



VOLUME 31, NUMBER 1 - January 1st 2016



REWIND

**INTERVIEW WITH EARS
MEMBER JEFF LIPP**

BY REBECCA FRANCESCATTI

Jeffrey Lipp, CTS-D is president and principal consultant of Lipp A/V Design, Inc. in the Chicago area. He has spent over thirty years in the sound and AV business. That experience ranges from system operation to design and project management. As a consultant, Lipp designs AV systems for corporate, government and education facilities. Specializations include performance audio systems, theatre facilities and more complex videoconferencing environments. He has served on the InfoComm Standards steering committee and has been on the adjunct faculty of the Audio Arts and Acoustics department at Columbia College Chicago. He is currently a member of the board of directors of the ICIF (InfoComm's foundation). Even though Lipp A/V Design is a one-man shop, Lipp has worked on projects in a dozen states and has won several AV design awards.

JEFFREY LIPP, CTS-D
Lipp A/V Design, Inc.



Jeffrey Lipp

1. How did you get into AV?

I got a very early start! I started working for my parent's company, Full Compass, at age 13. My first jobs were wiring connectors and building modules for consoles and stuff around the store, which was very small at that time. I learned a lot from my parents.

I started volunteering to help the sound crews at local festivals and eventually got my first live sound job on the road at 17. As a kid, I did sound for music and theater acts at a 2000 seat tent in Cape Cod, Massachusetts and the Spoleto Festival in Charleston, South Carolina.

I worked for Full Compass throughout college and also did live sound work. Eventually, I transitioned into the installation side of the business. I wound up moving to Chicago in 1990 to work for a large sound and AV contractor and 17 years ago started my own AV consulting business.

Of course I had to teach my son, Jake Lipp, sound when he was 13 years old, too. He's now a Chicago-based live sound engineer and also an EARS member.

2. What's the best thing about this line of work?

Well, it's a good way to make some money. Generally, installed sound and AV provides a good income compared to the more glamorous ends of the sound industry. You don't get to work in studios with musicians and talented celebrities, but the steady income is a good thing.

Creatively, I still get an artistic outlet as a system designer. I don't do production and music shows anymore, since I mostly work for architects on new construction projects. Some of the best architects in the world are right here in Chicago. As part of the architectural design team I am certainly able to scratch that creative itch that runs through me.

3. Do you have any recommendations for someone interested in sound and AV installation?

If any EARS members with backgrounds in live sound or recording are interested in getting into installed sound and AV I would certainly encourage it. It is a great way to use your audio talents and make a great living. Just be very cautious. Remember, the skill set is very different than that of other audio professionals, and there can be tremendous liability. Hanging portable speakers from a chain motor and hanging install speakers using aircraft cable from a plaster ceiling are very different. And mistakes here could be very dangerous. You need to know building codes and how to calculate the conduit size for each type of wire. You need to know how to work on a construction job site, union requirements, and how

a general contractor manages a project. And you need lots and lots of insurance or you can't even get on the job site at all.

I always recommend getting at least two years of experience working for another AV contractor before venturing out on your own.



Spencer Foundation Board Room, photo courtesy of Lipp A/V Design, Inc.

4. Any degrees help you along?

I tried to study sound and theater sound design in college, but 30 years ago there were not many options. I did study theater and have a Radio, TV and Film degree which is tangentially related to what I do today.

I also have a CTS-D certification. That is a certified technology specialist with an advanced level specialization in design. It is an ANSI certification

that is run by InfoComm, the AV trade association. My biggest customer in recent years has been the University of Illinois. They require any AV designer working on campus to have the CTS-D certification. So that has been pretty important for me.

5. What does a day in the life of Jeff and Lipp A/V Design look like?

What I do in an average day is way different than most of the guys who are EARS members. No listening to music. No working with bands. No mixing. I don't even set up mics and tape down cables anymore.

When I design a system, I produce bid documentation including drawings and a spec. Then, the project goes out to bid to sound and AV contractors. So I could be working on drawings or developing an equipment list that would go into the spec. There are lots of meetings with the client, architect, MEP (mechanical, electrical and plumbing) engineers and IT system designers. Sometimes, I have to sit through a four-hour meeting about things like toilets in order for me to get a few minutes to talk about the AV system. And yes, the toilet topic came up in one of my meetings just last week.

I also spend a lot of time working on budgets with Excel spreadsheets. This is a very important part of the design process, making sure the customer has the budget for what we want to do. This and the massive amount of time just communicating with the various members of the design team is tedious and very time consuming, but very important.

The only time I really get to use my ears is at the very end of the project. I always do a consultant's checkout. I check the AV contractor's work and develop a punch-list. Part of this process is listening to the system and looking at Smart test equipment. Usually I tweak the system tuning a bit.

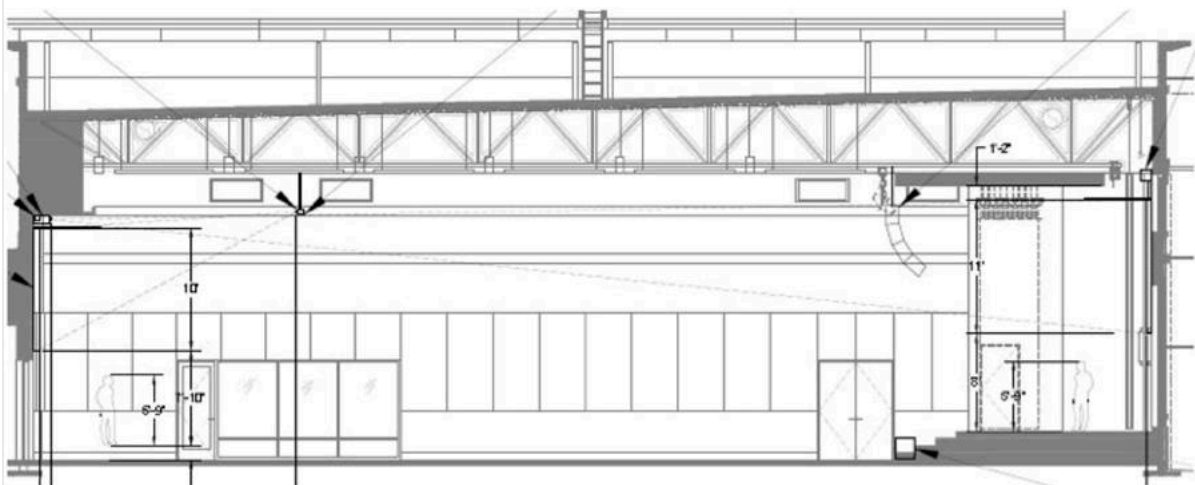
6. Do you use CAD? What's your process?

Yes, all of the drawings use AutoCAD. Some new projects even use a new system called Revit. That is a three-dimensional model of the entire

building that generates a massive database with all of the products that go into the building and where they are located. It is a very powerful tool, but a real pain in the ass to deal with. Eventually, I think every new construction project will use this tool. I just hope it will be years down the road.

The design process starts with needs analysis and budgeting, where I work very closely with the design team and the client. When the AV program document and budget is approved we start working on the drawings. The end product includes drawings and a spec. The drawings include “AV Layout” drawings which show the location of equipment within the room; “AV Conduit Layout” drawings which show the conduit and AC power system that the electrical contractor will install prior to the AV contractor getting on-site; and last the “AV Block Diagrams” which show signal flow. The written specification includes a “General” section which includes AV system description and the project conditions; a “Products” section which includes equipment lists; and then an “Execution” section which talks about how the system will be installed.

Once the bids come in, an AV contractor is awarded the project. I occasionally check in with them, but it is typically a year and a half to two years down the road when I do a final check out. In new construction, the building is built first, then the last thing to be installed is the AV system.



AV Layout – Section Sample, courtesy Lipp A/V Design, Inc.

7. What would be your ideal design project? For whom? Why?

I really love doing theatre systems. I started my career as a kid working in theatres and I still love to work in that world. I used to design sound and AV systems for about two high school theatres per year. But the bad economy has dried up those school project budgets.

I am just finishing up a really nice little theatre space for the Gorton Community Center in Lake Forest. The theatre there is called the John and Nancy Hughes Theatre. It was named because of the lead gift by Nancy Hughes, in memory of her late husband, the film writer/director John Hughes. This is the type of system that I really love doing.

8. Who's your biggest client? Who's your favorite client? Why?

Well, my most impressive client is the Illinois House in Senate Chambers. These two 130 year old historic rooms are arguably the most important rooms in the state. The design included over 200 custom built mics, two giant DSP matrixes and control system that interfaces with the voting system computers. I won two AV design awards for that project.



Illinois House Chambers, photo courtesy of Lipp A/V Design, Inc.

My largest client recently has been the university of Illinois. I've done about seven or eight projects in Champaign recently. One was a new system in Foellinger Auditorium. It seats 1,200 and makes it their largest lecture hall.

My favorite projects are usually the projects where the clients are really nice to work for. The U of I staff in Champaign are all really great. Right now, I'm working on a 1000 seat chapel for The Salvation Army called the Freedom Center and The Joint Commission, a four-story corporate facility with a ton of conference room AV systems. I've really enjoyed working with the clients and the architects on these projects.



Greenhouse CL Presentation Room (boardroom), courtesy Lipp A/V Design, Inc.

9. What's the strangest sound/video system you've ever designed? Why?

OK, for the strangest, I have to go back to before I did installed sound systems during my time as a young live sound engineer. I was running sound for a theatre that had a burlesque show come in. The director wanted to have a stripper do a song. That was a very interesting day in the costume shop when we had to figure out how to hide a lavalier mic and body pack.

10. Is AV fun?

Of course it's fun! I love my work. That's the most important part of designing AV systems.

A few years ago I had an epiphany when doing volunteer work for InfoComm. We were having drinks in the hotel bar after a Standards committee meeting. I realized everyone in that meeting was truly passionate about AV. Like me, they were all volunteers and only did it because they loved it. I truly believe anyone who is good in sound and AV really only does it because they love it.
