

GRANDE PRAIRIE Alliance Church

WELCOMING THE COMMUNITY

BY ANDREW KING. PHOTOS BY LANCE SPRATT.

By size and population, Grande Prairie is the central city of northwestern Alberta, situated on the bottom edge of Peace River Country. Considered one of Canada's fastest growing cities, it is currently Alberta's seventh largest centre by population, and sits nearly 500 km from the next major centre, that being the Edmonton Capital Region.

About a six-hour drive southeast of Grande Prairie, Edmonton is the home base of Creative Visual Communication Inc., a system integration firm captained by Lance Spratt. Creative Visual recently helped a long-standing client, the Grande Prairie Alliance Church (GPAC), outfit its brand new, 60,000 sq. ft. facility with a suitable audio system. While operations were smooth in terms of open communication and collaboration with the client, the physical distance to and relative isolation of the northerly city presented the project with a unique set of logistical challenges. At least it's a pleasant trip...

About GPAC

The Grande Prairie Alliance Church, which celebrates as a Christian and Missionary Alliance congregation, held its opening service on August 14, 1949 with 140 people in attendance. The church relocated in 1955 to the corner of 101 St. and 109 Ave., and then again

in 1963 when a new facility was erected at the corner of 100 St. and 108 Ave. During the late '70s, the church experienced such a large amount of growth that plans were made to move yet again, this time to 7702-100 St. in June 1979.

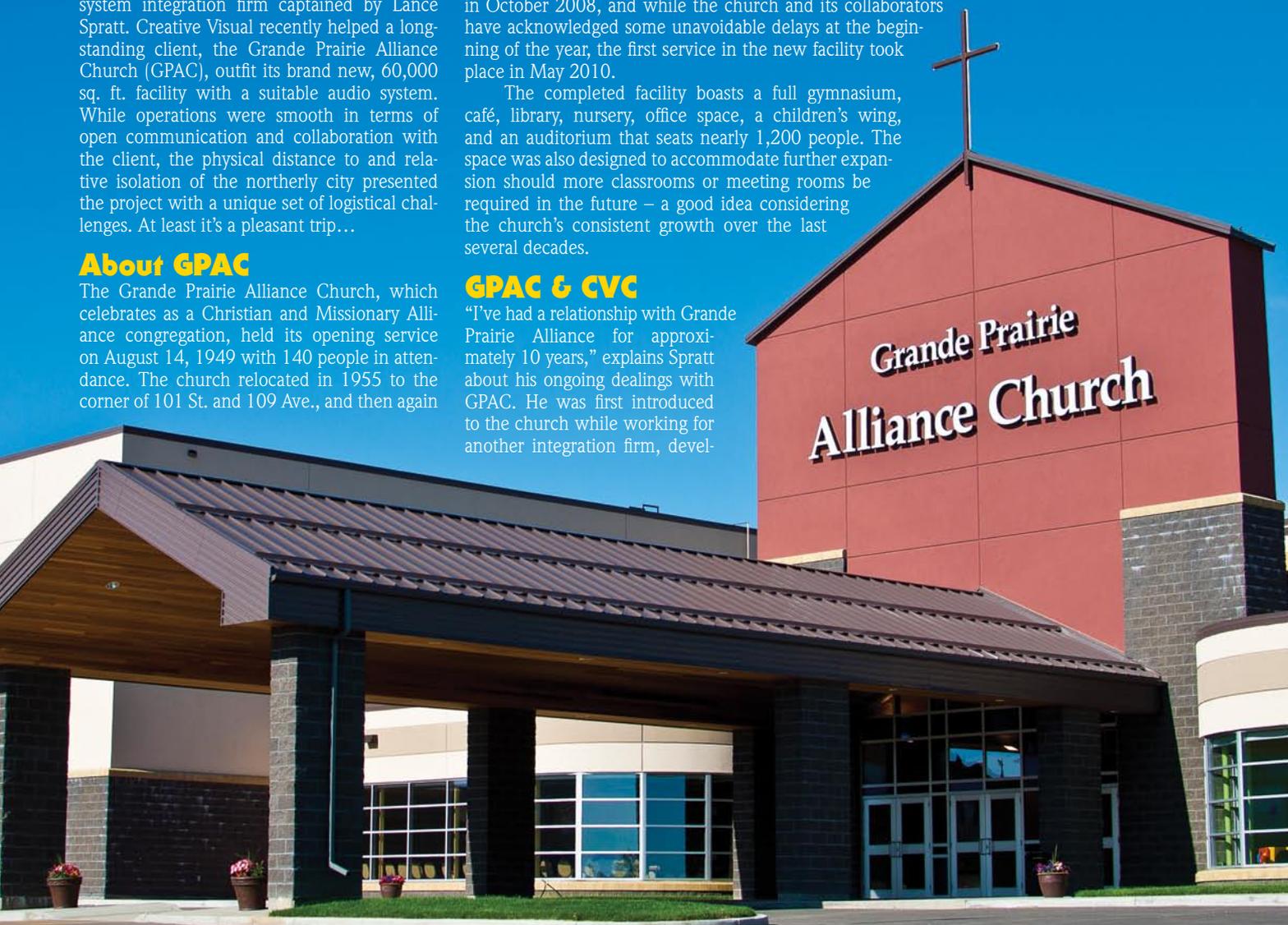
This year, GPAC moved into its fifth location, a new 60,000 sq. ft. building just north of Grande Prairie's city limits. In the fall of 2006, after over 95 per cent of the congregation voted in its favour, it was decided that the new facility would be erected on a donated 9.3-acre site. A building committee was formed and has since been offering direction for the design and construction of the venue.

Harold Funk Architect Inc. out of Winnipeg acted as lead design firm, with Fillmore Construction from Edmonton being Project Manager and Creative Visual Communication Inc. being, as previously stated, the A/V integration firm. Construction on the new venue began in October 2008, and while the church and its collaborators have acknowledged some unavoidable delays at the beginning of the year, the first service in the new facility took place in May 2010.

The completed facility boasts a full gymnasium, café, library, nursery, office space, a children's wing, and an auditorium that seats nearly 1,200 people. The space was also designed to accommodate further expansion should more classrooms or meeting rooms be required in the future – a good idea considering the church's consistent growth over the last several decades.

GPAC & CVC

"I've had a relationship with Grande Prairie Alliance for approximately 10 years," explains Spratt about his ongoing dealings with GPAC. He was first introduced to the church while working for another integration firm, devel-





ABOVE: Main auditorium, with Turbosound LCR system.

Project Details

LOUDSPEAKERS:

Turbosound TFA-600HDP Flex Array left/ right arrays
 Turbosound TA500DP Aspect centre cluster
 Turbosound TCSB218DP 2x 18" subs
 Danley Sound Labs SH-MINI low-profile frontline stage wedges
 Turbosound IMPACT65T 70-volt atrium speakers
 Convex CVMSP62 70-volt distributed ceiling speakers

POWER AMPLIFICATION:

Powersoft LQ2804 (x2) 8 x stage monitor mixes
 Crest CM2204 70-volt power

AUDIO SIGNAL PROCESSING:

Xilica XP8080 (x2) 70-volt & stage monitor processing
 TC Electronic M-ONE XL additional external effects

MIXING & AUDIO DISTRIBUTION:

RSS M400 FOH console
 RSS Audio Snake I/O:

- S4000S-4000 40 Channel Input Module
- S4000S-0040 40 Channel output Module
- S-1608 16 x 8 I/O module
- S-0816 (x2) 8 x 16 I/O module
- S4000D (x2) REAC Distributor
- S-4000M Merger unit
- M48 Personal Mixer (x5)
- Cakewalk Sonar multi-track audio recording package

CONTROL:

Extron IP-link



oping an ongoing relationship with the client during his last few years with that previous employer.

Around four years ago, Spratt left the firm as its business focus was streaming away from the worship market, essentially acting as the origins for what's become Creative Visual Communication Inc. and allowing Spratt to continue working with several of his worship market clients, including GPAC.

"We'd already started preliminary discussions about this new facility when I was with my previous employer," continues Spratt. "Because of that existing relationship, we were familiar with the environment in which they were working, and had an idea of what they were looking for." He adds that it was a six-year process from the beginning of general discussions through to completion in the early summer of this year.

The church's previous facility was a smaller building with plenty of years behind it, leading to the decision to expand to a much larger space that would not only allow

for future growth, but also boast features that would make it more welcoming to the local community. "Our desire was to build a facility that was as versatile as possible," explains Kris Biette, GPAC's current Worship Pastor. "Since our building was designed around a dedicated auditorium as opposed to a more multi-purpose room as many churches are today, we wanted to make sure this room was not only usable for a variety of productions and presentations, but would also do a first-class job for these events."

Creative Visual was directly involved in the design of the facility, working closely with the architect as far as integrating the soon-to-be-installed system with the general plans. Being a humbly-sized firm, there were four employees from Creative Visual involved in the design and eventual integration of the audio equipment. While Spratt himself handled most of the preliminary design and construction meetings, when it came time to actually put people onsite for the physical installation, serious considerations were needed to maximize

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the team's efficiency to save both time and resources for Creative Visual, its client, and its collaborators.

"Travel costs were a major consideration," says Spratt about the long-distance project. "In an effort to protect the interests of both parties, our agreement with the client was that if our costs fluctuated due to shipping and transportation, so would theirs. It was a partnership that we'd agreed upon before getting started." While budget is a consideration from start to finish for any project of this type, when an extra round trip from shop to site is 12 hours, problems are exponentially exacerbated.

The original plan was for the two-person installation team from Creative Visual to be onsite for a carefully-timed month to keep transportation and accommodation costs to a

controlled minimum with a once-in, once-out. Spratt notes that, to amplify the potential for budgetary problems, most goods and services in Grande Prairie come with a slightly inflated price tag due to its location and isolation.

"We were working towards having the rough-in done very close to the end of the project," shares Spratt. "Because most of the project wiring was in conduit, we could do that. The plan was to go in, come out, and be done." It would've worked well, but the aforementioned delays in the construction timeline meant that the last 10 per cent of the job – the same chunk in which the A/V integrator does most of its work – was stretched out from the end of 2009 to the foot of 2010. Says Spratt: "We're at other contractors' mercy in terms of our scheduling and efficiency of planning." Luckily, though, the team was able to shift

around technicians from other projects to bring things together relatively painlessly.

System Selection

"It's important to understand where the client came from, because that's ultimately their reference point," explains Spratt before delving into the systems that were chosen for the job and why. "They came from a much smaller space with modest technical systems, and it worked just fine for them for many years."

With the vision of becoming more community-minded and being able to host both congregational and public events, the church wanted to be able to support a much broader range of productions – anything from touring concerts to more traditional worship settings or simple spoken word applications.

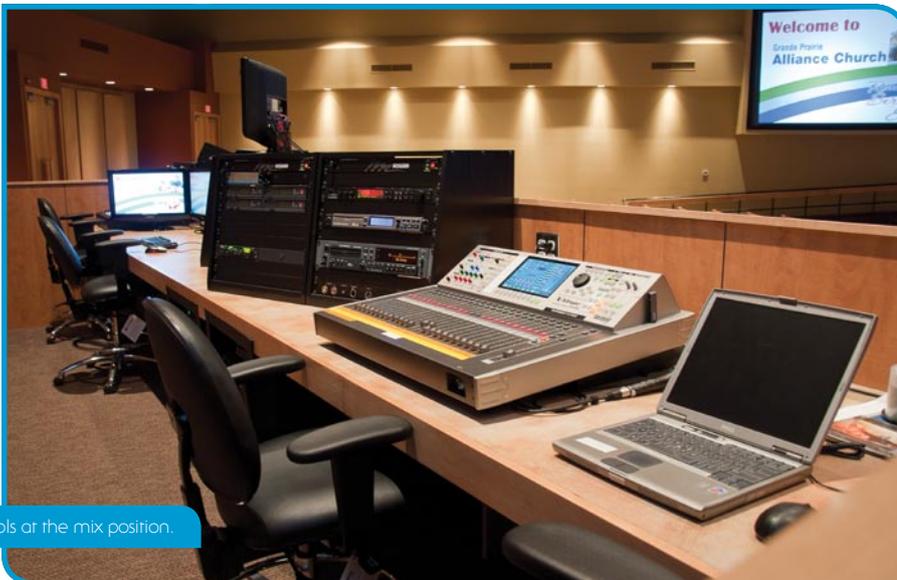
Explains Spratt: "They were adamant that they receive an intimate and intelligible signal throughout the space. The goal was that anyone be able to walk in and sit anywhere and have a great seat." He adds that, because of the versatility needed, there was extra emphasis on the tightrope act that is balancing functionality with available funds.

The church brought as many components as possible from its previous facility into the new one, though that didn't add up to much. While GPAC had a relatively new Soundcraft MH3 it had acquired only a few years prior that was in excellent condition, it stayed behind with the previous PA system as a fixture of the building. Still, some peripheral gear like three channels of Sennheiser wireless for the worship leaders is currently in active use at the new facility.

As for the pieces selected to outfit the newly-constructed church, Spratt explains: "We wanted to be creative in ways we could provide high flexibility and performance without compromising the budget, and we were successful in doing that." To accomplish this, he chose vendors that he knew would be supportive of the project, both for the duration of implementation through to ongoing support.

"We chose to implement the Turbosound Flex Array line array product," explains Spratt about the auditorium's main loudspeaker system. "It's an LCR system, with Flex Array powered cabinets for the left and right hangs, five boxes per side, and Turbosound Aspect boxes for the centre hang – again, all active." Not only is each box self-powered, but all DSP is loaded directly into the cabinets. The entire system runs on an RS-485 network, accessible at the FOH position and also remote controllable.

The network allows operators to configure the PA, get into all the DSP, group everything, and also give full monitoring of the components, meaning if there's a visiting show, church operators can look at what the PA is doing and see that the system is in proper order before, during, and after the performance. "At first," says Spratt, "the client didn't realize the system was capable of this until after the fact, at which point they were quite impressed." The plan is to add a PC to the FOH booth, at which point Creative Visual could perform remote digital processing from its headquarters.



Tools at the mix position.



RSS M-48 Personal Mixer onstage.



Middle Atlantic racks with RSS Digital Snake components

Going back to the PA, Biette offers: “We wrestled with a few different options for loudspeakers. Were there questions about the decision to go with Turbosound? Definitely not after hearing them the first time.” Spratt explains that the other options: “all modeled very well, but we were able to get a true LCR system with the Turbosound package instead of an LR like we’d have to do with other brands because of the budget.” Adds Biette: “We also chose the Turbosound wall-mountable speakers for our atrium space. These again pack an unbelievable sound into an unobtrusive, classy-looking box.” As a whole, Biette believes that while he can’t say this system is “better” than any other, “it just works really well for our room.”

Bringing a similar sense of value to the church is the RSS M-400 V-Mixer live mixing console, with a REAC digital snake network throughout the facility. Explains Spratt about its selection: “We spent quite a bit of time talking the console choice through with the church. We have to keep in mind that, while they do have a part-time technical director, a lot of the people operating this equipment on a day-to-day basis aren’t ‘technical’ by nature.”

For this reason, not only did the board need to be flexible and boast processing capabilities for a top-tier touring production, but at the same time, needed to be accessible to a user base with limited technical background. A number of desks were auditioned for the job, with Creative Visual wanting to leave the decision entirely in the hands of the church operators. “The decision was almost instantaneous after the demo,” he shares. “The user interface coupled with the digital audio networking capabilities, integrated personal monitoring, and flexible system configuration were major considerations for the church.”

The M-400 was easy for the operators to get their heads around thanks to an easily and quickly navigated interface, but still boasts the features required for visiting techs that might be using the system. Add its integrated personal monitoring features, and according to Spratt, the Roland “just made sense.” Once the board was acquired, GPAC operators were able to explore its features more profoundly, and back-end things like distribution fell easily into place. The snake system is capable of 80 ins and 88 outs, with distribution going to several different areas of the building.

The digital snake runs right up to the PA with the snakehead sitting at the catwalk, allowing for flown mics for more elaborate stage set-ups. “It’s a digital signal from the console to the loudspeakers suspended

from the ceiling,” says Spratt. “That allowed us a broad range of patching flexibility, noise immunity, full patch bay functionality throughout – all of which just reaffirmed the console decision.” Personal monitoring is available courtesy of RSS’ M-48s, being used as mixers for band members and singers involved in worship services, though Spratt says there aren’t a lot of limitations as far as how they can be used.

While Creative Visual has done several RSS-based installs in the past, Spratt calls this one the largest yet. “The RSS system fit the project requirements exceptionally well,” he explains. “It sounds great and packs a lot of punch from a deceptively compact package. Everything works right for this project.”

If the gear going into the facility didn’t require pre-prep in the shop, it would be shipped directly to the site to avoid unnecessary freight shipments. The church had set up a staging room in the new facility that was far enough along in the construction process to securely keep the equipment. The room is also where product was staged, and essentially became Creative Visual’s onsite workshop.

Ongoing Care

Creative Visual has an A-level touring technician on staff, who’s spent extensive time on the road with a popular Christian artist. “Between he and I,” says Spratt, “we’ve been working with the church on group training for a few years now – not necessarily unique to the newly-installed products, but more on general techniques from entry to advanced levels.” In fact, when Creative Visual is onsite for training, the church welcomes budding techs from the community to join the sessions, enhancing a sense of community while also sharing costs.

Once this system was commissioned and completed, church operators were given further instruction on the specific gear. “We’ll be back for follow-up training,” says Spratt. “Manuals and as-built drawings will give them a layout of the system, but nothing beats hands-on learning with someone knowledgeable taking them through the gear and process.” As a company, Creative Visual is making ongoing training a general priority, to provide sessions for operators at all levels within Alberta’s worship market.

“We’ve been very appreciative of the partnership we have with Lance and Creative Visual,” says Biette on behalf of his church. “Lance has not only brought a great amount of technical knowledge and experience, but also took the time to understand exactly what we needed.”

During the collaboration, Skype was a godsend as far as maintaining an open dialogue with GPAC. “If a component fails or they have a question,” explains Spratt, “they can call me and we’re on it right away. The TD can be my eyes and hands onsite for basic diagnostics. He’ll help me diagnose a problem and get it fixed.” Still, if it’s something that requires serious attention, says Spratt frankly: “We’re going for a drive.”

While GPAC’s audio system is still relatively new, and subsequently, its operators still amidst the learning curve, Spratt reports that his client is very happy with its new system. It’s already received praise from the crew of Christian pop act Building 429, who recently used the in-house PA for a performance. In fact, not only was the band impressed, but also slightly surprised by the system’s low-end performance.

“There are only two double-18 subs in the building,” reveals Spratt about the PA. “Admittedly, though, they pack a punch with tone unlike what I had expected. They sound great and have no issues keeping up with high SPL events.” The band’s crew actually asked where the other two subs were hidden, which had Spratt grinning. Though the band usually travels with its own production, the stray from familiarity seemed to have paid off. Says Spratt: “It’s nice to see a touring group of that calibre tickled pink.”

Not only is Creative Visual Communication Inc. pleased with the end result, but also the process itself. Spratt attests that the firm kept a very healthy dialogue with both the onsite general contractor and electrical contractor during the construction process. He also emphasizes the importance of the ongoing maintenance of his relationship with GPAC through support and training. “The relationship is what influences success or failure,” he says. “The equipment is just the tool to get the job done.” ■



Andrew King is the Editor of Professional Sound.