ESTA Remembers

BY LORI RUBINSTIEN

SO MUCH HAS BEEN WRITTEN ABOUT FRED FOSTER by so many people that it’s difficult to find new ways to say what has already been written in such heartfelt and eloquent words by those he touched so deeply. The posts make it abundantly clear what an amazing and truly unique person Fred was. The incredible care he had for each and every employee and their physical, emotional, and mental well-being set a standard that very few in management can hope to meet. That humanity and respect carried over to everyone Fred knew, and all those, from close friends to recent acquaintances, clearly treasured their relationship with him. A great deal has also been written about Fred, the visionary, and how he changed the lighting industry forever.

I would add that Fred’s impact extends far beyond the lighting industry to absolutely everyone who works in entertainment, because Fred always understood the big picture and the concept of the greater good. Fred knew that a stronger, safer, more educated, more caring industry was better for everyone. That’s a concept that often gets lost in this day and age of venture capital investment in our industry. Fred understood it’s not all about taking, but equally, about giving back, and he lived that every day.

That’s why Fred was such a strong supporter of the non-profits in our industry. He understood we are trying to serve the industry, each in our own way with our own unique focus, but all for that same greater good he so ardently believed in. The two non-profits I have been most closely involved with, ESTA and Behind the Scenes, owe enormous debts to Fred. In fact, it is safe to say that neither might exist today, certainly they would not have accomplished anywhere near as much, without Fred’s unfailing support. Yes, a large component of that support is financial, but it goes far beyond that. Fred was quick to understand the impact an idea could have if it received the early support it needed to develop it into a real program.

A perfect example is ESTA’s Technical Standards Program. When a group of industry manufacturers approached the association about starting the program, Fred was one of the first to step up with initial...
funding and with his staff involved at every level. That support for the program has never wavered and, when ESTA found the TSP in an extremely precarious position a few years ago, Fred stepped up to a new level of commitment and challenged the rest of the industry to do the same. Fred knew that only a few of the program’s eight working groups directly benefitted ETC, but he understood that the work done by the other groups was equally important for the health, safety, and creativity of the rest of the industry, and that was important to him too.

There are so many other ESTA-related examples I could cite—from his early support of the fledgling Theatrical Dealers Association, to ETC’s participation in the industry’s only long-running market research program, to his recognition of the impact that the Entertainment Technician Certification Program (ETCP) could have. As ESTA sought support for each of these from others in the industry, being able to say “Fred Foster and ETC are part of this program because they believe in what we are doing” made all the difference in bringing the rest of the industry on board.

Nowhere has Fred’s belief in our mission been more important or more impactful than with Behind the Scenes. Fred was a huge champion of the charity from its earliest days and that made an enormous difference in how quickly Behind the Scenes was able to begin granting and helping our colleagues in need. The financial impact that Fred and ETC have had on the charity has been incredible and has allowed us to help so many people across our industry—far more than we dreamed would be possible.

Once again, Fred’s support was felt in innumerable other ways as well. When others in the industry were thinking about setting up programs to benefit the charity, they went to Fred and asked if we were doing good work and if he believed in what we were doing. Fred’s unwavering belief in our mission invariably brought them on board to support Behind the Scenes. Yet again, Fred had a direct impact on the quality of life of people he never met and who might never touch a lighting instrument, but who kept a roof over their heads, or their heat turned on, or their prescriptions filled—because of him.

ESTA and Behind the Scenes send our deepest condolences to Susan, Kate, and James Foster and to the entire ETC family. We too will miss him enormously. For most of our existence Fred has been one of our key barometers. When thinking about new programs, we have asked ourselves, “Will Fred Foster think this is a good idea for the industry? Will he not only support it, but champion it?” We knew that if he would, then we stood a good chance of making it happen. Fred leaves many lasting legacies in our industry, and ESTA and Behind the Scenes are proud to be among those. ~ Lori Rubinstein

In 2016, the Fred Foster Scholarship Fund, for children of grant recipients, was established by Behind the Scenes to honor Fred’s unwavering support of the charity from its earliest days.

At the 2013 USITT Conference and Stage Expo, Fred Foster presented a check for $23,424, which reflected the ongoing proceeds from sales of ETC’s iRFR (Radio Focus Remote for iPhone or iPad Touch) application, to Rick Rudolph, Chair of the Behind the Scenes Foundation.