

GREAT EXPECTATIONS

AND GREAT PERFORMANCES

Woodridge High School finds a way to eliminate risk and guarantee users and taxpayers a professional-quality performing arts facility

By Rebecca Hansen



THE VENUE:

Woodridge High School's multi-purpose "auditeria," a combination auditorium and cafeteria.

THE CHALLENGE:

To design a sound system that would meet the needs of this multi-use facility and ensure tax dollars were being well spent.

THE SOLUTION:

Use the Auditorioner® system to let officials explore a variety of sound system options before any equipment was installed.

THE RESULT:

"[The taxpayers] got a lot of value for their dollars. They've built a facility that's quickly becoming a hub of activity in the school and in the community"

- Dr. Richard Clapp,
Superintendent of Schools, Cuyahoga Falls, Ohio

A performance experience without the benefit of a dedicated auditorium. Due to budget constraints, they opted for modularity and multi-use: one side of the facility is a cafeteria, study hall, and meeting room; the other is a theater. When combined, they form an "auditeria" with seating for 500.

The facility is in use practically all day long, and not just by students and teachers. "We've had very successful town meetings here, and we're now being deluged with calls from community groups who've heard that we have a very usable room," says MacRaild.

But this happy outcome wasn't always assured. In early 1995, as planning for the facility was well under way, Dr. Clapp was worried about sound quality. "The fact that we were using public tax dollars from a local bond issue made it absolutely critical that when we

designed and constructed the facility it be right the first time. We couldn't risk making any mistakes we'd have to spend more money to fix."

Describing the problem, Clapp says, "There was no guarantee we'd get the clear, crisp sound we were looking for or that there wouldn't be echoes and distorted sounds in the back of the audience." No guarantee, that is, until Clapp saw the Bose® Auditorioner® system on the television news. Auditorioner system technology allows people to hear what a sound system will sound like installed in a building – before construction begins. "I knew immediately it would be absolutely beneficial to our program," he recalls.

Clapp and his construction manager Mike

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Raig visited Bose Corporation, headquartered in Massachusetts, to experience the Auditorioner® system. Based on blueprints of the not-yet-constructed facility, Bose® engineers created a computer-based model that showed sound coverage at various frequencies, speech intelligibility levels, and other important metrics. "We spent several hours together discussing how we had gone about designing a system for their facility," recalls Bose application engineer and Auditorioner system manager Rob Kosman. "Finally, we reached the moment when the only question left was the one that matters most: 'How does it sound?'"

Clapp and Raig could answer that question by listening to the sound from anywhere

in the not-yet started facility through the Auditor system. The Auditor system allowed them to “move” from seat to seat, section to section. “The quality was excellent from every seat,” recalls Clapp. “At the same time, we could hear subtle differences as we moved around, which made us very impressed with the technology.”

The Bose engineers also let the Woodridge team listen to the full-range speakers with and without an additional Acoustimass® module



reinforcing lower frequencies. “It really helps customers,” says Kosman, “when they’re trying to make a decision that affects the cost of a solution, to be able to hear the difference for themselves and decide whether or not it’s worth it.”

“Auditioner helped us make the right decisions,” says Clapp. “And it put us in a position to make those decisions without risking taxpayer dollars, because Bose guaranteed that the installed system would sound as good or better than what we had just heard, or they’d fix it or replace it.”

The system Kosman and his team designed delivers on this promise of quality whether the two rooms are combined or being used separately. The theater side has two Bose Panaray® 502°A Articulated Array® speakers on either side of the stage as well as a 502B Acoustimass

module for the low frequencies; the cafeteria side has nine Bose FreeSpace® Model 32 ceiling speakers interspersed throughout the room. In addition, operation is very simple. Splitting or rejoining the systems requires only the flick of a switch.

“The first time they turned on the actual system we were absolutely blown away,” remarks MacRaild. “We played a Miss Saigon CD, and when the helicopter part came on everyone instinctually looked up. People from

the next room came running in, very startled, to find out what was going on.”

“The sound quality is excellent,” says choir director Robin Donald. “After our first concert, the students came off the stage just stunned at the sound they could get.”

“I believe our students truly appreciate having a facility like this and a professional quality sound system.” reflects Clapp.

Parents are among the most appreciative beneficiaries of the new facility. “It used to be that you’d hear parents leaving a concert saying things like, ‘well, they sounded OK,’ when really the kids sang very, very well,” says MacRaild. “It was just that there wasn’t anything to carry the sound to the audience appropriately. Now, we do have that vehicle, and you can see the pride on the parents’ faces when they leave.”

MacRaild says he now realizes the importance of quality sound. “If you’re designing a facility like this and you’re not trying to get the very best sound you can, you’re missing a big part of it. There is no place where you can sit in this auditorium where you don’t hear the absolute quality of the performance.”

Ultimately, Clapp notes, the taxpayers also benefit. “They’ve got a lot of value for their

dollars. They’ve built a facility that’s quickly becoming a hub of activity in the school and in the community. And I think these positive results have reinforced taxpayer confidence.”

Superintendents are often criticized, he notes, for not being effective planners. “I believe we do make good efforts, but sometimes we don’t make use of all the tools that are out there to help us. Through the experience of using the

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