

# Lighting & Sound America

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## Red Alert RESTART

The Industry Mobilizes

ALSO:

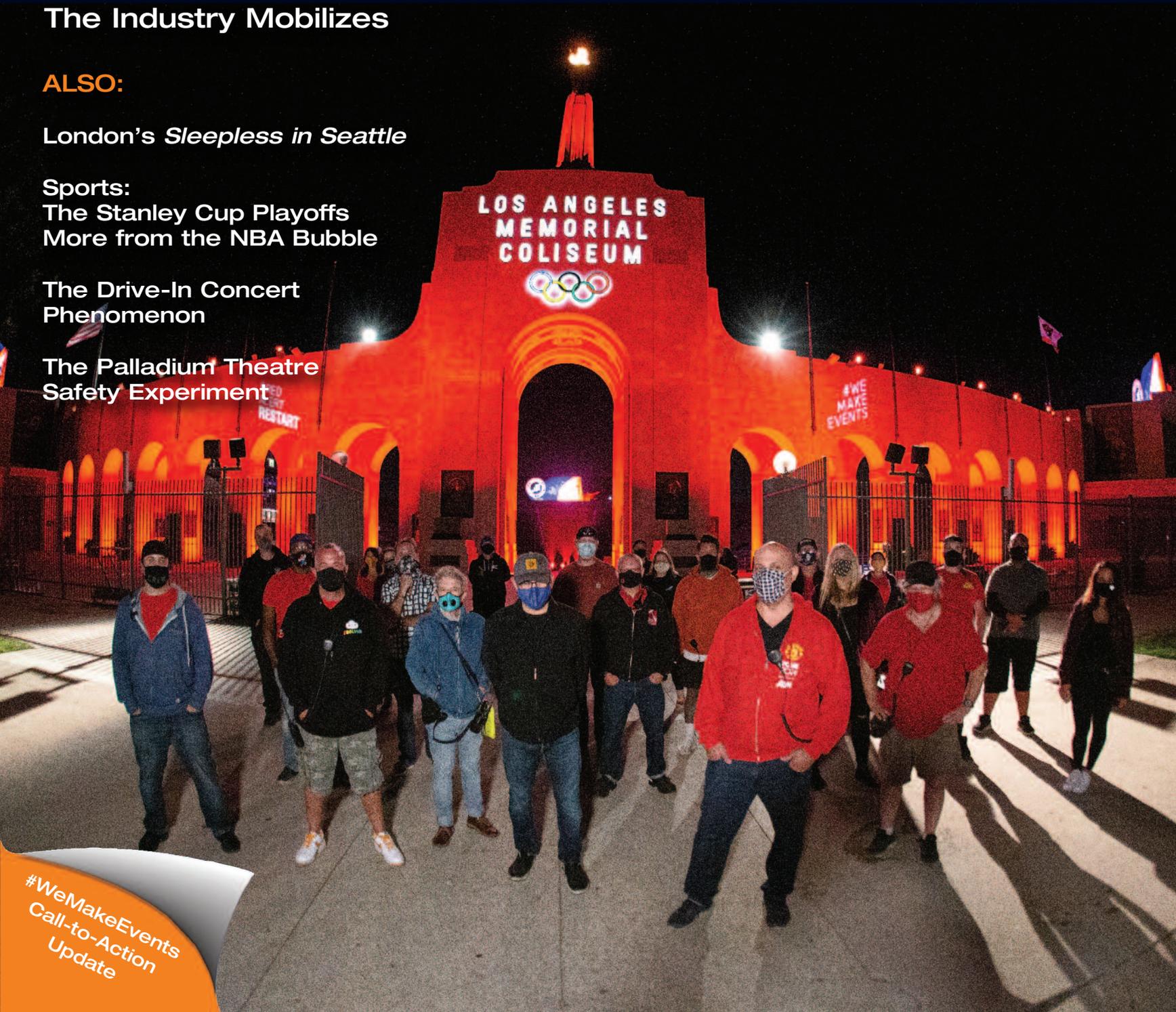
London's *Sleepless in Seattle*

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The Drive-In Concert  
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The Palladium Theatre  
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#WeMakeEvents  
Call-to-Action  
Update



ON SEPTEMBER 1ST

THOUSANDS OF INDUSTRY PROFESSIONALS  
WILL ILLUMINATE 1,500  
BUILDINGS, VENUES, AND SPACES  
ACROSS NORTH AMERICA  
TO ASK CONGRESS FOR

WEMAKEEVENTS.ORG



Sam Boyd's  
REMON

PUMPKIN IS BACK AT DUNKIN'

CASINO

4 QUEENS

Guests must wear masks

Guests must wear masks

# RED ALERT NATION

The industry comes together, coast-to-coast and beyond, in a demonstration of solidarity and to urge Congress to act

By: David Barbour

## ON

September 1, the US live events industry came together for a nationwide demonstration that involved marches, performances, and thousands of buildings lit in red, to urge Congress to vote for the RESTART Act, and to support an extension and expansion of PUA benefits for 1099 and freelance workers as well as an extension of the \$600 FPUC (federal pandemic unemployment compensation).

The event began with Marcel Fairbairn, CEO of GearSource.com, hosting one of his weekly industry happy hours. Inspired by the #WeMakeEvents day of action in the UK a couple of weeks earlier—an event that combined demonstrations, the lighting of 715 buildings, and a cruise on the Thames River—Fairbairn began to imagine something similar happening here.

Fairbairn held a meeting on August 14 with colleagues. In an essay on Medium.com., he writes, it “was meant to be a discussion on practical matters like feasibility, likelihood of achieving, costs, challenges, and other items most functional teams would discuss—instead, it felt like the decision had already been made. In fact, leading up to that meeting, I was already receiving calls from people who ‘heard’ what we were doing (how, I have no idea...since our first official notice of any kind would be the following Monday), which convinced me there was momentum building even before we decided to do it.”

With the #RedAlertRESTART name and date of August 27 selected (later moved to September 1), Brad Nelms

Left photo: Cheryl Hall; Right: Ron Lake



Opposite: The message is seen on Fremont Street in Vegas.  
Above: Seattle's Space Needle.

## THE INDUSTRY AND THE PANDEMIC



Technicians and their cases outside the Hy-Vee Arena in Kansas City, Missouri.

signed on as co-manager. Next, Fairbairn writes, “We quickly decided on constructing a decentralized team. We would select regional directors, who would in turn build regional or local teams who would focus on the national messaging, branding, and methods, but with a local or regional focus and flair.

“On Monday, just three days following our exploratory committee meeting and five days after the initial Zoom call spark, we were already able to hold our first regional directors meeting—on Zoom of course...In two days, we created and met as a national committee, then within three more days (over a weekend) we built what became a national team of directors in more than 50 regions, each with between 20 and 100 on their teams. Doing quick math, I am guessing this became a team of at least 5,000 people, likely closer to 10,000—in two weeks!!

“What happened next was truly remarkable and shows the heart, courage, determination, and passion of this great industry. With a level of resolve and commitment I cannot recall ever experiencing, this national team of now 60-plus people worked harder than I could have ever

imagined, for no pay, and never once complained...they never questioned the direction, the path, or even the goal ‘to light 1,500 buildings in the US.’

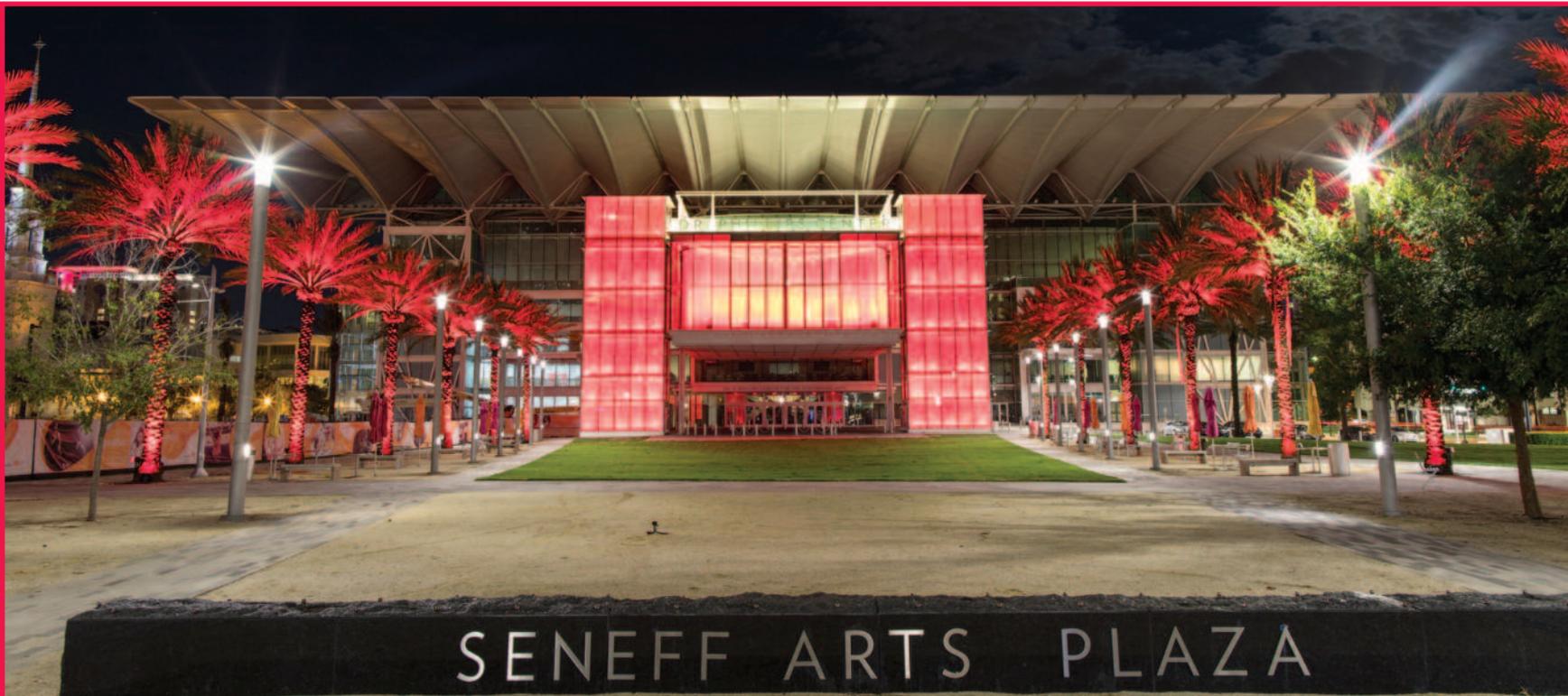
“Then...it happened. This thing went viral. In only a couple of weeks our Facebook page alone would reach 2,000,000 people and have nearly 350,000 interactions (and growing). We gathered enormous social media followings on Twitter and Instagram as well, while also gaining the attention of local and national media in a pretty big way.” Meanwhile, an array of celebrities—including Alice Cooper, Nathan Lane, and Barry Manilow—made videos in support of the effort.

On the big day, viewers could check out the panoply of events on Red Alert Live, a four-and-a-half-hour livestream on Facebook and YouTube. Christian Jackson, the lighting designer and programmer, hosted. Fairbairn notes that the stream has been seen by more than 200,000 people.

“What this team did was beyond remarkable, borderline unthinkable,” Fairbairn writes. “I’ve learned that when called upon, this industry answers the bell in a big way... These incredible people want to work, doing what they



Above: Bridgestone Arena in Nashville. Below: The Dr. Phillips Center for the Performing Arts in Orlando.





The Oculus in New York's World Trade Center.

love to do, creating beautiful things for millions of people to enjoy. I witnessed how happy people were to be setting up lights. I saw IATSE members pushing cases, shoulder to shoulder with non-union workers. I saw companies who are competitors and sometimes, bitter rivals, working together to light buildings. I saw 4Wall trucks parked next to PRG trucks—delivering free equipment in a show of complete solidarity.

“Humankind has taken a beating in 2020. We’ve been divided by a virus, by political beliefs, and a notion that we truly hate each other based solely on our voting preference or skin color. I don’t believe that. Sure, there are bad people in this world, but I truly believe that given the opportunity to do good, most of us will. In fact, September 1 could be considered one of the greatest group hugs ever organized by any one industry. And somehow, we found our way outside the industry as well, out of our bubble. People everywhere saw what we did, and many will remember it for a long time.” Following are reports from several cities.

## **New York**

*Matt Guminski, freelance lighting/production designer:* The success was that we didn’t try to micromanage each city on a national level. Knowing the people, vendors, legisla-

tors, and building/structures of each community was key. That’s why we sought regional directors in each of the major cities we targeted. We empowered them to utilize their own resources and contacts to build their own local structure.

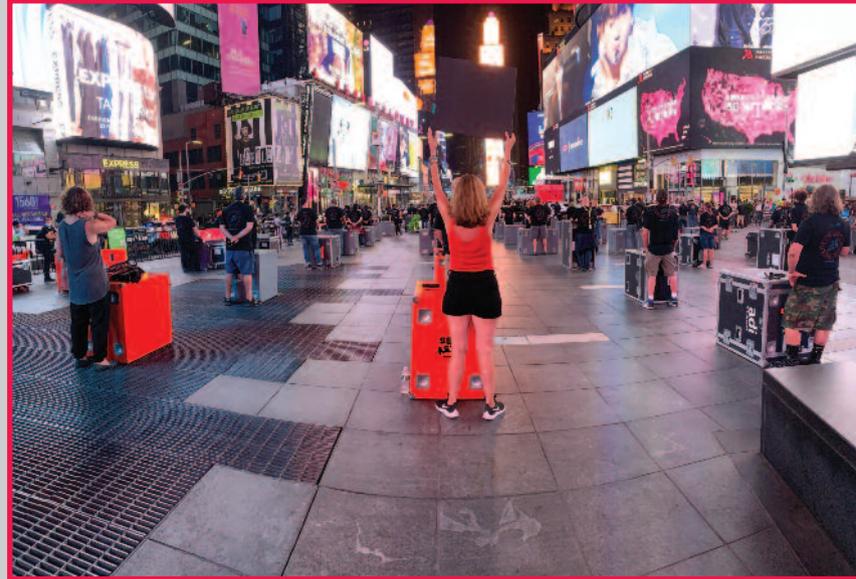
From the targeted cities, it spread like wildfire to other regions that we even didn’t think of. One example is Nickie Pollacek, an assistant tour manager in upstate New York. She saw my posts on social media and began to get venues and media outlets involved on her own. When she reached out to present me with what she had compiled on her own, I immediately asked her to join our committee for the upstate region. It was that kind of grass roots efforts and passion that made our event a success.

The Times Square activation was a unique beast. How do you make a statement during a pandemic and a time of civil unrest across the country? Originally, we intended to do a case push from MSG to Times Square but for safety concerns we scrapped that plan. Instead we decided to do a case installation in the heart of NYC. We had 172 road cases, with a stagehand next to each one, socially distanced. For most of these people it was the first time in months that they had seen each other. It was a really beautiful thing to see everyone come together.

Some of the buildings in NYC region that illuminated for our cause were the Empire State Building, Madison Square Garden, Radio City Music Hall, Beacon Theatre, the Public Theatre, Brooklyn Academy of Music, the Helmsley Building, MetLife Stadium, and the World Trade Center/Oculus. Herrick Goldman and a couple of others colleagues projected the #WeMakeEvents logo on the darkened Broadway theatres. The photos they captured were beautifully haunting. We did something pretty amazing in a short amount of time. We definitely made some noise and people are more aware of our industry. I'm excited to see what comes next.

### Los Angeles

*Chris Werner, principal designer, Chris Werner Design:* Noah Mitz, from Full Flood, and I decided we wanted to light something. We contacted several iconic buildings and got some hard "No's." Then we learned that Patrick Whelan was the Southern California leader and was organizing venues within Google Sheets. They were relying on a couple of generous lighting shops and trucking companies; the idea was that we would request an allocation of



Above: The Times Square activation.

Below: A marquee on 42nd Street sends the message.



## THE INDUSTRY AND THE PANDEMIC



Technicians at Hollywood & Highland.



A truck sent the message around Los Angeles.

gear and they would handle logistics. Noah and I decided to do something big without taxing those resources. The folks at Hollywood and Highland wanted to be involved. We contacted Volt Lites and they were really into it, offering a lot of resources and equipment. PRG provided video gear. DF Productions, a video production company, got pulled into it and the folks from Strictly FX provided lasers. L7 Touring joined us with crew. We expected a couple of people to come help; we got 30 talented, energetic technicians, which made it really pleasant. Rob Koenig, Metallica's lighting designer, came out to program. It was a delightful process. We also had a mobile video billboard that Volt rented for the night. Dan Efros and Drew Findley put content on the truck, and somebody drove it around, parking it in front of venues that chose not to go red.

### Boston

*Todd Gerrish, owner, Port Lighting Systems:* It all started really fast. I got a call from Matt Guminski from the #WeMakeEvents national team on a Saturday, asking if I would be willing to head up the Boston/New England area. The next day, Brad Nelms called to give more information. On Monday, we had a Zoom meeting with the national team, who gave us information and turned us loose. I sent out messages to all the production companies in the area to recruit as many folks as I could; I reached out to colleagues from Springfield, Worcester, Rhode Island, Maine, Vermont, New Hampshire, and Boston. The team was



The demonstration, complete with display of LED tubes, outside the Boston Convention Center.

comprised of production companies throughout New England as well as IATSE members and individual volunteers. Collectively, our group lit close to 200 buildings and landmarks across New England for the event.

A group of people in Boston designed an arrangement of cases in three half-circles. In front of the cases they had the idea of 12 stagehands standing around a spoked lineup of LED tubes. Each of the 12 represented one million of the 12 million unemployed industry workers. Ken Casey, from the Dropkick Murphys, came down to emcee, and do a recorded message that we put on the livestream. This was all set up in front of the Boston Convention Center. A group in Providence organized a case march and some of the local politicians came out to speak.

I am extremely thankful for all of the support of everyone on the team. It was inspiring to see the collaboration, passion, and willingness of so many to help. Competitors were working together, side by side. It was an amazing team effort and so incredible to see all of the great work that was done in such a short amount of time.

## Honolulu

**Bob Harmon, president, Eggshell Lighting:** I was approached by Marcel Fairbairn, wondering if I wanted to head the effort here and I told him I'd be honored. I went to my competitors—it's an island and you have to be friends here. So, I talked to Hawaii Stage & Lighting and Theatrix, and we rounded up a "hui" of all the other companies we could find. In the end, some 50 people lit, projected upon, and documented over 20 structures. We lit

the [Tom Moffatt] Waikiki Shell early, on the Sunday prior, because we were still under lockdown and we wanted to have something in the can in case we were told we couldn't do anything else. But we got clearance by Monday night and went ahead with all of the other buildings.

We also lit buildings on the outer islands. On Maui, Mark Astrella lit the Maui Arts and Culture Center. Jim Swanson, of Mid-Pacific Audio Visual, decided that the Waikoloa Bowl in Kona needed to be lit. Other venues included the



Tom Moffatt Waikiki Shell in Honolulu.

## THE INDUSTRY AND THE PANDEMIC

Hawaii Convention Center; The Neal S. Blaisdell Center Arena, Exhibition and Concert Hall; The Hawaii Theatre; Aloha Stadium; and the Bishop Museum. We lit Watanabe Floral, a shop that occupies a city block; flowers are a big thing here. And we can't forget the USS Missouri; the event just happened to coincide with the 75th anniversary of the end of the World War II commemoration.

After what we did at the Waikiki Shell, all the others brought their A game. They all did a fabulous job. We had seven companies involved and all of their associates. Nobody said no. We're all in the same boat. I hope people keep pressure on Congress. This isn't over yet...

### Cleveland

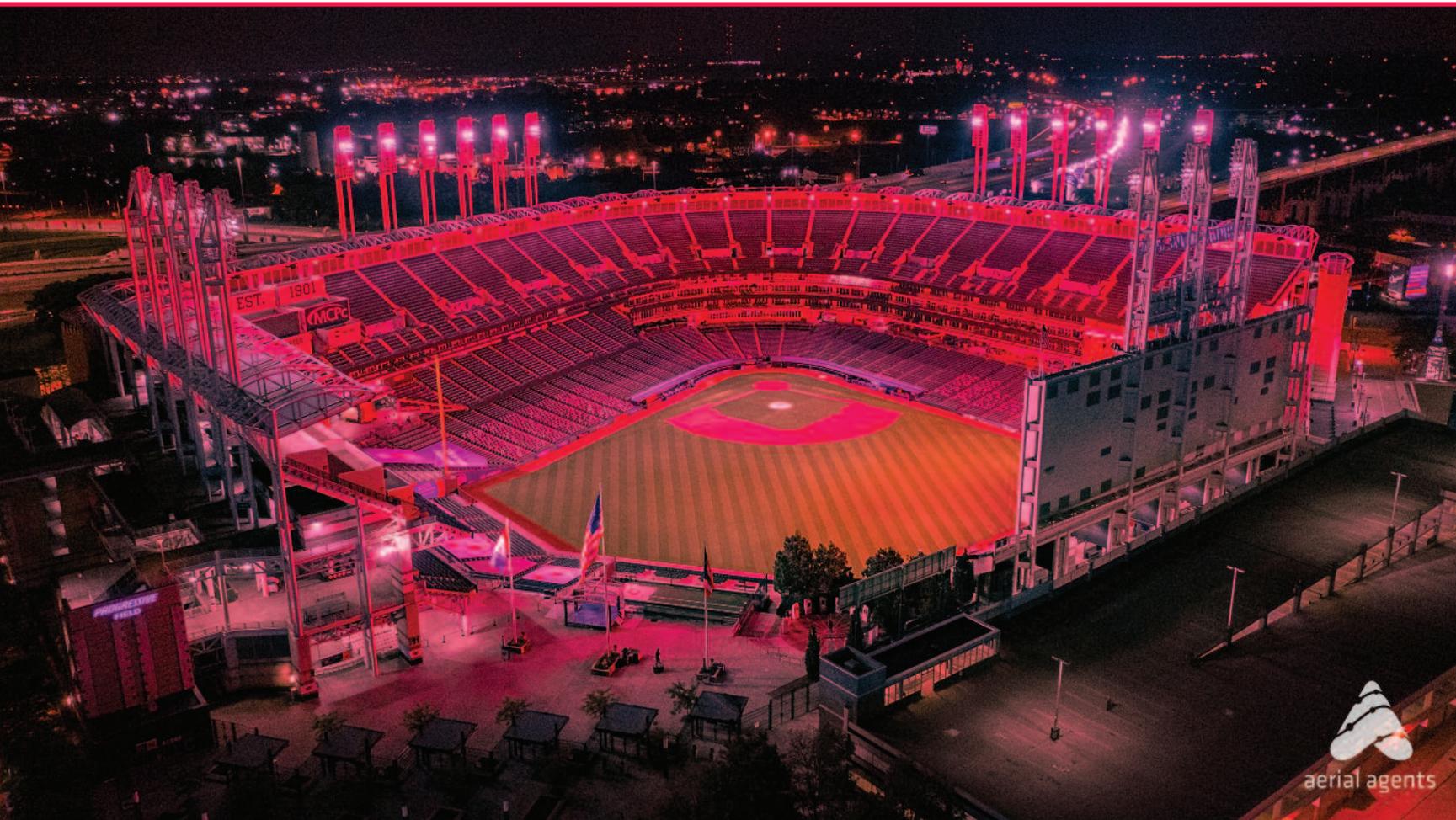
*Ryan Seybert, freelance lighting/production designer:* I moved to Cleveland in May to stay with family and ride out the pandemic. I'm on a couple of Facebook groups for lighting and I saw a post about this thing that was going to happen nationwide. I thought it would be a great opportunity to make some connections here, so I responded. Matt Guminski got back to me and said, "There's nobody coordinating in Cleveland; do you want to take it on?" I was

hesitant, because I didn't have any sweat equity in the community, and I didn't know anybody. He put me in touch with Brad Nelms; I told him my story and said I was happy to help. He said, "Perfect, cool, you're onboard." *(Laughs)* After that, it was email after email. Some companies were already planning on lighting their buildings and warehouses; Vincent Lighting Systems was already putting the moves on iconic buildings like Severance Hall, Terminal Tower, and Blossom Music Center.

Our area was most of Northeast Ohio. It stretched as far as Youngstown and I got a couple of pings from as far south as Columbus and as far west as Sandusky. The Sandusky State Theatre was recently hit by a windstorm that annihilated their stage house; it was astounding to see them get onboard and their pictures were heartbreaking.

As soon as I got a participation form response, I would respond to the writer with questions: How can I help you? Do you need gear? Do you have press contacts? Here's our call to action letter and social media assets. Do you know others who want to be involved? It was all about getting as much coverage as possible.

The lighting of Progressive Field caught us off-guard.



Progressive Field in Cleveland.

Vincent Lighting Systems was coordinating with them to do something after the Indians game on the original date. Then the date changed, and they fell off the map, not communicating with us. But as I was driving into downtown, it was all lit up in red. It was amazing! I owe the success in the region to the community here rallying together. I just made some phone calls and emails. (Laughs)

## Las Vegas

*Vickie Claiborne, lighting and digital media creative:* A group of events professionals here in Las Vegas were already in the planning stages for a community event for August 19 when we got the call from Andrew Gumper to join the #WeMakeEvents regional planning team; so after our walk to raise awareness on the 19th, we shifted our focus to the national event. Very soon afterwards, I received a call from Nate Tanner at Pyrotek, who said, "I've got lasers and pyro; what can we do?" After discussing some ideas, he met with the CEO of the Plaza Hotel, who was very happy to participate; The Plaza also has a new outdoor rodeo space, so that became the event location for the live event that included pyro, lasers, lighting, a 280' truss installation that spelled out "We Make Events," and an emotional performance by local performance group, Show Talent Productions, made up of former Cirque performers. Angelina Puzanova, one of the group's creators and owner of the fire truck used in the performance, expressed to us her interest in being involved, so that's how the fire truck and performers became the stars of the live event shown during the national livestream.

For the same night we organized many events across the city including a truss garden and case push at Symphony Park at the Smith Center. The truss garden was the brainchild of one of our co-regional directors, Erica Santucci, and included 68 pieces of truss, each one representing 1,000 unemployed live events workers in Vegas. The case push included 50 cases and was led by CEO and president of the Smith Center, Myron Martin. This location was also the base camp for media coverage, including interviews with Brad Nelms, Michelle Johnson (frequent performer at the Smith Center), and John "Kats" Katsilometes (reporter for the *Las Vegas Review Journal*), who broadcast his live podcast from the event.

Other events included a vehicle parade from the famous Las Vegas sign down the Strip to Fremont Street, while Fremont Street displayed custom content during the evening. Andrew Gumper also staged a truss installation that spelled out "Pass Restart Now" in the outdoor event space at DTLV Events Center.

These events served as alternatives to lighting up the Strip in red, due to the resistance of casinos on the Strip to participate. And, in many ways, they were much more fitting of the city known as the Entertainment Capital of the World. 📡



The Vegas case demonstration.



Sending the message in Vegas. For more about the Red Alert RESTART, see our digital edition at [www.lightingandsoundamerica.com](http://www.lightingandsoundamerica.com).