

Obituaries

Frank G. Lennert 1924–2013



Frank Lennert was born and raised in Hayward, California. When he was in high school, he joined a radio club and quickly became convinced that his future would involve electronics. While at school,

he designed and built his own (mechanical) disk recording equipment, so that he could make phonograph recordings of small vocal groups as well as radio programs off-the-air. After he graduated from the University of California in Berkeley in 1947, he started his own phonograph recording company.

In early 1948, Alex Poniatoff, founder and president of Ampex Corporation, heard about Frank and asked him to join his company. He was the first person to be hired who had a background in electronics. His contribution to Ampex was very great, and especially in its early years of developing and manufacturing magnetic tape recording equipment.

Frank joined just in time to check out Ampex's serial number 1, Model 200A. This recorder was delivered in 1948 April, and was the company's first product to be introduced in a long series of professional audio tape recorders. Frank then designed the electronics for a new Model 300, which was introduced in 1949 and performed even better than the 200A. He then designed a conversion kit to upgrade the 200A to match the performance of the 300, and each converted 200A became known as an Ampex Model 201. He established a standard laboratory to provide tapes to assure compatibility between Ampex recorders. He then helped establish a standard to assure that tapes recorded on one manufacturer's professional tape recorder could be played back properly on another.

In 1952 Frank was the ideal choice to become manager of manufacturing. He knew the engineering of the products to be manufactured, he knew the engineers, and he worked very well with all of them. He was a "team player" during those early years of helping Ampex become a world leader in magnetic tape recording of audio, instrumentation, and video.

Frank never lost his love for engineering. In 1953 he thought about the different sub-assemblies he was manufacturing, and decided one weekend to try an experiment. With the help of his machine shop, he assembled a combination of subassemblies onto a new top-plate. The result was the prototype of a new, smaller, and less expensive magnetic tape recorder. It became the highly successful Model 350. Ampex produced over 6,000 of them, and some are still in use.

In 1960 Frank resigned from Ampex in order to have more time to build his new home in Woodside and become involved with a few small startup companies. In 1973 he acquired a small company called Pemtek, which manufactured a line of special instrumentation recorders primarily for military applications. He built it up and sold it in 1976. Then he bought another small company called Standard Tape Laboratory (STL). It was an offshoot of the original standard tape laboratory that Frank had started at Ampex in 1949. He stayed with STL until his retirement in 1987.

Frank was AES member 423, and became an AES Fellow in 1959. He published the paper "Equalization of Magnetic Tape Recorders for Audio and Instrumentation Applications" in Transactions of the IRE-Professional Group on Audio (PGA).

He lived in his home in Woodside for over 50 years. In 2007 he lost his wonderful wife, Mary Ellen, to whom he had been married for nearly 60 years. Frank is survived by two sons, David and Steven, two grandsons, Jeremy and Jason, and his sister, Elizabeth.

John Leslie

Bill Isenberg 1944–2013



On Wednesday, February 6th, William H. Isenberg passed away from natural causes. Bill—or as his friends knew him "B-I"—was known and respected for his talents as a circuit designer, field technician, and all-around on-call "technical guru" for many of the most prestigious manufacturers and recording studios in Southern California.

After a short period of study at Lawrence University he joined the Air Force in 1964, rising to the rank of Tech Sergeant, specializing in electronics technology. In the late 1960s, Bill worked for Daniel A. Flickinger and Associates, where he helped in the design and construction of the Flickinger mixing console. After installing one of the consoles at Bolic Sound (Ike and Tina Turner's studio) in Inglewood, Bill decided to stay in Southern California.

Following his move to Southern California in 1972, Bill worked for and with a number of companies, including Audio Engineering Associates, Capp's Electronics, Cetec Vega, Filmways Audio, Groove Tubes, Harman Pro Audio, Hollywood Sound Systems, JBL Loudspeakers, Jensen Transformers, Litton Westrex, Marshall Long Acoustics, Pioneer Research, Record Plant Recording, RTS Systems (Telex), SAE High Fidelity, and Seymour Duncan Pickups.

As a long-time member of the Hollywood Sapphire Group and the Los Angeles Section of the Audio Engineering Society, Bill was a contributor to numerous technical presentations and workshops for both organizations and served as the AES Section's treasurer for several years.

Ron Streicher