

Four-day ESTA Plugfest a large success

BY MILTON DAVIS

ESTA'S PLUGFEST was held October 5 to 8, 2023, in Westlake, Texas, and once again came to a successful close. There were twenty-five registered attendees from around the world. The wide range of equipment brought in included consoles, lighting fixtures, network analyzers, and the web of cables required to connect it all together.

Many familiar faces could be seen around the tables. There were also new attendees who quickly became part of the Plugfest family. As in past events, Eric Johnson was on hand to greet new arrivals. He also



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provided introductory sessions on Thursday and Friday mornings to orient new participants to the nature of the Plugfest. A special nod goes to the ADJ group who sent nine(!) people to attend the event. While they will not send such a large contingent to all Plugfests, the commitment of so many resources is greatly appreciated.

The big news for this edition of the Plugfest was the extension of the event to four days rather than the traditional three days. This change came about by popular request from past attendees. There had been the observation that people often had to choose between participating in the Plugfest or attending task group

meetings where standards are being written. The new format and meeting schedule allows for attendees to get the best of both worlds. Through coordination with the Control Protocols Working Group, the evenings were kept clear of Task Group meetings thus allowing for full participation in the Plugfest.

As in past events, new gear was connected and validated. Larry Dew of Benjamin Electric provided RDM responder validation using the RDM Integrity test software package. The majority of products at the table appeared to be RDM devices. Although RDM was accepted as an American National Standard in 2006, it is now gaining traction

particularly in the architectural segment of lighting fixtures. A welcome addition to the equipment mix was a number of RDM controllers. This is a segment that has been under-represented in the past.

Beyond RDM, participants brought gear to evaluate for compliance with DMX512-A and RDMNet (ANSI E1.33).

As part of the new four-day format, the Plugfest committee opted to include a special presentation event on Friday evening. This idea was borrowed from the European Plugfest events. Thierry Dupont of Robert Juliat gave a presentation titled “Challenged by Controllers / On The Road to RDM”. The topic was about his company’s journey to implement RDM in a complex product. He emphasized the need for cooperation amongst manufacturers to ensure compatibility and compliance to the RDM standard. By doing so, we can enjoy stable, trouble-free installations.

Throughout the weekend, company affiliations were minimized. The emphasis and theme for the weekend was on technical support and seeking to ensure that all devices being tested act as “good citizens” in a lighting control environment.

After the conclusion of this Plugfest, the planning committee is looking forward to another event next year. No dates have been set yet. Keep an eye on the Plugfest web page at: <https://tsp.esta.org/tsp/news/plugfest.html> and plan to join the group next time. ■



Milton Davis has been involved in the entertainment lighting industry for over 38 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 ANSI national standard. Mr. Davis has been an ETC 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. Covered topics relate to all lighting control protocols and general practices related to theaters, theme parks, houses of worship, convention centers, and any other location where lighting control is critical to presentations and general operation. He is currently the co-chair for ESTA’s Control Protocols Working Group and is a member of a number of that group’s task groups working on new standards. Milton works for Doug Fleenor Design, Inc. where he designs products and provides technical support to customers.

