

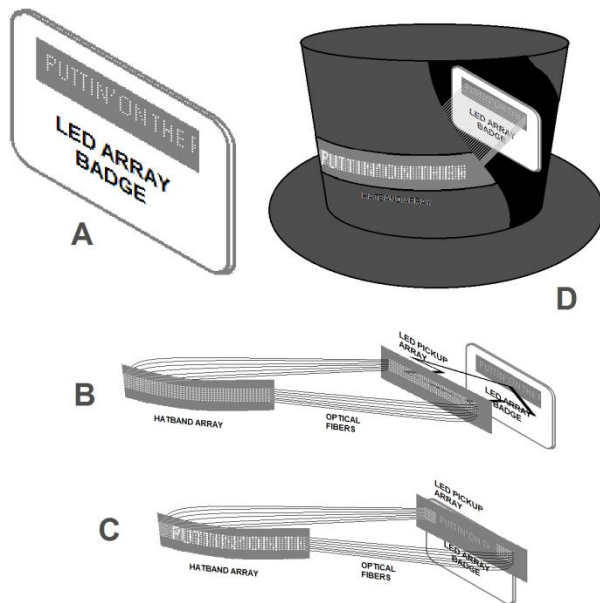
LIGHTS, COSTUME, ACTION— PART 2

P. J. O'Connor (Chicagoland Costumers' Guild) based on a panel done at Windycon 37, November, 2010

So, you want to make a costume that has lights with switching and special lighting effects. What's next?

Ever heard of a 'blinky?' A blinky is the offspring of LED and microprocessor technology, and from a standpoint of what it does, it flashes an array of lights in some pre-programmed sequence. It can be as simple as a mardi-gras light necklace with the light pattern running around in a circle, or as complicated as a traveling light display in the form of a badge, that you can program a message into and use to identify yourself to other participants at conventions.

One good thing about using blinkies that already exist, for costuming, is that with optical fibers, the lights on the blinky can be re-routed to any part of your costume where you want to have a blinking light, or any region of your costume that you would like to have lighting effects move along lines or travel in a pattern to give motion effects, even when you're standing still.



Imagine a top hat with a traveling-light badge inside, cycling the words, "PUTTIN' ON THE RITZ". Now imagine using an optical fiber leading light from each point on the surface of the badge out to a corresponding point around the circumference of the hatband, so that the words are rolling around the band like Times Square in New York.

The badge, 'A' is inside the hat. A fine metal screen with optical fiber 'threads' cemented to it in columns of seven connects to corresponding points on the hatband. In figure 'B,' only the leftmost and rightmost column of fibers are shown for clarity, but all the intervening columns would be filled with fibers as well, to carry the message to the hatband when the metal screen is placed over the LED display in figure 'C.' Connecting other less-elaborate kinds of 'blinkies' to the surface of your costume is merely a scaled-down version of this example.

NEXT ISSUE: Electroluminescent wire.