in a minute):

Ken has been involved in the Technical Standards Program since the first years of the program as the co-chair of the Electrical Power Working Group and a member of the Technical Standards Council. He is also a member of the Control Protocols Working Group and the Photometric Working Group.

Ken’s participation in the ETCP has been a major driving force. Because of his frequent interactions with the mainstream electrical industry, Ken, along with those of us on the NEC Code Panel 15, were faced with the question: “What makes a ‘qualified person’ in the entertainment industry?”

The often-heard answer, “I’m qualified because I know what I’m doing and I have years of experience,” was unsatisfying to
Ken’s acceptance:

Thank you, thank you, thank you!

I received a call from Lori Rubinstein ordering me to the ESTA Annual General Meeting. While I was processing that stark statement, she continued “You will be awarded with the Eva Swan Award.” I was blown away. I had to sit down.

Later, I received an email from Steve Terry. He said that he and Mitch Hefter had my presentation ready and did I want to see it in advance. I never know what those two are up to. I said that I intended to respond extemporaneously, but if I was expected to give a speech, I better see the presentation. I was told that I could speak extemporaneously and never received the presentation.

I looked up the names of previous Swan recipients. I was in awe. I never was a Board member. I am lousy at fundraising. I am kind of a down-in-the-trenches kind of person quietly working, or in some cases, not so quietly. What I do well is persevere. It took six times to find the right combination for ETCP’s Electrical Certification. It took several cycles of revisions to bring the NEC into the 20th century.

But, what you accomplish in life is not yours alone. It is the people you attract to help you that make the difference. I am thankful for friends like Steve, Mitch, and many others that have helped me along the way. And, I have enjoyed contributing to the entertainment industry in my own way.

Again, thank you. Thank you. Thank you!

~ Ken Vannice

an electrical industry where licensing and certifications were the norm. The result was Ken’s conclusion that an entertainment-specific certification was needed to prove qualification.

Ken was deeply involved in the creation of the ETCP and the Entertainment Electrician certification from the very beginning. As the chair of both the early Electrical Skills Working Group and the subsequent Entertainment Electrician Subject Matter Expert group, Ken was instrumental in creating the body of knowledge that formed the basis for the ETCP Entertainment Electrician certification exam.

Since 1988, Ken has represented USITT on NFPA National Electrical Code Panel 15, which is responsible for the entertainment industry and health care sections of the Code. He is the longest serving member of Code Panel 15, and has been closely involved with all of the most significant entertainment industry changes to the Code in the last 30 years. He has also been involved in work on the Canadian entertainment industry product standards and the Canadian Electrical Code. One of his major talents in standards work is his skill at developing lists of Yes/No questions for standards bodies that would reveal potential roadblocks to a solution and allow the strategic formation of an unassailable plan to solve the problem. We often called this “backing them into the corner we want!” A good example of that process was Ken’s creation of the NEC section that allows the safe and compliant use of multiconductor cables in entertainment applications.

Ken’s credibility in these endeavors has been built on the solid foundation of his working career that has included George Thomas Howard, Kliegl, Colortran, and finally Leviton. He is also a licensed Professional Engineer.

And now, to the most important part of this discussion: Just going down the list of all these accomplishments alone would fail to describe what are perhaps the most valuable attributes of Ken’s contributions. Ken has always applied the logic of an engineer when asking these key questions in almost every industry project he has worked on:

“Does what we are doing make sense? Have we thought of all the unintended consequences that might bite us?”

He has always had an unrelenting passion for the subject at hand, coupled with “Get it done, and make it better.” He also benefits from an “elephant’s memory” concerning prior actions and results that most of us forgot all about since they might have happened years ago, but are critical to the current problem. Perhaps the most important Ken principle has been “Don’t give in if it’s the wrong approach,” a view that sometimes caused friction, but almost always created a better result.

Finally, Ken has always been unselfish in sharing his knowledge. Our industry, and indeed the two of us personally, have been the beneficiaries of that philosophy.

And so, it gives us great pleasure to present the Eva Swan Award to Ken Vannice.

Mitch Hefter is Senior Systems Engineer at Philips Lighting. He is a founding member of the ESTA Technical Standards Program and serves on the Technical Standards Council. Mitch co-chairs the Electrical Power Working Group with Ken Vannice and is an ETCP Certified Entertainment Electrician and is an ETCP Recognized Electrical Trainer. Mitch has worked on updates to the National Electrical Code since 1981 with Steve and Ken, and all three serve on Code Panel 15.

Steve Terry is currently the Director of Standards and Industry Relations at ETC. From 2004 – 2017 he was ETC’s VP of Research and Development, where he led the group that is responsible for global development of new products. Steve is a founding member of the ESTA Technical Standards Program.