



Desco Audio/Video owner Dick Scott (left) and his son, Jeff (right), pose with technician Jason Suko, who performed the complex installation at AWB's Olympia headquarters.

Desco Audio / Video

by Danielle Rhéaume

Just one month before astronaut Neil Armstrong's televised "One giant leap for mankind" dazzled millions worldwide and less than two months before chilling details of the Tate/LaBianca murders prompted families to start locking their doors at night, Dick Scott and Gene DeRousie combined their skills and names to form Desco Electronics. It was June 1969. For the first time in history, foreign conflict wasn't "over there." The Vietnam War was broadcast into living rooms each night.

TV was still in its infancy as a broadcast medium at that time, but it had already indelibly changed contemporary society. Families were already gathering around it like cave dwellers before campfires. It had quickly become the main source of information, news and entertainment. It dared audiences to "explore strange new worlds, to seek out new life and new civilizations, to boldly go where no man has gone before" — with or without Captain Kirk. Generation by generation, it would continue to entertain and inform millions. This created a steady market that Scott and DeRousie could count on.

Merging talents

Scott learned how to repair electronics as a radio technician for the U.S. Air Force in the mid 1950s. That experience led to a job repairing and selling black-and-white televisions. "I sold my first 21-inch color TV in 1959 for \$900," Scott said. "That was a lot of money back then."

The average salary in 1959 was just \$5,500, and only about one in four American households owned their own TV. Because of that, it was common for neighbors to gather in one living room to watch shows like *Gunsmoke* or *The Twilight Zone* together.

Scott purchased a TV rental and repair franchise in Washington at Fort Lewis and McChord Air Force Base in 1960. Not long after that, he met DeRousie at a bowling alley in Olympia. DeRousie was an experienced technician for Ma Bell, and so Scott hired him to repair audio equipment

at his Fort Lewis business. By 1969, they were ready to go into business together and open Desco — a name they created from the DE in DeRousie and the SCO in Scott.

When Desco opened, it was an electronic repair and installation shop on Highway 101 in Olympia. That stretch of road is now Harrison Avenue.

"I built here because I knew that there would be a lot of cars passing through," said Scott. "I also knew that this was a relatively affluent area."

By 1969, the average annual income was \$8,550 and a 21-inch color TV cost about \$350. This made TVs far more affordable than they were a decade earlier, but they were still out of reach for many households. For Desco to do well, it needed to be close to households that earned enough to afford TVs.

Scott and DeRousie's technical skills and business acumen steadily earned Desco an excellent reputation. And while some things have changed since they opened nearly 40 years ago, Desco's reputation has not. That's why Desco commonly sees a third generation of customers frequenting their store. "I have people tell me that they bought their first TV here 30 years ago!" Scott said.

DeRousie sold his share of the company to Scott more than 10 years ago. Now Scott's son, Jeff, brings a second generation of business savvy and technical knowledge to Desco as his father's business partner.

Jeff Scott started working on evenings and weekends at Desco in 1979 when he was just 15 years old. His job initially consisted of cleaning and teaching customers how to program their VCRs. Once he got his driver's license, he was able to do home deliveries. Then, at 17, he did his first custom audio system installation in a new home. There were no in-wall speakers or switchers at that time, so Jeff and his dad combined their talents to cut into sheetrock and install plate-style car speakers in the walls. DeRousie then built a speaker selector from scratch. The installation was

a success and it paved the way for the custom installation services that would become Desco's bread and butter in the Information Age.

Thriving in the Information Age

Scott believes that there are several key reasons for Desco's success. The first one is simple, but very important: buying power. Years ago, Scott joined a buying group that allows him to buy items for within pennies of what the large electronics stores pay. This has helped Desco stay competitive and keep their guarantee to meet or beat their local competitors' advertised prices. It also helps them afford the best equipment. Because of their hands-on service experience, they are admittedly very picky about what they carry. They want items that they can stand behind with a warranty and repair in their service department, if needed.

Another reason for their success is their collective ability to provide skilled services—what DeRousie and Scott offered Desco's customers nearly 40 years ago. "The box stores don't have the time or the expertise to do installations or repairs, but we do," Scott said. "This is why our employees are very important to us. We try to give them plenty of opportunities to learn, so we can cultivate from within and keep moving forward."

Desco's staff includes four journeymen low-voltage electricians and four apprentices, as

well as a project manager, four system designers, three employees that deliver and set up equipment and several others that provide sales support. Jeff is also able to educate and guide staff members from what he has learned obtaining CEDIA (regarding custom electronic design and installation), THX (regarding high-fidelity sound reproduction) and IFS (regarding fiber optic systems) certifications.

Jeff's certifications reflect the final reasons for Desco's success: diversification and integration. Desco not only sells and services multiple audio, video and high-tech information systems, but they also specialize in marrying them as subsystems that create cumulative entertainment experiences that are greater than the sum of their parts.

Their home theaters are great examples of how they marry subsystems. Each setup includes a display device (TV or projection screen), surround sound receiver, speaker system and entertainment source. They also have automation systems. These systems allow users to control many different functions within their home—from theater components to room temperature to lighting—all on one remote control. With these systems, classic blunders like aiming the DVD player remote at the TV and wondering why the mute button won't work are a thing of the past.

Desco's on-site "Rainier Room" is the most

lavish example of their home theater capabilities. With its enormous screen, rows of theater-style seating, projector and designer acoustics, it looks like a place Steven Spielberg might watch films with his good friend, George Lucas. As displayed, it would cost a cool \$120,000. For customers of humbler means, most of Desco's home theater systems go for around \$5,000 to \$10,000.

Recent innovations

Gas costs a lot more now than it did in 1969 — or even 1999, for that matter — and that is keeping many people that would normally go out for entertainment at home. This has been good for Desco, where "the cost of gas is actually increasing business and making home entertainment more important," Scott said.

It is also changing the way many people work. Businesses are cutting back on employee trips and more people are working from home and telecommuting than ever before. Likewise, more and more businesses have offices spread throughout the county or the world. Scott's son can see how this will increase demand for their newest specialty of designing and installing custom, high-tech conference rooms.

These conference rooms allow businesses to give sophisticated presentations, play videos, teleconference, use the Internet or play audio — to name just a few options. Like the home theater systems, "they aren't as much about new technology, as they are about marrying subsystems," Jeff said.

Like the home theater systems, Desco's high-tech conference rooms are capable of automation that streamlines the system onto one control. "Presenters are already nervous," Jeff said. "They want to know that equipment will work." Fumbling for the correct remote while sitting on the couch at home with relatives is one thing. Having 30 people silently stare at you when your PowerPoint presentation fails to appear is altogether different — something that most of us don't care to experience. With AWB's help, hopefully you'll never have to.

Desco recently updated three conference rooms in AWB's Olympia headquarters. They did a great job, and now AWB's Large Conference Room has a new color projector and an impressively large projection screen. Both the Premiera Room and the Small Conference Room have large flat-panel plasma or LCD screens. All of the rooms have multimedia capability and are equipped with universal touch-screen remotes. These newly updated conference rooms are easy to operate and are available for members to rent, subject to availability. Members interested in making reservations should contact J-Anne Nepomuceno at jannen@awb.org or (360) 943-1600 for more information. ■

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Let's get down to business.

Since 1969, Desco Audio & Video has built a reputation as one of the finest custom home audio/video installers in the Northwest. What many people don't realize is that we have a terrific reputation for quality electronic systems in commercial locations. Our commercial installation experience runs from installing simple background music systems to elaborate conference room systems with state-of-the-art audio/video, computer networking and video conferencing systems. When it comes to working in the commercial environment, we use the same care and precision we are known for in our in-home installations. Next time your business needs electronics, give us a call. Our expert staff would love to help you make your business more successful. We travel all over the Northwest installing quality electronics systems and providing great customer service wherever we go!



360-943-1393

"Custom Installation Since 1969"

descoav.com 2306 Harrison Avenue NW
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