

## SPECIAL EVENT SHOW 2004: Hits Jackpot!

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and

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While Las Vegas is a favored destination for incentive and convention travel, the casinos couldn't lure attendees away from the valuable education offered at the Mandalay Bay Hotel & Casino during the Special Event Show 2004 held January 6 –10, 2004. The Primedia-produced trade show and convention drew more than 2,500 exhibitors, suppliers and planners from around the world.

As a first time attendee, Jamie Carlson, MATC Student, found herself immersed in fundamental to advanced level classes in special event production. Attending the show with a seasoned veteran helped to shortcut the decisions as her courses were mapped out prior to the Welcome Party hosted at the Thomas & Mack Center adjacent to the University of Nevada, Las Vegas. UN-LV is also home to one of the Meeting & Event Management Bachelor Programs in the United States. Carlson also had the opportunity to meet the Department Chair, **Kathy Nelson, CSEP, CMP**, and many other international contacts.

The most important facet of the educational and trade show experience for Carlson was not only the contacts made and exposure to high visual impact and high energy entertainment production, but more importantly, it helped her to focus her discipline as she set her feet on the path to a career in lighting production. Within this environment, she had the opportunity to spend time with many award-winning lighting producers such as **Doc Waldrop of HiTech** in Atlanta, Georgia.

Says Carlson of her first foray into an international educational forum and trade show, "I feel so blessed to have had the opportunity to go 'The Special Event Show'. I had no idea what I was getting myself into at first. When we arrived on Monday night, there was so much energy from Gloria and all of the attendees that my nervousness quickly changed into excitement. I met some truly exceptional people who offered their support to not only me, but also my fellow classmates with this program and our careers. Thank you Gloria Nelson and Janet Sperstad, CMP for suggesting I attend 'The Special Event Show'. It truly was an eye opening experience."

Rubbing shoulders with such industry-notables as **Steve Kemble of Steve Kemble Event Design, ISES (International Special Event Society) President** and **MPI International Planner of the Year** and **David Spear, President of Classic Effects, ISES Immediate Past-President**, were all part of the high points in attending. Additionally, being able to

experience the innovation in lighting, staging and special effects that went in tandem with the networking events hosted at the MGM Grand and Mandalay Bay Hotel & Casino, she had all of her senses assaulted. Experiencing high-energy entertainment from around the country, including aerial acts in the Grand Ballroom at Mandalay Bay, helped her to identify all the structural and lighting components that truly whetted her professional appetite.

Trends that remain and also that are taking off continue to be anything that blinks and glows in the dark or a place to park yourself. Furnishings are being incorporated more and more into events beyond the furniture rentals that one usually sees in trade show booths. Imagine a furniture grouping within an area that provides your guests with more of a nightclub environment for spending time relaxing and/or talking business. Embellishing these furnishings with tension fabric, lighted tables, creative floral and maybe even pin-spotted lighting, and your event has an immediate WOW! Join a tarot card or palm reader on a queen sized bed in an al fresco courtyard setting with specialty lighting and dramatic fabric and you can be assured that your guests will not fall asleep! Combine all these with a myriad of interactive walk-around entertainers and pockets of small show vignettes and you get a taste of just *one* evening's events.

The one thing that particularly caught the attention of one seasoned veteran in this duo of attendees was the greater offerings of spandex type table and chair cover vendors now entering the marketplace. Patent leather look-a-likes are now also being offered in a myriad of colors for those who are attempting to create a more avante garde and edgy environment. Coupled with dramatic lightscaping and a room can become instantly transformed for far less than you or your client would/could imagine!

Experiencing the local talent, which included acts such as the **Chippendale's** and **Penn and Teller**, provided much food for thought and talk as planners and suppliers set about incorporating some of these types of entertainment into their special events. **Jim Henson's Puppets** were also integrated with technology into a "queuing" line where guests awaited their turn to enter a haunted house fabricated on property within the Opening Night Party at the MGM Grand.

Creative room turns provided interesting logistics challenges at the Mandalay Bay as well. With four conventions going on in-house simultaneously and space being in great demand, for those of us in the business, we could only appreciate all that the hotel, vendors and production staff was faced with as they produced the black-tie awards gala. A portion of the room was draped with black velvet from trusses where the awards stage, AV equipment and rows of chairs were set for the 1,500 attendees. After the awards were presented, guests were feted with a reception in the pre-function area outside the ballroom doors while the stage was changed over, draping dropped, tables set and covered with linens, chair covers and tablescaping materials including chargers....all within the span of about 60 minutes. Gobos, crystal beaded drapes with lighting, an inverted crystal chandelier and more provided the *take your breath away feeling* as the staff opened the doors for guests to sit down to dine. Illuminated bars with specialty lighting offered inviting libations allowing more space to focus attention on specialty

items in cozy alcoves. Then it was the grand finale and *showtime* with six different acts being served up on the main stage along with dinner including **The Three Waiters**.

Says Nelson of the weeklong sojourn, “What a privilege and pleasure it was to introduce Jamie to the world of continuing education within a professional environment outside the traditional classroom setting. After strategically reviewing all the class offerings, mapping out a learning strategy and then watching Jamie run with the best through the rest of the events and trade show floor was a rewarding experience. Having a small hand in opening doors, answering practical questions and passing on knowledge that create new opportunities has been more rewarding for me than I think it was for Jamie.”

Ideas flowed; creative exchanges took place, strategic partnerships formed and valuable education was imparted. While some attendees may have come back with a lighter wallet, we felt we had *hit the jackpot!*