



# TRAVELING LIGHT

Whether it's a new invention or getting a pilot's license, audio-visual equipment magnate George Feldstein wakes up every morning with a bright idea.

BY BRENDAN SOBIE

We knew the Moses Mabhida Stadium in Durban was going to be loud: It was Germany versus Spain in a 2010 FIFA World Cup semi-final match. As the crowd filed in, fans were shouting in anticipation and the vuvuzelas were already blaring forth. What no one expected, though, was the extraordinary light show.

The stadium is impressive enough by day – you can see the immense white oval from miles away. But it's at night, when 1,320 LEDs move across the spectacular arch, and the flood and bowl lights brilliantly illuminate the 70,000-seat venue, that it takes on an otherworldly beauty.

The man behind this and thousands of other iconic displays around the world is George Feldstein. His infatuation with electronics is a remarkable story that starts more than a half century ago in the basement of his family's Lower East Side

tenement apartment in New York City, where Feldstein spent his youth tinkering with ham radios and model airplanes.

Today, in his chief executive office at Crestron Electronics, Inc., he pauses for a moment to look around and mentally count. Finally, he proclaims in a loud New York-inflected voice: "About 30!" That is the number of model airplanes, primarily World War II warbirds, lining the walls. Little did he know, when he began collecting them, that his childhood toys would offer a hint of the audio-visual-equipment mogul and pilot he would become.

As a child, Feldstein won a citywide science contest for physics. In his 20s, he gravitated towards the experimental side of science, earning post-graduate degrees in electrical and bio-medical engineering. He became an inventor (among his patents, one of the first under-the-skin nerve stimulators for pain relief). But, not surprisingly, the same renegade

thinking that made him a prodigious youth also rendered him largely unemployable. In his early 30s, jobless and with a family of five, he ventured out on his own.

Today Crestron Electronics, which Feldstein established 40 years ago and still leads, is one of the largest manufacturers of advanced control and automation systems in the world, with 2,500 employees and 57 offices. The company's growth has been completely organic, never requiring financing or additional investors. "I don't do this for money, if you can believe it," Feldstein says. "I put everything back into the company. We have the largest private R&D facility in New Jersey."

Crestron now sells a diverse portfolio of 1,500 products which can be found virtually everywhere: in cars, on yachts and in aircraft; at Yankee Stadium, Microsoft global headquarters and Macau's City of Dreams; and, of course, Moses Mabhida Stadium, where the floodlights trained on the pitch are so sharp that, even from the nosebleed seats, the game looks like HD.

Feldstein credits corporate aviation for much of the company's recent success. Crestron operates a Bombardier

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Challenger 604 jet, which it acquired four years ago after deciding the business needed an aircraft with enough range to cross the Atlantic. "Even in these hard times, the last thing we'd give up is our plane. Indirectly, it's a big moneymaker for us," Feldstein says. "A couple of weeks ago I had to go to Salt Lake City. We left in the morning on the Challenger, took off again that day and I was home. It would have been a three-day trip on commercial airlines." Given that time-saving advantage, Feldstein has only flown commercially once in the last 15 years.

His adventures in private aviation, meanwhile, started innocently in the early 1990s, after his four children had grown up, when he decided to pursue his lifelong ambition of flying. ("That's how I do things. I buy buildings. I start companies," he says, "and I woke up one morning and decided to become a pilot.") Today he holds private and commercial pilot certificates with instrument, multi-engine, aerobatic and jet ratings. Altogether, he has logged an impressive 3,000 hours.

Initially Feldstein acquired a small single-engine aircraft that he flew on business trips for several years. Feldstein and his wife Lynda still pilot it for pleasure along with a two-seat aerobatic airplane, which they take out when they really want to let loose. "When you are flying, especially aerobatics, it's relaxing to get away from all your responsibilities," he says. "And when you run a company the size of mine, you have a lot of responsibilities."

The only aircraft Feldstein doesn't fly himself is the Challenger 604 jet, which is operated by an in-house crew consisting of a chief pilot, co-pilot and mechanic. When he boards the Challenger 604 jet, it's because he's got work to do en route.

One might assume that Feldstein would be preparing for retirement on a relaxing island with a private airstrip, or freeing up some time to actually enjoy the venues around the world where Crestron's elaborate systems take center stage. But Feldstein – who proclaims, "I don't go on vacations" – has no intention of even slowing down: "When you have less time in your life, you have to speed up to accomplish more." ■



**ELECTRO POP**  
You might not know it, but you have encountered Crestron's control and automation systems at venues around the world such as Durban's Moses Mabhida Stadium (above) and Macau's City of Dreams (top and left); Feldstein in his Challenger 604 jet (opposite).

PHOTOS: MICHAEL SCICOLONE (GEORGE FELDSTEIN); KERRAN ALLEN / OCEAN DRIVEN MEDIA (MOSES MABHIDA STADIUM)