

Challenging Jobs

Every electrical contract has its problems. But once in a while, a job comes along that is unique. It demands that the electrical contractor use his firm's special talents to the fullest. This is one of a series of articles on challenging electrical contracting jobs.

Job: Woodstock Music & Art Fair Contractor: Pantel Electric Company South Fallsburg, New York

The Woodstock Music and Art Fair, which drew 500,000 rock music fans to a rural New York town in August, 1969, represents many things to many people. To some, it epitomizes the youth movement of the Sixties with its passion for crowds, loud music and drugs. Others look back on Woodstock as a three-day utopia; the weekend when it seemed that the younger generation could really bring about a change in the history of this country and the world. But for one man, the Woodstock Music and Art Fair was an electrical construction job and "a hell of an experience."

In July, 1969, "Woodstock" was nothing more to Harold C. Pantel, owner of the Pantel Electric Co., than something he had read about in the newspaper. Woodstock Ventures, the company promoting the music festival, was busy preparing to hold the event in Wallkill, New York, a town outside Mr. Pantel's normal area of operation.

Then, late in July, the people of Wallkill reacted decisively to the rumors they had heard about thousands of young people invading their quiet town to attend a rock concert. They cancelled all of the permits that had been issued to Woodstock Ventures. With less than a month to go before the opening date for the festival and with thousands of tickets already sold, the promoters began a frantic search for another site.

Within a few days, a dairy farmer named Max Yasgur contacted Woodstock Ventures and offered them the use of his 600-acre dairy farm in the town of Bethel, New York, just a few miles away from Mr. Pantel's headquarters in South Fallsburg. The festival organizers jumped at the opportunity and



United Press International Photo

began making arrangements to prepare the site.

Mr. Pantel first heard from Woodstock Ventures in early August, barely two weeks before the festival was due to open. "They called me several times and asked if I wanted to do some work for them," Mr. Pantel said in an interview with *Electrical Contractor*. "I was a little wary at first, but I checked their credit and found that they had substantial backing."

So Mr. Pantel sent his son Robert to the festival site in Bethel to install some poles which were needed to bring power to various parts of the farm. He reasoned that his bearded, college-age son would get along with the young organizers of Woodstock and find out whether there was more electrical work to be done.

Sure enough, Woodstock Ventures called again a day or two later and asked Mr. Pantel if he would be



An aerial view of the hillside covered with humanity at Woodstock. The stage is at left and concession stands are at the rear. [Wide World Photo.]

interested in doing part of the electrical work required to prepare the site for the festival. Since he was accustomed to working on projects as the only electrical contractor, Mr. Pantel told the promoters that he would be able to do all of the work. Woodstock Ventures agreed to make Pantel Electric the sole electrical contractor.

Over the next few days, the contractor's men busied themselves installing more poles for power lines. Then, on a visit to the site, Mr. Pantel met with Chris Langhart, Woodstock Ventures' man in charge of construction, and got his first look at the roughly drawn blueprint for the entire site. What he saw spread out before him was a far bigger job than his informal conversations with the promoters had led him to believe. The blueprint showed a vague but elaborate plan to electrify dozens of locations all over the farm and adjacent properties.

Besides the performance area where the rock concert itself was to be held, Woodstock Ventures planned a large concession area with 40 food stands, all of which would require power for cooking; a performers' pavilion where the concert acts were to be housed while they waited to go on stage; an outdoor movie theater; craft booths; camper and trailer parking areas where power outlets would be provided; and outdoor lighting along paths and roadways. All of these

installations and more required not only power equipment but also the running of power lines.

"What started out as a small job mushroomed," Mr. Pantel recalled. "I felt I had to give this job my undivided attention." He brought in a house trailer and set it up by the stage to act as his command post and living quarters. Two of the firm's equipment trailers were brought in to store tools and materials. And Mr. Pantel assembled his heavy equipment, including two bucket trucks for high work, two auger trucks for pole digging, several pick-up trucks, and a bulldozer. The bulldozer was necessary because the heavy trucks had to be pulled through the pastures made soggy by unusually heavy summer rains. Then Mr. Pantel quickly organized a crew of 25 men working in two shifts.

His next problem was to get the materials that were necessary for the job. "I drained the four local electrical supply houses of all the outside wire they had and I had to send trucks to New York to pick up more," Mr. Pantel said. One of his biggest supply problems was obtaining switchgear on short notice. A large distribution panel was needed for the stage area for a three-phase, 1200-amp service. "Since switchgear usually takes a minimum of eight to ten weeks to get, I called a friend of mine who had just bought the electrical

equipment from several of the buildings at the New York World Fair. I was able to latch onto a distribution panel that just fit my needs."

Through such scrambling, Mr. Pantel was able to assemble most of the power poles, distribution wires, switchgear, fixtures and other equipment from local suppliers and from his own inventory. But in the later stages of the job, critical shortages of materials arose repeatedly.

"Towards the end, just as the festival was ready to open, we found that we were short of 1,500-watt quartz lamps for the stage lighting," Mr. Pantel said. So Jim Mitchell, Woodstock Ventures' comptroller and expeditor, jumped in a helicopter, flew down to New York City, and picked up the lamps along with several cases of champagne and crates of strawberries, apples and other fresh fruit. Why the champagne and fruit? To keep the temperamental rock stars happy. "Jim was in charge of spending money," Mr. Pantel explained, "and he did his job very well."

After the first week had gone by, Mr. Pantel and his electricians had made considerable progress in supplying power to various areas of the Woodstock site and activating equipment. But it seemed that as soon as one job was done, two more tasks would crop up. Throughout the days remaining before the festival opening on August 15, Pantel Electric's men were kept busy running power lines and hooking up a garbage compactor, water pump and chlorinators, a police command center, medical tents and doing a hundred other minor jobs.

As work continued over the weekend of August 8, no one had any inkling of the size of the crowd that was coming. Woodstock Ventures had planned on an attendance of 50,000 people. But on Wednesday, August 13, there were already more than 50,000 people camped out on the site.

This further complicated Pantel Electric's efforts to supply power for all of the installations. Moving heavy equipment through the gathering crowd was a slow process. But Mr. Pantel and his men never had a problem from the people, even when there were several hundred

Several of the New York World-Journal staff members were on hand to help with the job, but that just fit our needs.

Ambling, Mr. Pantel assembled most of the distribution wires and other electrical supplies from local suppliers. But when it came to the inventory, but not the job, critical materials arose.

Just as the festival was about to open, we found out that some of the 1,500-watt stage lights were out. Jim Mitchell, the festival's comptroller, stepped in and helped to get the lights back on. The festival was a success, and the organizers were very well.

Work had gone by so fast that the electricians had made progress in various areas and activating seemed that as much as was done, two more days were needed. Throughout the festival, Pantel kept busy with the wiring and hooking up the water pumps, police commands and doing other jobs.

Over the weekend, no one had a chance to see the crowd at Woodstock. By August 13, there were 100,000 people at the festival.

Mr. Pantel's crew worked through the night, a slow but steady pace. The power lines were still operating around the stage area.

thousand of them crowded into the performance area.

"In spite of all the people that were there," Mr. Pantel noted, "the hundreds of thousands, there never was a cross word. There wasn't a single fight. Everybody was polite. In fact, they were too anxious to help, if anything."

But on Thursday, the day before the opening, Mr. Pantel still wasn't aware of the throng that was heading for Bethel. It wasn't until he drove home that day to South Fallsburg, several miles away, that he realized just how many people were coming to Woodstock. "The roads were so packed on the way home half the time I was driving in the ditch," Mr. Pantel said. "And once I got home, I knew I couldn't drive back. So I called the site and had a helicopter pick me up."

Coming back to the festival site in the helicopter, Mr. Pantel got a feeling for the enormous size of the crowd moving toward Yasgur's farm. Route 17B, the highway coming into Bethel from the New York Quickway, was backed up bumper-to-bumper for fourteen miles, and traffic on the New York Thruway was also at a standstill. "It looked like one of those horror movies where everybody is trying to get out of town when a monster is loose," Mr. Pantel recalled. "The roads were jam-packed, mile after mile in every direction. It's still hard to imagine." It was estimated later that as many as three million people attempted to get to the Woodstock Music and Art Fair that weekend, while only half a million actually made it.

When the afternoon of Friday, August 15, came to Max Yasgur's dairy farm, several hundred thousand people were waiting for the music to begin while Pantel and his electrician's crews were still working on numerous installations elsewhere on the site. All the wiring for power to the stage was complete, however. Mr. Pantel had taken precautions to protect the 1200-amp service that powered the stage by burying it underground between the last power pole and the service equipment. He was especially concerned because the stage was constructed of wood and scaffolding, and because heavy equipment was still operating around the stage area.



Clogged roads like this one made helicopter travel essential during the festival. [UPI Photo].

"Just before the concert was ready to begin Friday evening," Mr. Pantel said, "the company handling the public address and speaker system tied a cable from our service pole and ran it across to the stage scaffolding. It was only ten or eleven feet off the ground. And I didn't see it. Then a tractor-trailer came through, hit their cable and ripped our service partially off the pole." The power cable was damaged and electricity to the stage was cut off. "We thought that was the end of the operation," Mr. Pantel remembered. But the Pantel electricians were able to pull up some slack, repair the cable and restore power so the concert could begin. "That was our darkest moment," he said.

Another hectic moment came when the heavy rains that drenched the horde of spectators on Friday night and Saturday began to expose power cables that had been installed underground between the stage and one of the scaffolding towers where the stage spotlights were mounted. The backfill turned to mud and the cable came to the surface. Then, as the people in the area danced and walked and dragged umbrellas back

and forth over the wire, the insulation wore away. The combination of rain and the dense crowd soon began causing some electrical shocks. Mr. Pantel had to cut the power to that light tower and have a crew repair the cable and bury it again to prevent any electrocutions.

By the time the weekend was over and the multitude had all but dispersed, Mr. Pantel and his men had begun the long process of dismantling everything they had installed over the previous two weeks. The total value of the work done in those fourteen days came to \$150,000. Mr. Pantel estimates that one-third of that amount involved overtime, transportation and telephone costs that would never have been incurred if there had been more time. But in spite of a total lack of advance warning of the scope of the job ("It's just as well," Mr. Pantel remarked, "because we would have been overwhelmed."), the electrical requirements for Woodstock were largely fulfilled.

"We're always under a certain amount of pressure to get our work done," Mr. Pantel said reflecting on the Woodstock job, "but at least we have a chance to assemble the merchandise and order it in time. But this was something that came out of nowhere."

"Still, it was a good job," he continued. "It gave us publicity and a sense of gratification that we could come through under circumstances like those and perform. And it was an experience that no one will ever have again. For three days, Woodstock was the third largest city in the State of New York," Mr. Pantel noted. "So we actually wired a city in two weeks from start to finish."

"History was made here," he concluded. "It was frightening at times, but it was a hell of a good experience." □