Clear-Com Intercom Gear takes the heat for Maryland High School

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In late 2021, a fire ravaged Dulaney High School's (DHS) 1,000- seat auditorium in Baltimore County, Maryland, when a PAR 64 lighting fixture was inadvertently pointed at the red curtain. The fire was quickly extinguished, and all students and faculty were evacuated safely, but much of the audio and lighting gear was damaged beyond repair, except for the school's communications system from Clear-Com®. The system is small but mighty, consisting of CC-95 headsets, RS-601 beltpacks and a Clear-Com Encore® Analog Partyline Main Station. DHS Engineering teacher and Head of Lighting and Sound for the Theater Department, Dave Quinton-Schein , refers to the system's durablility as, "the china that survived the tornado."

Now in his 13th year at Dulaney, Quinton-Schein said the school's theater department productions have continually expanded in scope, with communications playing a large role in that evolution. Like many schools, budget is always a concern, however the DHS team has used its limited resources wisely over the years, investing in newer lighting and audio equipment to replace gear that in some cases was 30 or more years old. Plus, through some creative trading

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with neighboring schools, they've managed a few upgrades. "It's not all state-of-the-art, but we've done our best to maintain quality and our technology has always performed well for us," he said.

The Clear-Com products are mixed with other brands out of necessity, "because we have never had the money to invest in the newer systems, despite Clear-Com being the unquestioned industry leader in intercom technology." Quinton-Schein explained.

That was the theater's comms status until September 2021, when the stage curtain caught fire.

"Those lights get outrageously hot and the curtain caught fire starting at floor level, annihilating everything on its way up," Quinton-Schein said, "but it's fascinating how well the Clear-Com gear made it through the ordeal."

"There was some cosmetic damage and one of the cable connections was affected, but that's minor. An earpad cracked from the heat, which is a small part to replace and the unit shows wear but these are all paltry repairs compared to a completely melted unit."

Other gear didn't fare so well. "Much of our audio equipment was absolutely obliterated, oddly enough by the fire extinguishers," Quinton-Schein said. The recovery efforts are still underway, but not without some challenges. "The whole industry is waking up from COVID at the same time we're recovering, so everybody is ordering equipment right now which makes it more difficult for us," he said.

Even before the fire, comms had been growing in use and importance, especially as the department holds more elaborate productions in the 1,000-seat theater. "We rely on comms to keep everyone in sync during a show," Quinton-Schein said. "Typically during our shows we've got people in both wings, at the sound and lighting consoles, with the stage manager constantly moving around. All these groups need to communicate simultaneously. We've been able to do that solidly because of our Clear-Com units which have out-performed the inconsistencies of other units we've tried."

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With all its productions student-run, equipment performance and ease of use are critical. “The students love the Clear-Com systems, and they find other gear to be less straightforward to use or repair,” he said. “There’s less down-time due to maintenance with Clear-Com units, which we’ve never once had to send out for repair.”

During COVID, the auditorium was dark although the theatre department did create some online productions to share with the school and community. Now that they are back in front of live audiences, Quinton-Schein and his team are looking forward to getting even more mileage out of their proven Clear-Com systems.

“It would be impossible to do what we do without an effective working communications system,” Quinton-Schein said. “With the Clear-Com technology we do have, even though it’s aged, it’s held up astoundingly well and has enabled us to communicate effectively. You can’t ask for much more than that!”

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