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SERVING SOUTHWEST MISSOURI

Brawner & Associates lights its way to success

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As wonderful as a theatrical production may be, the success of what happens on stage depends on the production skills and services backstage.

Enter Brawner & Associates LLC. Under the leadership of owners Donnie and Karen Brawner, Brawner & Associates specializes in technical production services for theater, video, concerts, corporate meetings, attractions and special events.

What this means is the production company does lighting design and consultation, technical direction, project management and event coordination.

Termed a turnkey production firm by Donnie Brawner, he said, "It means we often handle all elements of a production or a design all the way through from the drawing stages, the purchase of the system, installation of the system, through to the end."

Home-based for the first year, Brawner & Associates moved into its current quarters because more personnel and space were needed.

For that first year, the personnel consisted of Brawner and his wife.

Brawner and his wife came into the company with experience in the field. Brawner, inspired by high school theater, spent five years at Six Flags where he worked up from stagehand to entertainment supervisor over the technical theater division.

After freelancing for a time, he became lighting director at The Grand Palace theater in Branson, where he stayed for five years.

He also worked at Downhome Productions prior to starting Brawner & Associates.

Of the time he spent at The Grand Palace, Brawner said, "The bar was high and the Palace produced top-notch productions. I really made a lot of contacts during that period, many of which I still have today. It was time well spent."

Karen Brawner did theater work in high school and college. After she worked for a lighting company in California, she took a job at The Grand Palace, where the couple met.

"Our business quickly grew to where we needed to hire employees to do a lot of the CAD drafting, and an office manager," Donnie Brawner said.

Today, there are six regular staff including the Brawners. Additional employees work on a show-to-show basis.

Brawner said having the office space helps because clients can come there to review drawings and meet in the conference room.

The extra room also allowed them to add a virtual lighting design studio. The studio makes sure what the client sees is what the client gets on a project.

With the virtual lighting system, Brawner can present a 3-D drawing of a facility that needs a lighting system, positioning lights and turning on the lights inside the program. That means the client sees what it would really look like as designed.

"We have over \$30,000 invested in the full version of this program. It's a high-profile computer system, insuring quick operation, all built into a traveling system we can take on the road for productions or use in our dedicated studio."

The system can result in savings of time and money, as well.

"We can show architects and planners what a theatrical space may look like upon completion or how certain theater lights or houselights may effect the finished space. It is very efficient and can save countless dollars on mistakes that may otherwise be made,"

Brawner said.

Brawner's business is evolving to focus more and more on consultation and design projects.

"The consultation business for us has really opened up in the last two years. One project seems to lead to another, it's opened up a lot of doors for us. We've had a lot of success in using a more theatrical approach to our designing. I think we're going to be moving more toward that direction. We will probably do less production management direction work," Brawner said.

Brawner has nine projects going, spread from Springdale and Rogers, Ark., to Dallas to Atlanta to St. Louis and Kansas City.

Over the course of a year, the company handles between 20 and 25 projects, with some being multiyear contracts.

He declined to give the company's annual gross income, but did say his clients include such names as Wal-Mart, Silver Dollar City Corporate Development and Radio City Productions.

Brawner & Associates provides production services for Wal-Mart's annual shareholders meeting, and the Mexico City presidential inauguration in 2000 was one of its projects. Brawner also said he has done production work for several appearances by President George Bush and the Miss Missouri Pageant.

"Probably the smallest job we'd take on is doing crew management. A lot of our bigger shows are in the 1,000- to 1,200-fixture range; smaller shows are in the 150 to 200 range," Brawner said.

In Springdale, Ark., the project is for the Church at Pinnacle Hills. They are three months into the church project, which is due to be completed in 2006.



Ground was recently broken on the church project, which is a \$30 million facility designed to maximize natural light. The worship center's back wall is all glass with a lake view and a built-in baptistery.

To control the light that enters the room, Brawner said his company is considering a new technology, DMX-controlled electro chromatic glass, which transitions from clear to opaque.

While Brawner & Associates has competition in its field, Brawner isn't worried about it.

"There are a lot of projects to be had. It's all about being competent and capable in the area of video lighting because all of these corporations who are doing corporate meetings, or churches doing telecasts are relying heavily on video to spread their message," Brawner said. "The more they rely on video, the more they rely on high-quality video lighting. That's something we've had a lot of success at. Word spreads pretty quickly among those types of markets. It's not that big of an industry."

Brawner said his business philosophy is simple: help the customers.

"We want to help our clients succeed in their goal whatever that may be. It sounds so simple, but in reality it takes patience. With budget restraints, one's own desires, the pressures surrounding the industry and so on, it is easy to lose sight of the simple things such as helping the customer. We do whatever we can to help them accomplish their goal within the parameters set.

"We approach each project as a clean slate, with a can-do spirit and an anything-is-possible attitude, and a good sense of humor," Brawner added.



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Photo provided by BRAWNER & ASSOCIATES

Karen and Donnie Brawner founded Brawner & Associates LLC in 2000, providing technical production services for theater, videos, concerts and corporate meetings. Clients include Wal-Mart and Silver Dollar City.