



CUSTOM  
ELECTRONIC  
DESIGN &  
INSTALLATION  
ASSOCIATION

## Five Minutes with Jeff Zemanek

### **How did you get started in this industry?**

I was the hobbyist who would make cassette recordings for my friends. I loved music and my stereo, and decided to get into the business as a salesperson at an audio specialty store called Carlin Audio. A few years later I became a store manager for Stereo Lab, both of these stores are located in Cincinnati. During this time, at Stereo Lab I saw the need for custom installation services and a new opportunity began.

### **Who in the industry has been your biggest influence? How and why?**

Three people come to mind; Jim Pearce, the owner of Stereo Lab for giving me my chance and education in this industry; Tom Doherty for founding CEDIA and mentoring me all along the way; and Rick Schuett for introducing lighting control to the CEDIA channel and hiring me to be a part of it.

### **Describe some of your most memorable moments in the industry.**

- I remember listening to Rob Gerhardt teach a class in 1992 at the Lowes Anatole and talking about \$300,000 systems! It blew my mind, but by 1994 we were doing them too. Thanks to Rob for opening my mind to the possibilities.
- As president of CEDIA in 1995, speaking at the banquet to 500 people, I was a little nervous, but I remember thinking what a great industry we were becoming.
- Going to Australia in 1995 to kick off the first international chapter and seeing the enthusiasm of the people.
- In 1996, we moved EXPO to the Dallas Convention Center from the Infomart. I happened to be the EXPO Chair and I remember going around the show floor before the show had started and being amazed by what we had become.

### **What do you think was the greatest advance, event or trend in our industry in the last five years?**

Becoming that fourth trade and being that technology resource to the building process. All of the influencers are beginning to truly come together, each dependent on the other to build a better place to live.

### **What trends will affect custom integrators in the next two years?**

Lighting control and electronic window systems will become the norm and you will be expected to provide it. There will be more and more people getting into this business; differentiate and brand yourself.

### **What are three things that custom integration companies need to do to prepare for the next two years?**

- Continue to improve your knowledge base. You will always be able to charge for your intellectual property...make sure that you do.
- Get fully into the retro-fit business.
- Audit your services and offerings to be as profitable as possible.