

The event unfolds across 88 acres of the Sports and Entertainment Park.

### Nights of the Owls

By: David Barbour

Kennesaw State University's Owl-O-Ween requires an extensive outdoor lighting, sound, and video layout

One of the more unusual and inventive projects to come to our attention in recent months is Owl-O-Ween, a hotair balloon festival and costume runway held on 88 acres of the Sports and Entertainment Park, a stadium at Kennesaw State University in Kennesaw, Georgia. The above description doesn't begin to describe all that happens there, including live entertainment on multiple stages, trick-or-treating, roving performers, a merchant marketplace, artists' displays, food trucks and a food court, an interactive kids' zone, vodka and craft beer bars, and more. Running the numbers, the event includes 19 hot air balloons, 16 bands, more than 40 circus performers, and local talent.

The event features five stages, three Stageline mobile stages, five LED walls, eight cameras, over 500 DMX-controlled lighting fixtures, and a daily crew of 55 on show days. It's an extraordinary event for an institution of learning to produce, and it generates untold goodwill among the citizens of Kennesaw.

Brandon Harris, who produces Owl-O-Ween—the title is an allusion to the owl, symbol of the university's mascot —says that the 2018 edition of the event was the sixth, "and it has grown every year. It combines hot-air balloons with a Halloween theme. It was conceived as a way for the university to reach out to the community. It is one-hundred-percent produced internally by our staff—from production to operations, guest experience stuff, box office, and food and beverage."

Of course, such an event is an obstacle course of logistical challenges. To manage it all, "We build an RFQ (request for quote) that defines

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The Pixelmap Owl.

the scope and necessary equipment, and production companies bid on it," Harris says. Lighting design and sound systems are handled mostly by faculty and students; many of the latter belong to a university department known as Night Owl Productions. Established in 2012, it is a studentled entrepreneurial workforce. Currently employing 70-plus students, it offers hands-on training and jobs for student employees in marketing, production, conversion, operations, maintenance, event services, and hospitality. It provides leadership opportunities along with the chance to network and build relationships with industry contacts and peers; it also reduces reliance on outsourced staff and gives students more opportunities for experiences in sports, entertainment, and events. "We have 11 part-time students who learn technical production and work under various technical directors across campus," Harris says.

"We start planning the event during the first week of January," Harris continues. He notes that the event production software Shoflo "helps us keep track of everything and allows us to build time lines for each of the stages." These include the Busker Bus Stage, which combines music with





The Kids Stage.

magic acts and other entertainments; the Garden Stage, which hosts a variety of music acts; the Glow Stage, which focuses on aerial and other circus-style acts; the Kids Stage, which includes karate demos and a *School of Rock*style kids band; and the Levitation Stage, home of costume showdowns, music acts, and our DJ dance parties.

The event draws on gear owned by the university with the rest being supplied by the Marietta, Georgia-based firm Technical Elements. (The company provides technical assistance and gear to a variety of events; clients include the disaster relief organization Samaritan's Purse; American Cancer Society; First Baptist Church of Woodstock, Georgia; and Black and Decker.) "They handle the larger stages, because we don't have line arrays and moving lights," Harris says. "They also bring in all the site lighting." Among the challenges of dealing with an extensive outdoor layout, he adds, "Our operations manager builds a map of the power grid for the company handling it. It's always a puzzle to get power exactly where we need it. We have generators all over the place, and, for site lighting, hundreds of small boxes from which Technical Elements runs the



An aerial act on the Glow Stage.

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Weather, of course, is a major concern, "We had decent weather this year," Harris says. "The hard thing about this kind of festival is that hot-air balloons can only go up if winds are below eight or nine miles per hour. Also, the balloons can only go up for three hours at a time. We are carefully regulated by the FAA to protect the safety of our patrons. Patrons can have tethered balloon rides behind the Levitation Stage, if weather permits." In terms of loading in, Harris says, "We start bringing in gear on the Friday before the event [which opens on the following Friday]. It's a good, solid week of work; the amount of gear that we use is crazy. We do a lot of site lighting throughout the entire park. We also put up a number of apparatus, including a truss structure for the aerialist rig. Starting on Wednesday, we set up the stages, including one Stageline SL260 and two Stageline SL100 mobile units."

For video, Harris says, "The stadium has a video wall by Daktronics. We

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**ENABLING BRIGHT OUTCOMES** 

also bring in four Absen walls-one for the Kids Stage, two by the Levitation Stage for the costume runway, and one at the juncture where two roads meet at the Pixelmap Owl." The latter is a pixel-mapped digital display of the school's mascot. "We use the screens for sponsor rotations, stage schedules, and live IMAG throughout the night. We have eight cameras in different locations around the park, including three at the Levitation Stage, for the costume runway. This is the main event; if someone walks onstage, he or she can be seen by more than 10,000 people. It is their moment of fame!"

To facilitate this system, he says, "We build a large fiber network in which all the cameras feed to a central control room in the stadium. We have a Blackmagic switcher that sends the images to boards all around the park. We can also take audio feeds from each stage using Sescom SES-FA-2 boxes; for example, we had a band (Mariachi Búhos de Oro) dressed in skeleton costumes, and we broadcast it simultaneously to all five screens. No matter where you are in the park, you don't miss the entertainment!"

To light the various stages and outdoor layout, the lineup this year included eight Martin by Harman MAC Auras, 32 Claypaky Sharpys, 10 Martin Mac Viper AirFX units, eight Martin Axioms. 12 Martin Mac Quantum Washes, six Quantum Profiles, 68 Chauvet Professional COLORado 1 Tri-Tour wash units: Chauvet Freedom Pars, 296 Elation Professional SixPar 200 IPs, two 10W lasers, 22 ETC Source Fours, eight Source Four PARs, four Ultratec Radiance hazers, two Reel EFX DF-50 hazers, and 2,500' of festoons, with control provided by one MA Lighting grandMA2 ultra-light, one Jands Vista T2, and three Jands M1 consoles.

Audio gear included 12 JBL VTX V20 and four JBL VRX932LAP line arrays, six JBL G28 dual 18" subs; eight EAW SM200 wedge monitors, two QSC 18" subs, 12 JBL PRX512M loudspeakers; four Electro-Voice ETX 35P, six ETX-18SP, and six XZA1 loudspeakers; four JBL Eon 518S subs, two QSC K12.2 and two KW181 loudspeakers, with control from the following mixers: two Midas M32s and two M32Rs, one QS Touch Mix 30, two Avid VENUE SC48s, and one Yamaha MG102C. A Clear-Com FreeSpeak II wireless communication system was used to allow multiple stages to communicate flawlessly.

Video gear included 128 Absen 7mm panels; four NovaStar Nova Pro HD display controllers; four Barco Image Pro II Jr. video scalers, scan converters, and switchers; one Barco HDX2-W20 projector; one Panasonic AW-HE130 PTZ camera; seven Panasonic AJ-PX380s; one Teradek Bolt 1000; and one Blackmagic Design ATEM 4 video switcher. The staging component also included four 4' x 8' Staging Dimensions decks, truss from Tomcat and Mobil-Tech, Columbus-McKinnon Lodestar half-ton hoists, ten



Sumner Event stage lifts, and over 50,000' of cable.

Other key personnel included Jeremy Walts (video director) and Jason Sharkey (technical director).

Whether the balloons go up or not, it seems clear that Owl-O-Ween pro-

vides a good time for local families as well as hot-air enthusiasts from around the country. Plans are in the works for next year's edition, which should again offer great learning opportunities for students at the university.

