

Lightology
Formerly Tech Lighting Galleries

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For Immediate Release
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Master Electrician Launches Lightology, Unique Contemporary Lighting Showroom at 215 W. Chicago, with Quiet Opening to Public

No Fanfare, but Contemporary-Minded Customers Double Sales in Two Months

CHICAGO, IL (October 8, 2002)—Last year, having parlayed a \$2,000 investment (1983) into a \$36 million contemporary lighting business, Gregory L. Kay realized he was now “mayor of a small city” with no time for his true passion, lighting design.

So the 44-year-old entrepreneur sold the manufacturing arm of Tech Lighting, kept its small retail showroom and talked about retiring early—the American dream.

Instead, Kay gutted an old building at 215 W. Chicago Avenue, and designed Lightology, a stunning, glass-enclosed, three-story lighting showcase that flows around a central atrium with two product-filled catwalks. In December, the first floor of Lightology opened quietly to the public. With a lack of fanfare, customers came and spread the word—spontaneously calling the showroom “awesome,” “fantastic”—and sales doubled in two months (February to April).

Already the largest U.S. distributor of high-quality contemporary lighting, Lightology will flip the switch this fall on its second and third floors, open only to architects, designers, contractors and other professionals. The lighting emporium also will open a multilevel roof deck, featuring a Japanese garden, waterfall and extensive landscaping elements designed to showcase outdoor lighting installations. The rooftop expansion, which will afford dramatic meeting spaces, brings total display space to 20,000 square feet. Lightology also has a 24,000-square-foot warehouse and office space at 1718 West Fullerton Avenue.

Lightology, Low-Voltage Pioneer with Unique Niche

One of North America’s oldest contemporary lighting showrooms is also one of a kind in Chicago, packed with gleaming modern fixtures. Many of them feature low-voltage halogen lighting, which Kay pioneered in the U.S. market. Prices range from a simple \$75 halogen desk lamp to an intricate, hand-blown Murano glass chandelier at \$5,000.

“There’s certainly nothing like this showroom in the country,” says Kay, Lightology’s founder and president. “What makes it unique is that it’s entirely contemporary, and has a lot of imported fixtures that aren’t found anywhere else in the U.S.

“I want people to walk in here and talk about it,” he adds. “It should be a shopping experience—

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an event—not just shopping. All our sales representatives are lighting specialists who have to take American Lighting Association tests. We sell a high-end product and a technical product, so one has to have professional sales skills.”

Sales to date are split almost 50/50 between consumer purchases and architect/designer volume. Commercial clients and installations include: Armani AX Stores, AT&T Showcase, Ben Pao, Manifesto, Design Studio, Pasha’s Restaurant, Scoozi Restaurant, Disney and MTV’s Chicago “Real World” house.

From Master Electrician to Lighting Master

A Detroit native, Kay began his career as an electrician, earned master electrician status in 1979 and was attracted to design when he began installing roller disco lighting. An early entrepreneur, Kay offered to take over (catalog) lighting sales for a roller skates distributor and subsequently met his major competitor and mentor-to be: Paul Gregory, the man who designed the breathtaking dance floor for “Saturday Night Fever.” And Kay was hooked.

Since most of his catalog lighting sales came from Chicago, Kay moved here in 1983 and opened Tech Lighting (Superior and Franklin streets), the city’s first all-contemporary lighting showroom. “We had 1,500 square feet,” he remembers,” and it was our showroom, warehouse and world headquarters! It was an exciting time. People were just lined up outside.”

The lighting showroom initially imported fixtures from Europe, but European low-voltage cable systems provided troublesome in the U.S. market due to different codes, junction boxes and listing requirements, so Kay began manufacturing in 1988. His background as an electrician and his passion for lighting design led to the introduction of revolutionary new low-voltage systems designed for the U.S. market: First Kable Lite, then TwinRail, MonoRail, 2-circuit MonoRail and Free Jack. Fixtures for all systems were and are interchangeable.

Also tapping into his electrical background, Kay was instrumental in changing the National Electric Code to recognize this type of lighting, permitting his systems to obtain UL or ETL listing—and making low-voltage lighting systems available in the U.S. market for the first time.

Evolution of Light Museum to Open Spring 2003

Lightology plans to open the Evolution of Light Museum, a unique mini-museum utilizing floor, wall and ceiling planes along the back stairwell between the first, second and third floors.

“We envision the museum as both educational and fun,” Kay says, “with one display exploring kelvin temperature, another the ‘AC/DC wars’ between Thomas Edison and his adversary, Nikola Tesla. Another display is the morphous room, where light can be altered to change the room’s color. The multi-purpose room can be used for meditation, as an entertainment room or an experimentation room for prospective lighting projects,” he explains.

For professionals out in the field and customers who can’t get to the showroom, Lightology also has a unique product Web site, showing real-time inventory, in development.