

# THE REAL STUFF

RELATING YOUR EXPERIENCES

## Church Finds Transformation in TECHNOLOGY



When First Baptist Church of Marco Island in Florida envisioned their new facility, completed in July, they intended for the new space to replace the old sanctuary and serve as a bridge between the past and the future.

“We were looking for a complete transformation with a focus on technology,” explained Tim Neptune, senior pastor. “We wanted to appeal to those living in Marco, but also to those visiting the Island, a mix of retirees and younger-generation families. Our goal was not to ostracize the older generation by building a contemporary facility, but we had to make everyone feel comfortable.”

His vision was to create a ministry that could be spread around the world from a new, high-end, state-of-the-art worship cen-

ter.

The church chose Brawner & Associates, a theatrical design firm, as a key partner in the design process of their project to work alongside the architects. They felt the firm had the mindset to satisfy traditional and contemporary tastes, and that they understood the church and, certainly, technology.

“Donnie Brawner, the president of Brawner & Associates, told me early on that we needed to create an environment that produces an inspirational audience experience,” said Neptune. “And, that’s what they did. After our first meeting, we turned the design of the whole sanctuary over to them.”

### THE PROCESS

The project included a 500-seat worship

center, a commercial kitchen attached to multi-purpose rooms with air-wall dividers, a library, a Starbucks-style coffee shop, multiple children’s spaces, youth rooms, and conference facilities. Intimacy, flexibility, and future expansion were tops on the list of design goals.

Neptune recalls those early meetings with Brawner.

“I told him that it needed to have the ambience of the Marriott here on the Island, but still have technical capabilities that would allow for theatrical production, television, and even concerts, all in the same space. In one word, it had to be flexible.”

The company was tasked with providing turnkey design and installation services, including overall sanctuary design, ceilings,

seating layouts, audio, video, lighting, digital signage, scenic elements, acoustics, and motorized rigging systems.

Brawner said it started in their Springfield, Missouri, offices with a blank square on a CAD drawing.

“We had an open canvas to develop the space, which is unique, but it paid dividends in the end,” said Brawner. “We started with a stage/platform layout, seating arrangements, sightline studies, and ceiling configurations. Next, we went into the technical elements and how we would integrate those.”

He continued, “Our approach does not start with designing ultimate systems individually but rather on how they fit together seamlessly as one unit. Lighting, audio, and video need very different and sometimes conflicting prerequisites to be a success. We often use scenic elements as the vehicle to blend it together. At the end of the day those scenic elements help define the space. The idea is that we have to be able to connect with the audience. It can’t just be sound, lights, and video; it has to be an experience that makes a connection.”

Brawner says he accomplishes this by creating a sort of “master plan” similar to an architect and then works with strategic partners on designing everything to fit the criteria.

“The key was that they got us involved early, and we were able to help drive many decisions that could have been very limiting later on down the road,” he said.

### THE DETAILS

The rear wall (built as a set piece for future flexibility) is the focal point of the worship center design that creates a technological canvas in which to paint with light. It works in unison with a soft fabric ceiling, and both come to life with multiple color-changing LED lighting units.

“Our design criteria for the stage set included depth and dimension, vivid color capability, and something that would register well for the live message but also something that we could go to TV with,” said Brawner. “It gives that simple classy look for their traditional service followed by a very hip, trendy-looking contemporary service.”

The stage set also houses the video screens and serves as acoustic elements for



the space along with an acoustic island ceiling over the audience. Brawner had to convince the team that the design for the audience ceiling had multiple purposes. For one, it was a major player in the acoustic solution, but it was also the masking for HVAC systems, sprinklers, and even their own audio speakers, lighting, and rigging systems.

The professional audio system consists of Electro-Voice and EAW components with a Yamaha 48-channel digital console and full stage monitoring system, in addition to a distributed speaker system throughout the facility inside and out. The lighting system features ETC equipment and incorporates conventional lighting, moving fixtures, and LED lighting.

The high-definition video system feeds live and pre-produced content to three IMAG screens and digitally records program material for postproduction. The system includes operator-controlled and remote-controlled cameras and a full video edit suite.

The motorized rigging system enables staging flexibility with multiple battens for stage electrics and scenic pipes. Digital signage plasma displays are installed throughout the facility and driven via a matrixed high-definition content server. The plasma screens can be flipped horizontal or vertical for ultimate flexibility in desired content. Electronic Media systems that interface with the Edit Suite were also incorporated in children’s areas, youth rooms, and fellowship halls.

A custom multi-dimensional cross with interior LED white light neon travels in and out and can be used at anytime for services or worship. In addition, there is a 16’ x 9’ center video screen unit that travels in and out.

The stage battens are designed to be full stage in length so that drops, curtains, or soft-sets can be added for special events or message series. A full stage curtain can be drawn to facilitate weddings, funerals, or special meetings without affecting the stage setup for Sunday services. The curtain also allows for a transformation of the space.

Custom modesty walls and a glass podium were built and trimmed to the space to create a clean stage look. Wall sconces help add a touch of class to the space, in addition to LED up-lights above an HVAC shelf that circles the room.

Pastor Neptune concludes, “Our new Worship Center has totally exceeded our expectations. It is exactly what we had asked Brawner for as part of this total church transformation. It is an awesome combination of upscale, traditional elegance with a focus on new-generation technology. An excellent experience is what we were promised, and that’s what we got in the end.” **RPN**

**Brawner & Associates** is a turn-key design firm offering theatrical design and live event production services to clients nationwide, ranging from churches to theatres to Fortune 500 corporate events, [www.Brawnerassociates.com](http://www.Brawnerassociates.com).