

# TOUR GUIDE

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## Northeastern Production Systems Inc.

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Northeastern  
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# Northeastern Production Systems Inc.

35 YEARS & STRONGER THAN EVER!

THE WORLDS LARGEST DISCO

**I**n 1967 Ray DiBiase was the kid who got called out to the auditorium to turn on the sound system for assemblies at Bishop Kearney High School in Rochester, New York. After high school, he went to R.I.T. (Rochester Institute of Technology) for a couple of years, during which time he worked in the Post Office to make extra money. Still, he never took his eye off the career path that had originally caught his attention.

by MICHAEL A. BECK

## Northeastern Production Systems, Inc.

"During that time I would do little lighting gigs here and there with fixtures and cables I would beg & borrow to use. I didn't have anything of my own," he recalled. Then in 1972 he created Northeastern Production. "At the time it was just sound," says DiBiase, "We did quite a few gigs in the Northeast through a couple of agencies out of New York City that did college shows. They used to get gigs for me all over the place. We'd do jobs sometimes at five different colleges in a row and drive back and then figure out how to get more shows."

Things broke open for the company in 1975 when Ray caught the eye of jazz trumpeter, Chuck Mangione, for whom he did 23 dates that year. In '76 Northeastern picked up K.C. and the Sunshine Band for a national tour while hanging onto the Mangione gig, which was picking up steam as well. It seemed like it was 'off' to the races' for Northeastern.

In '77 the company bought a tractor-trailer and began supplying full production for Mangione which lasted through 1989. During 1976 through '78, the company handled the east coast production calls for Heart, doing gigs as far west as Salt Lake City.

As time went on, DiBiase, now with a daughter and son, the road started to lose its appeal. "It got to be a little awkward being on the road as much as I was," he recalls. "I really didn't want to do it anymore, but we got through it." Then in 1989, an audio engineer died in his hotel room in Torrance, California. Chuck Mangione came to the point where the road was wearing him a little thin as well. Soon, it all came to a close.

The problem for Northeastern was, that the company had relied primarily on the Mangione gig for a lot of years. So with all of its eggs in that one basket, when it all came to an end, there was a huge void. DiBiase remembers, "Things were a bit uncomfortable in the

first few months of 1990 because I really didn't know quite what I wanted to do. I tried a few remodeling jobs thinking I might want to change careers after having never done anything other than this in my entire life."

However, after his second remodeling gig he decided that he'd rather deal with the entertainment industry than homeowners. With roughly \$200,000.00 wrapped up in Northeastern Production, it was probably a good call. So, in the summer of 1990 he decided to get serious about the idea of being a regional production company. But the new rule was that there would never again be one primary client of the company upon whom its fate would rest.

Later that year the decision to stay in the production business paid off when the company began a long-standing relationship with Quad/Graphics, the world's largest privately owned printing company that is still going strong today. With that, the life of the company took on a new direction. Suddenly touring wasn't the bread winning concept.

Now, with an eye on all things production in the northeastern region, be it concerts, festivals, corporate or anything else, Northeastern Production has a firm handle on the market. Since the restructuring of the company's goals in 1990, DiBiase has spent several million dollars on lighting, sound, video gear, staging, outdoor roof systems, backline, generators, barricades and just about anything else needed to get the job done in any environment.

One thing DiBiase is insistent upon, is that when a client hires Northeastern Production to handle an event, they get Northeastern, and not another company that has been subcontracted to handle the overflow. While the company still does some install work, DiBiase likes to keep the business aimed at the production market,



**THE WORLDS LARGEST DISCO**

which has a work schedule just the shy side of crazy for most of the year, and certainly all of the summer. Proof of that is found in the fact that Northeastern Production did just over 90 gigs in July of 2007.

One of the more interesting gigs Northeastern worked on this year was something that just happened on November 24 in Buffalo, New York. It was billed as “The Worlds Largest Disco,” and was actually certified by the Guinness Book of World Records. It had a total of 510 moving and conventional lights hung out over a total of 850 feet of truss. It used 17 mirror balls ranging from 16” to 5 feet. Northeastern also provided sound and barricade for the massive area the event covered. All of this, for an event that sold out two months in advance, for 7,000 people.

When people talk about the landscape of the production market, there is a tendency to talk only about companies in the big leagues. The idea that there are regional companies out there like Northeastern Production seems to get lost. But one could argue the case that these companies are the foot soldiers of the industry upon whose shoulders the rest of it all stands.

Northeastern employs eight full time people, and in 2006, DiBiase sent out 93 W2's. Those 93 people (including Local 25 stagehands) are, without a doubt, the most important assets this company has. During the

hour that *TGJ* was able to sit down with DiBiase and chat, many things were discussed. In such an exchange, everything that is said colors the tone of the story, even though not all of it gets into the piece. As the conversation was drawing to its end, Ray said, “There is one thing that I really want to be said in the story about my company.”

Beyond that comment there was nothing else. He just sat there, his face became red and deep emotion washed over him as tears welled up in his eyes as he fought valiantly to muscle out two words, “My people.”

Finally he found his strength and said, “I love my people.” The two names that he was able to get across were Timm DeBruyne and Jack Hereth. This is a guy who truly knows who signs his paychecks. During the interview, he used the word “family” many times, referring to the team at Northeastern Production and the clients the company faithfully serves.

This year has marked the 35th year of the existence of the *family* known as Northeastern Production Systems, Inc. This family has a father who would do anything for it. There is no doubt that his devotion to this company is the reason why his career has lasted as long as it has. He will continue to flourish as long as he wants it to. 🌟

