

PLUGFEST 2025

Plugfest 2.0 is gearing up for action

BY MILTON DAVIS

ESTA's Plugfest event has been held in a large hotel suite in Westlake, TX, for many years. It has been a place to gather to test control protocols, prototype equipment, and to reconnect with colleagues from around the world. However, as the times change, so must the Plugfest. It's moving to the Delta Marriott Hotel in Minneapolis, MN. The Delta Marriott is to be the site for the next meeting cycle and the new generation of Plugfest, scheduled for October 16 to 19, 2025. The four-day format has proven to be popular and productive. Plugfest will be in a secured meeting room rather than being held in a large guest room suite. This will provide us with extra space, more available power, and noise isolation so we do not disturb hotel guests.

As in the past, Plugfest fills the gap between written standards and putting those standards to use in the real world. This gathering gives all attendees the opportunity to connect their equipment to devices from other manufacturers and to verify compliance with a wide assortment of protocols including DMX512, RDM, sACN, and RDMNet. Testing in the Plugfest environment without the pressures of production, customer demands, or show schedules allows for a methodical approach to solving problems.

Plugfest is an open forum to learn, test, and adjust protocol implementations in real time with colleagues in our industry. Expert advice is readily available as many of the people who write the standards are participating and can offer their insights.

The E1.37-4 standard which facilitates the downloading of new firmware to devices via RDM is in the process of being accepted as an ANSI document. This new standard will be demonstrated at Plugfest. Experts on the standard will be available to help test implementations in prototype equipment. It is an opportunity to learn about the nuances of the protocol and to see how it can be used in real products.

The Control Protocols Working Group (CPWG) has established a study group to look at single pair Ethernet (SPE) as it might be used for lighting control systems. The study group plans to look at

the various SPE standards and to possibly evaluate some hardware platforms during Plugfest.

A roundtable discussion or topic seminar will be presented on at least one evening. These gatherings typically center around topics such as common implementation errors or clarification in understanding some aspects of an existing standard. We welcome suggestions for new topics, so please send them in.

While the location for Plugfest may be moving, the spirit of the event will remain unchanged: to offer an informal welcoming environment to conduct interoperability testing with other products that use ESTA control standards.

Plugfest is open to all and free to attend. You only need to cover your travel and meal expenses. ESTA membership is suggested but not required to attend. Detailed information about the event can be found at tsp.esta.org/plugfest. This page also includes a link to reserve your hotel room at a discounted rate. We look forward to welcoming all interested people and companies to the new Plugfest! ■



Milton Davis has been involved in the entertainment lighting industry for over 40 years. During that time, he has served as a lighting designer, stage electrician, field service engineer, product developer, software engineer, hardware engineer, and advocate for the DMX512 protocol. He was part of the ESTA task group which formalized the DMX512-A standard making it an American National Standard. Mr. Davis has been an ETCP Certified Entertainment Electrician and Recognized Trainer for over 15 years. During that time, he has led many classes and seminars addressing a wide variety of lighting professionals from all skill levels. He is currently a co-chair for ESTA's Control Protocols Working Group and is a member of a number of the CPWG's task groups working on new standards. Milton works for Doug Fleener Design, Inc. where he designs products and provides technical support to customers. He can be reached by email at milton@dfd.com.