



Connected Community's Chicago Installation was The Little Project That Grew

by karen mitchell

Instinctive Control

Call it the little budget that grew. When Ron Romano met with his prospective clients in early 2002 to discuss ideas for the 8,000-plus square-foot custom family home they were building on Chicago's North Side, he knew they were cautious. They had presented Romano, the owner/designer of five-year-old Connected Community Inc., of Kankakee Illinois, an A/V budget of about \$35,000, and were not ready to commit to anything more.

Two years later, however, the \$250,000 completed project featured a whole-house Crestron control system, a dedicated media room with a 106-inch drop-down Da-Lite projection screen, a Marantz VP12S3 projector, Panasonic plasma and auxiliary equipment, and Mor-daunt-Short speakers.

The house is a virtual sports lover's paradise with a wall of six Sharp 30-inch LCD screens and the Marantz 50-inch plasma, and 12 Hughes satellite receivers, half of which are dedicated to the media room, others to satellite music for the house, and to his and hers HDTVs and TIVOs, including one for the master bath. A custom-built PC wireless keyboard and mouse in the media room allows for gaming via the plasma.

According to Romano, Crestron technology enabled smooth distribution of audio and video throughout the home. "The Crestron CNX-PVID8x4 allows us to send extremely high-quality video, high-definition and digital audio over CAT5e which normally might take four to six individual video cables," Romano said.

CCI has been a Marantz dealer since the be-

ginning, he said. "They have some gorgeous plasma displays such as the 61-inch plasma in the family room. The VP12S3 projector can't be beaten at that price point."

Other equipment for the installation includes Boston Acoustics, which provides nice performance for the price, Romano said. "We couldn't use concealable speakers since the room was already dry-walled. I'm a longtime BA fan; I've had them for years."

The upgrade, which took place after original design plans were implemented, was achieved by a combination of luck, instinct and Crestron, Romano said.

"You can do just so much based on any budget," he said, "In the end, thanks to the Crestron system over Cat-5e, we were able to do a

lot more with the audio and video than in a traditional situation in which we would have needed a lot of other wiring.”

That Romano's clients were avid sports fans was a clue that they would probably want more as time went on. He recommended from the start that they go with a basic Crestron keypad control system for distributed audio throughout the two-story home, with the inherent advantage of expansion possibilities.

The initial budget provided for 14 zones of audio with a centrally located touch panel and keypads in the family room on the main floor, a family room surround sound system with relatively modest gear, pre-wiring and comprehensive structured wiring giving each room several phone/cable/network locations.

Meanwhile, what Romano knew to be the natural spot for a dedicated media room, downstairs in the lower level, was being dry-walled. “It wasn't in the original contract, but it felt right to us to pre-wire downstairs,” he said. “We didn't want to have to redo wiring or deal with drywall issues later. I proposed some ideas for the room as we got closer to finishing the project, and they still hesitated.”

But during that project, CCI was referred to the homeowner's two brothers, who were each



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Equipment List

Audio Request ARQ-NITRO-60	Marantz DV-4400
Boston Acoustics DSi495 (2)	Marantz PD5040D
Boston Acoustics PV900	Marantz PD6140D
Boston Acoustics VR2 (2)	Marantz SR-6400
Boston Acoustics VRC	Marantz SR-7400
Crestron C2ENET-1	Marantz VP12S3
Crestron CNAMPX-16x60	Miscellaneous Tributaries Cables
Crestron CNHBLOCK	Monster Power HTS-3500 (2)
Crestron CNMSX-PRO2	Mordaunt-Short
Crestron CN-WP12FW (6)	MS903 Surrounds (2)
Crestron CNX-BIPAD8 (2)	Mordaunt-Short MS905C Center
Crestron CNX-PVID8x4 (2)	Mordaunt-Short MS907
Crestron CNXRM (10)	Subwoofer
Crestron CNXRMCLV	Mordaunt-Short MS912 Front
Crestron ML500	Speakers (2)
Crestron ST-TUNE	Niles CM650HD (6 Pair)
Crestron STX-1700CXP (3)	Niles OS6 Outdoor Speakers (4)
Crestron TPS 2000L (3)	Panasonic TH42PX25U/P
Da-Lite 87858	ReQuest VRQ1
Hughes DirecTV Receivers (7)	Sharp LC-13B4US
Hughes HD TiVos (2)	Sharp LC-20B4US
LG Electronics LSS3200 (2)	Sharp LC-30HV4U
Marantz CC-4300	Sharp LC-30HV4U (6)

gutting and remodeling a home. Like their sibling, they're sports fans, and each asked Romano to design systems to accommodate that passion.

"Finally, as they got closer to moving into their new home, the first client asked to meet again," Romano said. "I had shown them upgrade proposals, and we sat down and went over the wish list. Everything I had suggested made it onto the list. They counted on us to make the experience happen, placing a lot of confidence in us; these client's were a thrill."

Since CCI had wired so heavily, they had more than enough Cat-5e for a nice network using some for the Crestron system without compromises. "We pulled off some miracles," Romano said. "We were able to fulfill their desire to

Thompson. "Without Crestron, it would have been mayhem. There's nothing with that amount of flexibility. It was a challenge in the beginning, and the hardest was remembering every little detail in the programming for every nook and cranny. When you have that much logic it's easy to skip over things. I did more testing on this than for any project because the inner workings are so complex."

The result, Thompson says, rivals any sports bar. And games or any programming can be transported to other parts of the house. "They can call up a video source from the media room in the basement and bring it into the bedroom," Romano said. "If they want to watch a DVD in the bedroom, they can. If they're watching a

have all video sources like satellite and DVD available on any TV in the house at any time."

The one equipment room, with four racks, is in the basement on the other side of the screen wall. "We could poke through the wall and retrofit for what was added," he said.

"We took a basic system and turned it into way more than was planned, a system that's easy to use," said CCI lead installer and Crestron programmer A.J.

movie downstairs they can pause and resume in the bedroom on the plasma. With his and hers TiVos no matter where they are in house—except the children's rooms—they have access. You have to have a comprehensive control system to manage all these TVs and to make it fast and easy to use. We couldn't have done this without Crestron."

The client can walk into the media room and check on any game score by pushing one button. "We have a favorite page for each TV, based on icons, most are for sports, a few for cartoons," Romano said. "The other half of the basement is designed as a soccer field with dugouts."

The project was CCI's largest to date. "We're 60 miles south of Chicago, a little removed from the big suburbs," Romano said. "We've done a lot of nice Crestron systems in our area, and most of our residential projects are in the \$20,000 to \$100,000 range. We'd done programming and Crestron systems, but this project represented everything we'd ever done all in one job. We're always interested in any job but now we have the expertise of a job that large, no matter who does business with us. We've been there and done that."

Karen Mitchell is a writer based in Boulder, Colorado.

CCI's media room design rivals most sports bars with its 106-inch drop-down Da-Lite projection screen, Marantz projector, Marantz plasma, six 32-inch Sharp LCDs, and Mordaunt-Short speakers.