

residential SYSTEMS

NewBay Media

www.resmagonline.com

April 2007

PLUS

Trends and Innovations
in the **POWER**
MANAGEMENT Market

Preparing for
CEDIA'S
DESIGNER EXAM

Taking Stock of
MEDIA SERVERS
for the High-End
Consumer



GUI GUIDANCE

Keys to Creating a Graphical User Interface
That Fully Meets Your Client's Needs and Wants

THE MAGIC OF GIVING BACK

INNERSPACE RECALLS THEIR REWARDING ELF EXPERIENCE

The Elf Foundation was established in July 2001 as a non-profit charity with the mission of creating private entertainment theaters for children's hospitals, autism centers, shelters for abused kids, and hospices for terminally ill children. Since that time the foundation's director, Doug Weinstein, has encouraged the donation of AV products, systems design and installation services, and money for the completion of more than 50 theaters in the U.S. and Canada. Most recently, InnerSpace Electronics of Port Chester, New York, completed its first "Room of Magic" installation at New York Presbyterian/Cornell Weill Hospital for Children on the Upper Eastside of Manhattan. The theater features donated gear from Chief Manufacturing, Crestron, Decor Installations, Denon, Liberty Wire & Cable, Lutron, Middle Atlantic, Panamax, Runco, Sonance, and Stewart Filmscreen. When it opened in November 2006, pediatric patients were treated to a live performance by the Broadway cast of *The 25th Annual Putnam County Spelling Bee*, and a screening of the movie, *Cars*. InnerSpace's Barry and Andrea Reiner shared that special event with their manufacturer partners and proud hospital administrators, after having led their company's involvement in the project over three-plus years. The Reiners spoke recently to *RS* about their charitable experience, and explained why they would definitely work with the Elf Foundation again, when the opportunity arises.

What inspired you initially to get involved with Elf?

Andrea: We met with Doug Weinstein at CEDIA EXPO a couple of years ago, and what he said really had an effect on me. My brother had spent substantial amounts of time in a children's hospital with his daughter, and it made me feel especially sympathetic to what parents and their kids go through when they're in a hospital so frequently. I thought that the Room of Magic program was a wonderful idea. Also, I just felt that it was important for our industry to give something back to society. Frankly, we, as an industry, are not very "green" at all, with all of the plastics we use and the impact our products have on energy consumption. It's nice to be able to give back, in some way, to a good cause.

What was it like working with a group of hospital administrators, instead of a homeowner, on a project like this?

Barry: Actually, it turned out to be a relatively simple process once they recognized that we were going to provide a really great entertainment space for the children. The only limitation that they left us with was that it was a really modest-sized room. But we were still able to design a high-quality theater for that modest-sized room. We put together a mid-end Runco system. We were led down certain paths by Doug Weinstein, who said, "You know Runco is going to be happy to work with us, Sonance would really like to work with us, and Denon would like to do some stuff here."



From left, the Elf Foundation's New York Presbyterian/Cornell Weill Hospital for Children participants included (from left) Doug Weinstein, Elf Foundation; Sharmon Rodgers, Sonance; Barry and Andrea Reiner, InnerSpace Electronics; Melissa Andresko and Phil Scheetz, Lutron Electronics; and Carol Campbell, Elf Foundation.

Were there any other special design parameters to consider?

Andrea: It's interesting, because Doug knows which companies are Elf-friendly and would be good for us to call in our favors with. There were other considerations, like we could have put gorgeous motorized shades in that room but the hospital wouldn't allow us because they had to have a certain hypoallergenic plastic. They also didn't want to make anything any more complicated or more difficult than it had to be. There were things that we could have done but were discouraged against because of trying to make it suitable for the hospital.

What other notable design elements are involved?

Barry: Well, normally for a theater like this we would have done a simple handheld remote control, maybe a universal touchscreen. But because Crestron wanted to be part of this, they provided a control system instead. It's a little CP2E ethernet control system, along with a flush-mount wall touchscreen. When we were first thinking about it I thought a control system might be overkill for the project. But in practice it was terrific, because this is a room where the adults or supervisors should be operating the system, not the kids. The thing that was best about it—and it didn't even occur to us initially—was that we could put a pass code on the screen for accessing the theater. Crestron lends itself to that feature beautifully, and now there are only a couple of people at the hospital that can turn it on.

Had you worked on any commercial projects before this?

Barry: It's not a focus of InnerSpace, but we have done a bunch of commercial spaces—mostly multimedia boardroom set-ups, videoconferencing set-ups, and dedicated conference rooms.

Andrea: We don't market to it, but when a client of ours owns a firm and calls us in... It's that kind of thing.

Did those experiences prepare you at all for working with a hospital and its board and administration?

Barry: No, but I don't want to leave the impression that they were difficult to work with. They were a pleasure, but it was just different. What was fun about it was that they didn't understand what we were going to do until we did it. The greatest part about it was the surprise and joy on their faces when they saw what we actually did. It was fabulous. It was worth it.

In terms of designing the room with architects, etc., how different was this project?

Andrea: Often when we do a project we'll meet with an architect who says, "My client want to do a theater. What is the optimum size, what materials do we need to use to build this thing?" In this situation, we had absolutely no say. We were told, "This is your space." That's it. We were getting CADs and that sort of thing from the architect, but there wasn't a whole lot of flexibility, and we weren't able to suggest how it should be. Now that could be different for another project. I think that working in a city where space is so limited played a role in this case.

What other lessons did you learn that you could impart to someone else who volunteers on an Elf project?

Barry: I would make absolutely no assumptions on the relative knowledge level of the people you're working with. The contractors that are used to doing that level of commercial work have really never seen this [AV] stuff either. They're not like the high-end residential contractors who see it every day. They just need a little support and some handholding and perhaps a higher level of explanation and coordination than you would normally give. There were moments when I was skeptical because we were donating a lot of time, energy, drawings, and coordination, and I had never done anything like this before. But there is no question in our minds that, given the oppor-



tunity, we would do as many Elf theaters as we possibly could. The gratification of doing something that nice for the kids and for the hospital was just one of the better experiences that we've had.

What surprises, if any, did you face?

Andrea: I guess there were two things that I would say that I found to be surprises. One was how long it took. From the first meeting I had with Doug, I think it took three years to complete. Mainly because the hospital at first was only going to do a small renovation. Then they got a large donation to the children's hospital and ended up re-doing the whole children's hallway there. So people shouldn't be surprised when they get in these things because you just don't know which turn it's going to take.

The other thing was that, as it was all coming together, you have to stay involved with points of view that you wouldn't normally have to worry about. For example, if I hadn't made some calls and pushed it along, the artist would have never gotten into the room and done anything to the walls. So things that a designer or the client would be watching in a home, were now our responsibility.

Was the grand opening event the punctuation on the project for you or were there other special moments that you have experienced along the way?

Andrea: I thought it would be just that grand opening, and Doug always talked about how you would get tears in your eyes when you first see the kids coming in... but what's really great is that we still get calls from the hospital telling us the different things they've used the room for and how much the kids are enjoying it. For instance, a couple of weeks after the grand opening they had a movie premiere for *Charlotte's Web*, featuring some of the actors in attendance.

The new Room of Magic opened November 2006 at New York Presbyterian/Cornell Weill Hospital on Manhattan's Upper Eastside.



As far as your business commitment is concerned, what does taking time to donate services and staff for a project like this require from you in terms of cash flow and project management time?

Andrea: That's a good question, because we're a larger firm with approximately 30 employees. If we were a firm with five to seven guys then it probably would not be a feasible project. It's easy for us to send one of our teams down there when they need it, and we have a dedicated service department with four guys. So if they have an issue, then right away we can send somebody down there.

Barry: In terms of our schedule, this was such a simple project relative to what we usually undertake, that it was relatively transparent to the business. If I wasn't specifically involved with this project, it could have happened around me without me even noticing it. I wish I could have more projects like that. But, I think the biggest impact this project had on the staff was when they realized how fun it would be to design a theater for the kids. That was really special for them.

GETTING INVOLVED

ELF FOUNDATION

The Elf Foundation is always in need of contributions and assistance. Visit www.elfsystems.org to read about some ways that enthusiasts, corporations, and others have helped Elf Foundation in the past.