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A Long Bar and a Narrow Room

Harry Caray's on Chicago's North Side Gets a Sound System for Sports

By Chuck Shriver

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WGN-TV Sportscenter Harry Caray is such a Chicago celebrity that when he opened his restaurant on Chicago's Near North area the city of Chicago renamed Kinzie Street "Harry Caray Street" in his honor. In the background is the 444 North Michigan Avenue building, home of many of Chicago's advertising agencies.



Fire of 1871. Originally the home of the Chicago Paint and Varnish Company, it became notorious in the Twenties as a distribution warehouse for the bootlegging network of the famed Al Capone mob. Rumor has it that Capone lieutenant Frank Nitti lived in an apartment on the fourth floor which still exists.

It seems hard to believe, but even popular Chicago Cubs television personality Harry Caray needed some help to be heard over the crowd. Well, not Harry himself. His fighorn voice can be heard leading the cheers from the Wrigley Field broadcast booth almost without assistance of the WGN-TV airwaves. In this case, it was Harry's popular near northside eatery that needed the help. His restaurant, appropriately called Harry Caray's, at 33 West Kinzie St., is located in one of Chicago's most historic structures. Most of the time you couldn't hear the sound from the sports events on our TV sets. Just north of the Chicago River and two blocks west of Michigan Avenue's "Magnificent Mile," the restaurant is almost literally within shouting distance of the Windy City's two major daily newspapers most of its television and radio stations, and a majority of its advertising and media agencies. The building which houses Harry Caray's was the only structure left standing north of the Chicago River following the great Chicago

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The long, narrow configuration and many windows in the bar area of Harry Caray's Restaurant presented special challenges to Modular Sound Systems engineers.



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Harry Caray's Restaurant is nestled in the heart of Chicago's active Near North area in the only building north of the Chicago River that survived the famous Chicago fire of 1871.

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In more recent times it had been the home of the Kinzie Steak House, until Caray's group took it over three and a half years ago. Now it is the forty-third largest grossing independent restaurant in the United States. "Our bar alone grosses more than most standalone bars in Chicago," said Harry Caray's manager, Steve Borchew. "Most of the time you couldn't hear the sound from the sports events on our TV sets, which is part of the draw and certainly you couldn't hear a page." The most effective application is the one that fits the needs. Painfully aware of the need of a sound system in the bar that could be heard over the din, Borchew made calls to fellow restaurateurs. The result: "Modular Sound Systems was recommended to us several times." The long, narrow configuration of the room, its décor, its seven windows opposite the bar, and the age of the building presented some peculiar problems.

"The bar itself is 60 feet, 6 inches long (the exact distance from the pitcher's rubber to home plate), but the room is only about 25-feet wide," Borchew said. "When it's packed to capacity - which it is most nights - you can't hear a thing. We were concerned about finding a solution that worked," he said. After surveying the situation, Jim Wischmeyer, president of Modular Sound, and Henry Heine, Modular Sound's chief engineer and designer, came up with a unique solution. We decided to make the loudspeakers part of the décor. "We ruled out the ceiling as a location for the speakers for a variety of reasons," Wischmeyer said. "What we decided upon was to make the loudspeakers part of the décor rather than hiding them. The result was a row of loudspeakers which hang on the wall between the windows, giving the effect of antique picture frames," he said. Modular Sound decided upon six customized TA12 Bag End loudspeaker systems, with SE1280 speakers and E350 horns installed in particularly shallow custom cabinets between windows, finished to match the décor of the room - a seemingly simple, but extremely effective answer to the problem. The bar's sound system is connected with the main sound system in the restaurant. It can be employed separately or as part of the overall system. It is also patched into the room's video system so that all important Chicago sports events - particularly Chicago Cubs telecasts - can be heard clearly in every corner of the bar. The bar's sound system is connected with the main sound system in the restaurant.



Modular Sound System engineers dealt with the problem of an inappropriate ceiling and limited wall space by custom designing shallow Bag End TA12 cabinets to house SE1280 speakers and E350 horns. The cabinets are mounted between the windows, and are finished to match the rest of the décor in the room.

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What's the bottom line?

"We're ecstatic," said Borchew. "The system is perfectly tailored for the situation and it does everything the Modular Sound people said it would." Said Wischmeyer, "Sometimes the solution does not have to be complicated. After you have analyzed the problem thoroughly, the most effective application is the one that fits the needs - simple or complex.