

A helping hand: CITT/ICTS's new Mentoring Network

LAST SUMMER at Rendez-vous 2017, following a roundtable discussion and subsequent breakout sessions, CITT/ICTS rolled out a new mentorship program for its members. Hosting those sessions was Robert Vernon, who boasts a long and varied career in theatrical and event production. Vernon is a former CITT/ICTS president, a recent board member of its Ontario section, and currently works as a scenic constructor at The Shaw Festival in Niagara-on-the-Lake. He joins us here to speak with Andrew King, Editor-in-Chief of *Professional Sound* magazine about the new program, developed in tandem with former CITT/ICTS Presidents Michael Harris and

Graham Frampton, with plenty of input from the membership.

Andrew King: *First off, tell me about CITT/ICTS's mentorship program and what informed the decision to launch a formal program like this at this point in time.*

Robert Vernon: The idea of the program is not new to the CITT/ICTS. It is something that we have considered at various times throughout our 25-year history. Early in the institute's incarnation, we did not have the resources to expedite this ambitious endeavor.

The goals are two-fold. First, to provide a resource for emerging professionals building their careers in entertainment production,

and second, for long-serving individuals to give something back to the industry.

At Rendez-vous 2015 in Vancouver, then President Michael Harris announced that it would be his goal in his last year in office to establish the program. At that conference, a parallel session on transferring the knowledge and skills to the next generation of theatre techs established that the membership had the drive and the interest to pursue this. At Rendez-vous 2016 in Winnipeg, a working group was established to look at the specifics of instituting such a program. A second working group session at the Ontario Section – Ignition 2017 event further refined what we expected to do with the program. Last summer, after hosting the mentorship roundtable and breakout sessions at Rendez-vous 2017 in Saint John NB, The Mentoring Network was officially launched.

AK: *What makes mentorship an important initiative for the theatre technology industry specifically?*

RV: As stated previously, the broader goals of providing guidance to people considering or just starting their careers and the satisfaction for established practitioners to help those individuals. The working group discussions expanded on this to define mentoring as a two-way exchange of information—long-term professionals also learning from new workers. It will be of value to the established career technician who is looking for advice and encouragement to change their career path. An important aspect of the mentoring



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Delegates participating in the Mentorship Roundtable at CITT/ICTS Rendez-vous 2017 on the stage of the Imperial Theatre in Saint John New Brunswick.

program is to provide the emerging entertainment crafts person the opportunity to see how the training they have received, be it in a formal educational scenario or on-the-job, relates to practical work scenarios.

AK: *At which point in their careers should budding theatre technicians consider working with a mentor to further their careers?*

RV: We all have had mentors in our lives; for most, it was a teacher or teachers who took specific interest in us and what we were learning. Others didn't find that until they started their careers and found a supervisor or experienced co-worker willing to take on that role. It depends on the individual to determine when they are ready to seek a mentor.

AK: *Why should potential mentors get involved in the program, and what types of traits are ideal for mentors from CITT/ICTS's perspective?*

RV: The short answer to this question is the CITT/ICTS tagline, "Connecting the Live Performance Industry." The Institute was founded on the premise of networking for professionals across Canada. Given the vastness of the country, networking is vital for the health and well-being of the industry in Canada. Individuals can use networking to become known in the industry and thus build their careers.

AK: *What were your goals for the mentorship sessions at Rendez-vous 2017 last summer? Who did you expect to see in attendance and what are you hoping they took away from the experience?*

RV: My personal goal for Rendez-vous was to see a formalization of the mentoring process. In past conferences, mentoring has taken place in an informal setting with delegates hooking up with one another on an ad hoc basis. My plan for the mentoring session was to establish guidelines for being a mentor or mentee and to see the mentoring dynamic extend outside of the conference. It is my hope to see CITT/ICTS viewed less in the light of the technology of entertainment and more of the people of entertainment production.

AK: *How can CITT/ICTS members or potential members get involved with*



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Robert Vernon (standing) moderating the Mentorship Roundtable at CITT/ICTS Rendez-vous 2017.

this initiative?

RV: Three ways. First, the national office has developed a new dedicated page of our website where members and interested parties can learn about mentoring, and where they can sign up and identify the areas for which they would like to be a mentor or mentee. Second, continue to attend CITT/ICTS Rendez-vous; the 2018 edition will take place August 15 – 18 in St. Catharines, Ontario, and we will have a dedicated area for The Mentoring Network participants to meet and we are planning a session for developing mentoring skills. Finally, they can contact their section and ask to bring the mentorship program to their region.

Learn more about CITT/ICTS's The Mentoring Network at www.citt.org/Mentoring_Network.html.

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Andrew King is the Editor-in-Chief of *Professional Sound* magazine, as well as three other titles published by NWC: *Professional Lighting & Production*, *Canadian Musician*, and *Canadian Music Trade*. Visit www.nor.com for more information.



Robert Vernon has a long and varied career in theatrical and event production, starting as a carpenter at summer theatres in Ontario as well as technical director at Magnus Theatre, Alberta Theatre Projects, The Blyth

Festival; and stagecraft instructor at Humber College, Ryerson University, and York University; and project coordinator at Holman Exhibits. He currently works as a scenic constructor at The Shaw Festival in Niagara-on-the-Lake. Robert is a former Chair of the Ontario Section and former President of CITT/ICTS.