

The Sights and Sounds of Many S.D. Locations Are Co.'s Work

TECH: Audio-Video Co. Is Hands On and Subcontractors Off

By **KATIE CALLAHAN**

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San Diego — Walk into any large public venue in San Diego and it's likely Pete Spencer had a hand in designing and installing its audio-video system.

Spencer's company, Chula Vista-based Audio Associates of San Diego, has brought sight and sound to such major projects as Petco Park, San Diego Central Library, SeaWorld San Diego and Qualcomm Stadium. After 30-plus years in the business, he still relishes the work.

"I love a challenge," he said.

Spencer founded Audio Associates in 1981, a few years after he left the U.S. Coast Guard. The company designs and installs audio-video systems and provides construction management and electrical engineering services, mostly for public works projects. The company moved from La Mesa to Chula Vista in December.

Audio Associates brought in \$5 million-\$6 million this past year in revenue and has worked on notable projects such as the San Diego Convention Center, SeaWorld's turtle exhibit and San Diego International Airport. The downtown library features the Sony wall, a seven-monitor arrangement that he and his firm designed; it was the first of its kind on the West Coast when it was installed in 2013, he said.

The company distinguishes itself by getting into projects earlier in the process so the audio and video systems can be integrated into the space instead of as an afterthought.

"A lot of companies do A/V installations after the building is done," Spencer, 59, said. "We work with the general contractor/owner while it's being constructed, coming from the dirt up."

Spencer started the company to do large, different projects, knowing that the odds in the bidding process were better on those types of projects.

The past couple years have been the most successful years for the company. The latest projects for the firm include Southwestern College's football stadium, classroom upgrades and lighting shades; and the Riverside City Council Chamber (a space the size of the The Old Globe theatre).

His 20-person team specializes in systems design, 3-D acoustic modeling, computer-aided design and drafting documentation, performance specifications, project submittal review and installation supervision for commercial projects. The company can do everything from noise assessment and computer-aided design to sourcing parts and installation.



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Spencer got his start helping his uncle and father on service calls for color televisions. His father owned a television store next to their home in Buffalo, N.Y.

“There was no such thing as a solid state,” Spencer said. “Color TV was just a thing happening so I would test tubes for my dad and solid state came after that.”

Spencer said he went to a vocational school in Buffalo and credits his knowledge to his time in the Coast Guard as an electronics technician, his experience working under other video-audio professionals for four years and three years in college (which he left to open his own business) for his knowledge.

Avoiding Subcontractors

Spencer claims to know almost everyone in the business in San Diego, if only because he trained half the guys in the field.

The company also gives itself the title of the largest A/V installation company in San Diego, given its body of work. He trains all his workers to complete the installation from start to finish versus hiring subcontractors to assist on the project. That way, the work stays within Audio Associates.

“I like to think what sets us apart is that we don’t have any subcontractors and we’re able to provide and train labor because of the union,” he said.

Audio Associates is a signatory for the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) Local Union 569, meaning the company can draw from a pool of union workers and apprentices for jobs. Audio Associates falls into the service-disabled, veteran-owned small business category.

Spencer is on the board of directors of the local chapter of the National Electrical Contractors Association as well as the Women’s Construction Coalition. He served as president for five terms on the American Subcontractors Association’s local chapter. He was also vice president of the American Subcontractors Association of California, chairing multiple committees and task forces and being a board member on the national level.

“The more I did construction, the more I liked it,” Spencer said. “I can’t think of anything else I’d rather do.”

AUDIO ASSOCIATES OF SAN DIEGO

CEO: Pete Spencer

Revenue: \$5 million-\$6 million

No. of local employees: 20

Headquarters: Chula Vista

Year founded: 1981

Company description: Designs and installs audio and video systems

Key factors for success: More integrative approach to projects