

# FROM UNUSABLE

TO FIRST-CLASS

*To restore civic confidence, the Lea County Cultural Center needed a sure thing.*

By Rebecca Hansen



Auditioner technology is embodied in a demonstration system that lets you hear how a particular audio system will sound when installed in a particular space. It can be used before the space is built or before renovation begins, as was the case for the Lea County Cultural Center. The Auditioner system makes it possible to hear the impact of proposed changes to the facility and sound system before anything is installed.

“I figured if county officials could hear what they were being asked to pay for in advance, there would be a whole lot less risk of making a big mistake,” recalls Duke.

At the International Association of Auditorium Managers (IAAM) trade show in Denver, Duke listened to an Auditioner system

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## THE VENUE:

The Lea County Cultural Center, a cultural resources and entertainment facility serving 60,000 residents.

## THE CHALLENGE:

To overcome the poor acoustics and inadequate sound system that made the performance hall virtually unusable.

## THE SOLUTION:

Use the Bose® Auditioner® system to design an acoustic treatment and sound system solution to make the facility viable.

## THE RESULT:

“We now have a world-class space to host major performing artists and conventions that have never been able to come into this part of the state before.”

– Todd Duke, Facilities Manager,  
Lea County Cultural Center

**I** imagine a new arena in which the sound was so bad the space was unusable. The Lea County Cultural Center in Hobbs, New Mexico was built in 1991. Five years later, the county’s 60,000 residents hadn’t gotten much for their \$9 million investment.

The newly-hired Facilities Manager Todd Duke recalls, “The reverberations were so bad, you couldn’t hear someone speaking to you 15 feet away. The people who had fought for the Center had sold the community on the promise of musical events and other types of performances. It became a very divisive issue.”

But Duke had an idea for a solution. “I was watching a technology show on CNN and I saw the Bose® Auditioner® system,” recalls Duke. “Later when I heard the problems at the Center I suggested that they might want to look into this technology.”

demonstration, and explained the problem to members of the Bose Professional Products engineering staff. The Bose people were intrigued by the challenge and agreed to come to Hobbs to check it out.

“When we first got there it was really eerie,” says Tom Clelland, one of the Bose Senior Project Managers who made the first visit. “Here was this beautiful, modern building in the middle of the desert. There was a parking lot for 3000 cars, but there were only about 3 or 4 in it. We walked inside and immediately knew why.”

The Center had concrete floors and walls with a steel deck ceiling and hard plastic seating, creating an echo chamber. Clelland whistled a note, and it came back again, and again.

“We told Todd Duke no sound system we or anyone else could sell them was going to correct the problem,” says Bose system Design Engineer Phil Nelson. “The first step had to be acoustic treatment.”

When the Bose team returned to Hobbs, they brought a plan for improving the acoustical environment developed by Bose System Design Engineer Tom Tyson. They also brought the Auditorer® system. The Lea County people listened through the Auditorer system to a basic Bose sound system “installed” in the current facility, in its present condition, and then to the same system “installed” after acoustic treatment. With this demonstration, they could hear the substantial difference a modified acoustic environment would make.

“The demonstration turned out to be quite an event,” recalls Nelson. “We had expected

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to be presenting to Todd Duke and a couple of the county commissioners. But it turned out to be the chairman of the commission, the school board, and reporters from local radio and television stations. It was very clear that the project was of huge importance to the community.”

Along with the assurance of the demonstration, the Center also had the assurance of the Bose Performance Guarantee. If the final installation didn't perform as the Auditorer system predicted, the sound system would be replaced by Bose, or a full refund would be issued.

Funds were allocated for the acoustic work, which included paneling on end walls and ceiling baffles. “We were surprised and happy with the result,” recalls Duke. “Far from interfering with the building's design, the panels enhanced it. They were installed in a way that calls

to mind geometric Southwestern Indian designs, which suits us very well.”

Meanwhile, Bose was developing a sound system design for the new audio-friendly environment. What Nelson describes proudly as “the finest sound system in New Mexico,” consists of a main cluster of Bose Panaray® LT speakers as well as three satellite LT loudspeakers for coverage of the far-end floor area and Bose Model 32 ceiling speakers for the top row of seats, which is outside the coverage of the main cluster.

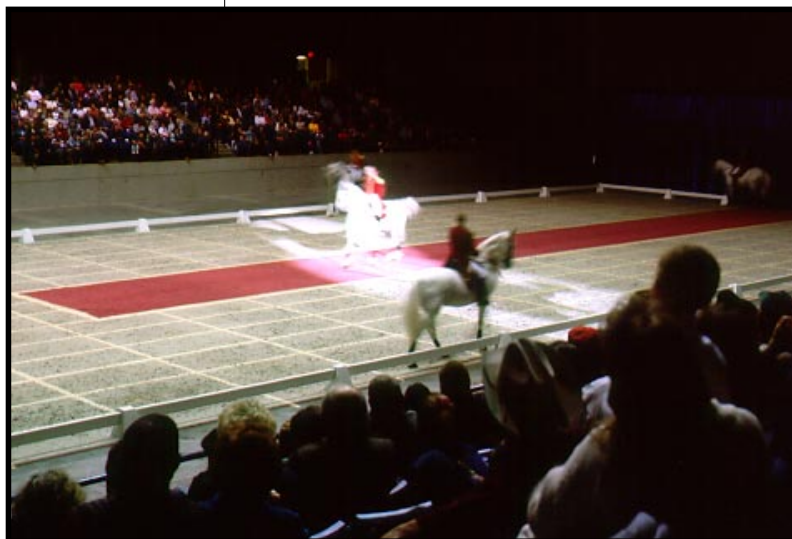
“Panaray LT is ideal for this space,” explains Nelson, “because it has a ‘long throw’ for coverage of big spaces but a very narrow dispersion pattern. This means that acoustic energy falls off very rapidly outside of the speaker's beam of sound. This was very important at the Lea County Center because it keeps the sound directed at the audience and off of the walls, ceilings, and other surfaces. This, along with the acoustic panels, sharply reduced the reverberation time in the arena.”

Returning again with the Auditorer system, the Bose team let the Lea County officials compare what they had heard in the first demonstration with the Bose sound system designed specifically for the space. “Everyone who listened, got it immediately,” recalls Nelson. “It was really interesting because Auditorer system technology had enabled them to experience a progression they could understand, from untreated space, to acoustically treated space with a generic sound system, to acoustically treated space with the right sound system for that space.”

Today, the Lea County Cultural Center, once a symbol of disunity, is a place where

members of this widely dispersed community come together.

High School seniors looking for a graduation venue picked the Center. “We played some music and the students practiced their



graduation speeches,” Duke recalls. “They loved the sound system and their parents were pretty happy after the ceremony too...it's kind of nice to be able to hear your kid's name when she goes up to get her diploma,” he explains.

The audio renovations have also attracted high profile events. “We have a world-class space to host major performing artists and conventions that have never been able to come into this part of the state before,” says Duke. He adds, “Now we have a sound system that is worthy of our beautiful building.”

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