

COMPANY PROFILE

ACOUSTICS FIRST CORPORATION, RICHMOND, VIRGINIA



Nick Colleran, vice president, Acoustics First

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As today's churches reach to attain the best in modern sound, problems with audio control and noise elimination often follow close behind. For instance, how do churches keep the praise and worship band's sound primarily in the auditorium or sanctuary? And what happens when youth centers offer a barrage of multimedia in a contained area?

Richmond, Virginia-based Acoustics First Corp. is poised for the task of helping keep audio where it ought to be and sounding the best that it can with a range of sound-tempering products. *Worship Facilities Magazine* recently caught up with Vice President Nick Colleran to learn more about the company that offers acoustical materials, such as sound absorbers and diffusers, ideally suited for the modern house of worship.

WFM: Give us a brief history of the company, how it was established, and its products.

COLLERAN: Acoustics First was established by our president, Becky Colleran, with the help of a long-time associate, a former banker, who was our chief financial officer for the first three years. We have dealers, representatives, and installers throughout the United States and in several foreign countries. We manufacture in various contract facilities throughout the United States depending upon product composition, be it furniture-grade wood or molded thermo plastic diffusers, die-cut and convoluted acoustical foam, non-woven milled fabric, quilted blankets, or fiberglass board cut to shape with CNC [computer numerical control] routers. All of this is coordinated from the Richmond, Virginia office.

WFM: What sets your company apart from others with similar products?

Colleran: This question may be better asked of our customers, but we have heard that it is the level of customer service we offer. All of us in the Richmond office are active in the broader business of sound and music. Many of us have been involved in the sound business for decades. We design, manufacture, and own a proprietary line of patented sound diffusers. Our acoustical foams include the

Cutting Wedge design that requires special tooling to create its dense and efficient pattern. We are able to produce custom shapes and sizes in acoustical panels using a computer-controlled router. We sell component parts to other acoustical manufacturers on an O.E.M. [original equipment manufacturer] basis.

WFM: How do you approach the church market; do you handle it differently than other markets?

Colleran: The difference in our markets is really between end-user customers and bulk quantity purchasers of manufactured components, such as our Art Diffusers. The church differs in its message, but does not differ in its acoustic needs. We work in a manner similar to doctors treating their patients. The treatment is determined by the nature of the ailment or problem and not by the identity of the individual or entity.

We ask about the type of service, the perceived problems, and try to determine how much help the customer needs. We do not assume a level of knowledge, although we have recently talked with a church secretary who knew more about acoustics than some recording engineers. As with any other large venue, we need to know the type of service (or performance), as the acoustical requirements are different for speech, traditional choir and organ, high-energy praise and worship, or unaccompanied congregational singing. One size does not fit all. We will often refer them to one of our dealers if site visits are required, or to an acoustical consultant if the room presents a real challenge.

WFM: Tell us about some initiatives your company is planning to launch.

Colleran: We have several new diffuser designs currently in the prototype stage. We

are building the molds and expect to be able to deliver in the fourth quarter of this year. After 10 years, we are doing a major overhaul of our technical materials and have created a new short form brochure with an emphasis on installation examples.

WFM: What are your thoughts on the church market in terms of growth potential, and what are the market's nuances?

Colleran: [The church market] is thriving and shows no signs of slowing down. From our point of view, the church market is not a stand-alone market but rather part of the overall market for acoustic materials. The message may be different but the physics are the same. In churches, the awareness of acoustics is growing the same as it is for other venues. The same disciplines apply and we use knowledge gained from our work in other areas to solve the acoustical problems

of church facilities. We also have gained knowledge working with churches to apply in our other business sectors. Sometimes the church broadcast facility is larger than that of the local broadcasters. Recording studios have the same requirements regardless of content. A high school gym and a church multi-purpose room often require similar treatment. We always ask what is taking place in the space, whether it is a church sanctuary or a commercial performance venue.

WFM: What developing trends will affect your business in the upcoming years? And how do you adjust and keep Acoustics First relevant to the church market?

Colleran: We are gradually seeing a trend to consider acoustics first rather than last. The church market reflects the greater acoustics market and the increased awareness of the impact that acoustics and good sound have

on everything in life. We want to promote this awareness and facilitate education in sound.

WFM: How has your company evolved over the years, and how does that evolution help you better serve the church market?

Colleran: Many years ago we operated commercial recording studios. Seldom did a week pass that we did not record a gospel performance. We learned that the sound of the performance space and the comfort of the performer had the [greatest impact] on the final product. We always asked what the performers wanted to achieve and tried to facilitate that. Our original acoustical business grew out of that experience. Although we no longer make records, we still ask questions. Once we understand the requirements, filling the need is much easier.

WFM: Do you have any sound words of wisdom in closing?

Colleran: In the midst of today's bombardment of sound from media, movies, traffic, and talk, one idea holds true: The clearer your message and music can be heard, the more effective and enjoyable it will be.

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