MGG Lights the Sky in Johannesburg

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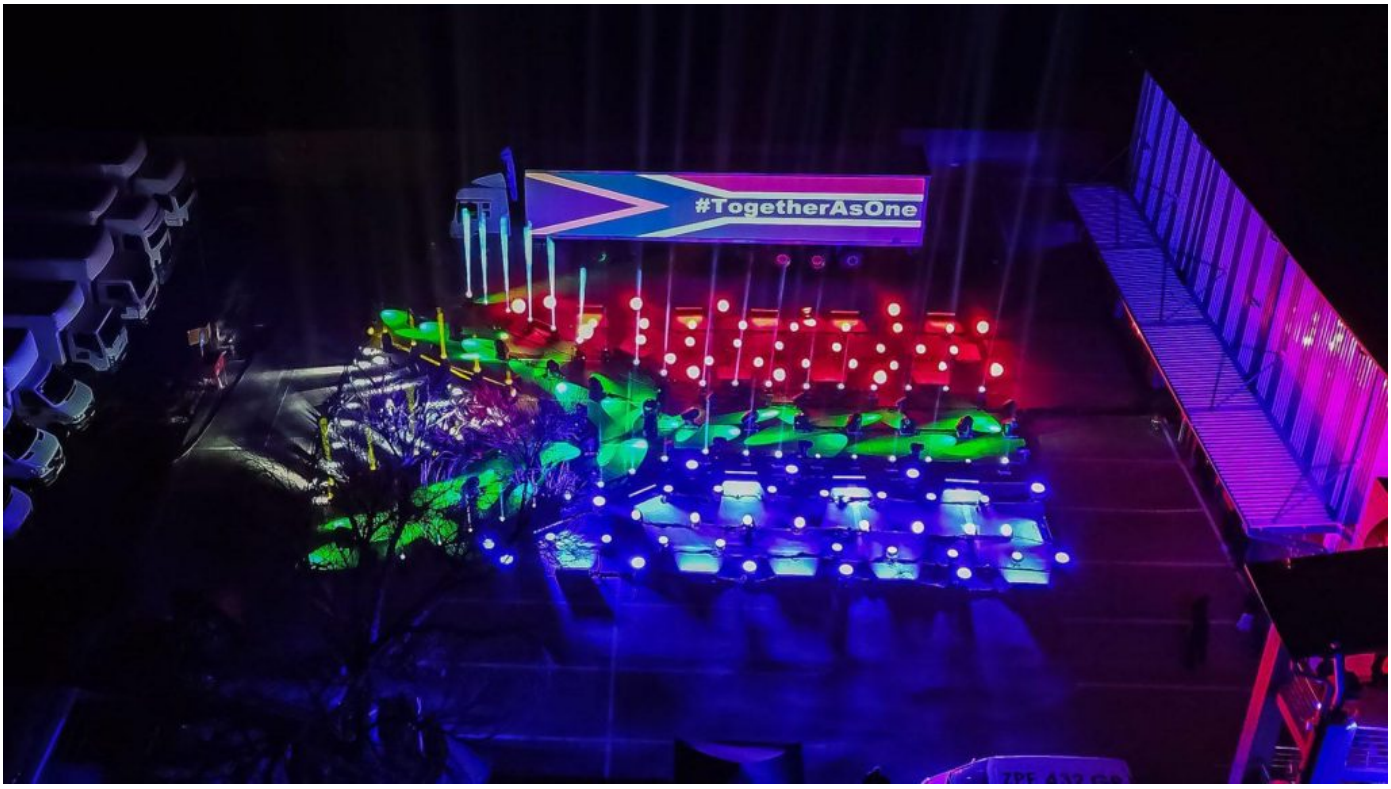

As the sun set over Johannesburg, South Africa on the evening of 19 May, Mark Gaylard of technical production company MGG had a lump in his throat.He and his crew of twenty had just replicated a version of the South African flag using 214 lighting fixtures, predominantly Robe, at the company's premises. As he looked over the horizon, Mark hoped that life would soon enable him to get back to doing the things he loves most – running a busy and proactive lighting and visual rental and production company which services a diversity of shows and events.

During the Covid-19 lockdown, MGG has thought on its feet and adapted to the new environment, becoming an 'essential service' provider by offering a virtual studio for broadcasting and streaming. Other activities have included assembling information noticeboards, developing a clever hands-free door opener, and producing essential PPE kit like masks.

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> “I wanted to shine our lights in solidarity for South Africa, and I wanted to reach out to Robe and the other various #TogetherWeAreStronger and #LightTheSky projects,” Mark explained. “Also, I wanted to highlight the plight of the thousands of freelancers in our industry, many of whom are reliant on food vouchers provided by the #FeedOurCrew initiative.” (see separate Robe News story)

Kevin Rieck, head of drafting at MGG was asked to draw the South African flag which would be outlined in the extensive car park area. “We had previously split our staff into teams to minimize risk and properly social distance, and so had to rely on all departments this time to do the setup.”

Everyone was delighted to be together again whilst observing the safety regulations like social distancing, temperature checks and mask-wearing.

General manager Denzil Smith and operations manager Rianda Van Burick measured out the flag shape using tape, and the lighting fixtures were then deployed within the design.

The Robe elements included 24 x LEDWash 1200s, 32 x LEDWash 600s, 16 x Spiiders, 22 x Tetra2s, 14 x BMFL Blades, 10 x Pointes, 25 x LEDBeam 100s and 24 x MegaPointes.

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“With so many lights, we didn’t have enough power in the building and had to use two generators,” said Mark, added to which the area suffered a power outage, so they ended up using three gennies … “and no we didn’t cause it!” quipped Mark.

“Everyone had butterflies – there was great excitement, and it was wonderful to get together to do what we do best and miss so much.”

A pitch-black sky provided the perfect canvas to replicate the flag which comprises a funky mix of black, gold, green, white, chilli red and blue.

It was designed in March 1994 and adopted on 27 April 1994, at the beginning of South Africa’s 1994 first free general election, to replace the flag used since 1928 and represent the country’s new democracy after the end of apartheid. Three of the flag’s colours were taken from the flags of the Boer Republics and the Union Jack, with the other three from the flag of the African National Congress.

Mark and the team were surprised when some random strangers arrived at their premises wanting to take a closer look, having seen the lighting from a nearby bridge on the highway.

A strict curfew meant there was little time to get everything set up and put back in boxes within 12 hours.

The next morning, there were rumours of a few stiff muscles! Having been at home for weeks on end, the crew were not used to the physical work.

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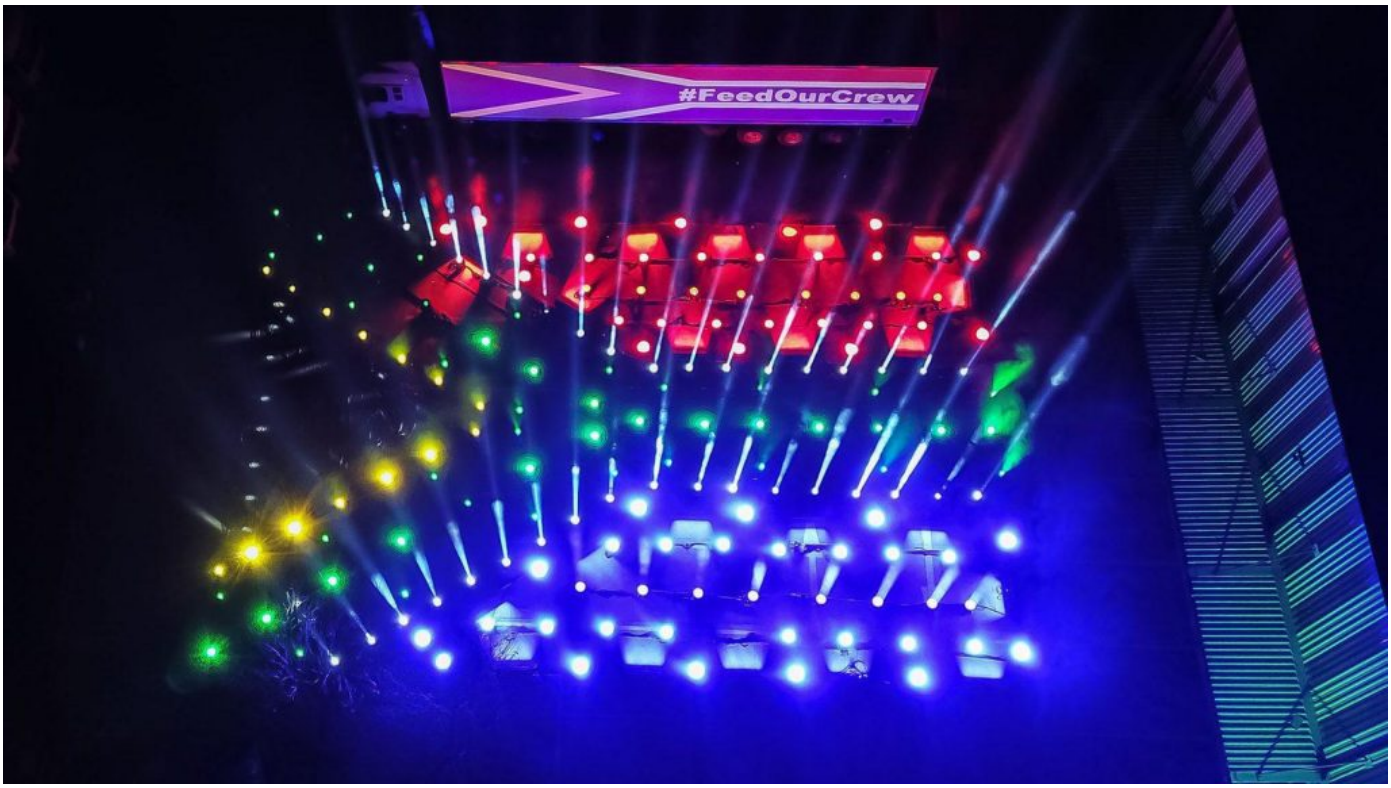
“South Africa has the coolest flag in the world, and as a country we really are all in this together,” ended Mark. “I’m hoping that we will inspire corporate organizations to come up with projects and ideas during this time, and that they’ll turn to our industry to help them create and share a message of hope.”



About Feed Our Crew

Feed Our Crew was established during lockdown by MGG’s Tamsyn Strydom and Kagiso Moima from Blackmotion. It is a non-profit organization that has distributed hundreds of grocery vouchers to assist theatre and technical freelancers left stranded by the government’s current relief programmes. The SOS Charity fund, an initiative started by Robe’s South African distributor DWR, has also financially backed this

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