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Tabletop Trends:

## New Season, New Ideas

PLUS: How to do Comedy Right

## Rewarding Experience

Meet ES editors' picks for the top innovator and top trendsetter making a splash in the industry this year

By Pat McCarrell

Two visionary event companies were recognized last month with the first annual Event Solutions Editors' Choice Awards.

Classic Party Rentals and Aqua Visual FX were presented the Editors' Choice Awards for Trendsetter and Innovator, respectively, during the opening general session at the Event Solutions Idea Factory and *catersource* Conference & Tradeshow.

### Trendsetting in Event Rentals

The magazine's editors chose Classic for the Trendsetter award due to its strategy and execution, over the past year to two years, of acquiring strong regional party rental brands and consolidating them under one roof.

Leading the event industry's remarkable consolidation trend, Classic Party Rentals, with John Campanelli at the helm, has acquired some 15 party rental companies in the past 18 months to



Classic Party Rentals has bought out numerous regional and local event companies to expand its store network from coast to coast.

become the largest party rental company in the United States with well over \$300 million in rental volume.

By some estimates, the late-December purchase of Chicago Party Rental alone added \$30 million in sales, and Campanelli says the buying isn't done yet, either. Already, the consolidation has left no other companies in the sector that would be considered national in scope.

To be sure, there are still plenty of regional and local party rental equipment outlets competing with Classic, and they still have the ability to compete with the larger Classic on local customer service grounds and in other ways.

Most industry observers see Classic's strategy as a sign of a healthy, growing industry. Indeed, Classic's strategy reached trend status as more rental companies have sought to expand through acquisitions.

### Next-Generation Water Screens

Aqua Visual FX, a new type of water screen that uses computer-synchronized water droplets to display the most intricate images, from logos to text and other graphics, was chosen for the Innovator award.

The water screen is the brainchild of Doug Adams, who also operates Pyrotek Special Effects Inc. and Laser Design Productions Inc. Adams has been innovating in the special effects industry for 27 years, and the latest technology is a

result of experience gleaned with the other two ventures.

The two older companies have been noted recently for creating the stage lighting and special effects at the live concerts of bands such as Rush and Kiss, along with contemporary artists such as Beyoncé and Britney Spears. Fog and water screens on which



Courtesy: Aqua Visual FX Inc.

No projection here — the Aqua Visual System uses a computer program to form the water screen's water droplets into company logos and other images.

images are projected have been available and popular for several years, and Adams' company has used them to enhance corporate events and auto shows, but the Aqua Visual FX screen takes the technology a step further.

"I've used water curtains for projection, but I got to thinking, 'What if we can do a water screen with animation?'" Adams says. "So along came Aqua Visual FX."

A 50-foot by 60-foot system will be employed onstage by the band Maroon 5 when it goes on tour in 2008, and a permanent installation is planned at Planet Hollywood in Las Vegas, among other venues. **S**

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