

snapshots

Grand Tradition

by Joshua M. Bachrach

Built in 1913 in Grand Rapids, MI, the Pantlind Hotel was named after a famous family of local hoteliers who aimed to accommodate the large number of furniture buyers who frequented the city. Its designers, the architectural firm Warren & Wetmore of New York, NY, set out to create a level of splendor reminiscent of their more famous projects, which include Grand Central Station and the Biltmore Hotel. Today, the luxurious hotel still takes its name from a local business, but with a much more recognizable name; the Amway Grand Plaza four-star hotel was acquired and renovated by the corporation, which is headquartered nearby.

The Amway Grand Plaza is a four-star hotel that possesses a number of amenities in addition to its guest lodgings, including a large ballroom on the main floor that once housed a bank. This newly renovated, grandly decorated room serves a variety of purposes. While Amway itself holds a number of trade meetings there, other companies also use the space for conferences. In fact, the first group to use the room under its new format was the IRS. Additionally, the ballroom can be utilized for large-scale parties, promotional dinners and even hosts the occasional wedding.

But having a room with this many purposes—not to mention this many pillars and high ceilings—requires that the structure provide a great deal of flexibility. One of the most important as-

pects of this flexibility comes in the form of sound design.

In search of an expert, Amway needed to look no further than its own backyard. Ken Wieringa, who makes Grand Rapids his hometown, started designing the sound system for the Amway Grand Hotel ballroom last November. "The challenge right from the start," Wieringa recalled, "was that the sound had to be seamless, regardless of the level of complexity of the sound system used for different types of events."

Wieringa and his team ran into a few obstacles in the early stages of the project. "We knew that we were going to use TOA F121s under the balconies from the start of the job. And we were going to use sound tubes within the chandeliers. But the chandeliers wouldn't allow for a fitted sound tube that was pleasing to the eye."

Faced with this impediment, Wieringa considered another route. He called Neil Wood, vice-president and co-owner of the Burcaw Company. Wood's company serves as a manufacturer's representative for TOA in Michigan. After rethinking things, Wieringa came to a new conclusion and placed a very large order with Wood. Wieringa explained the new design: "We ended up using all TOAs—the H2s in the balcony area and the H1s on the face of the balcony facing the center of the room. And we have added the HB1 subwoofer to the room to give it full fidelity." And to ensure that his initial design achieves the



▲ The sound system at the Amway hotel ballroom consists of TOAs—the H2s in the balcony area and the H1s on the face of the balcony facing the center of the room, in addition to the HB1 subwoofer added to the room to give it full fidelity.

high level of quality sound that he intended, Wieringa set up an area in the balcony for a person to control the sound. That way, he said, "The AV person is hidden away but is still in the room, so he knows exactly how it sounds."

Wieringa concluded, "The end result is that everyone in the room says the sound is seamless. Everywhere you walk, everywhere you go, it's just there in a very intelligible manner. That's exactly what we were shooting for."



▲ System controls are located in the balcony.

► TOA
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