

THE WATER COOLER

On top of stars' world in the Hub

Because he's got the ultimate backstage pass — 100 feet in the air above such acts as the Rolling Stones, Kiss, Aerosmith and Madonna — Jimmy Callanan's friends assume his workday is a live blend of MTV and VH1. But to their surprise, he seldom even bothers to watch the concerts.

THE WORKING STIFF Darren Garnick

Callanan, a 30-year veteran of the entertainment business, is too busy staring at the ceiling. As the chief rigger in demand by venues such as the TD Banknorth Garden, Gillette Stadium and the new Boston Convention & Exhibition Center, he's in charge of making sure that hundreds of thousands of pounds of lights and sound equipment stay attached to the steel-beam infrastructure.

"The last thing I want to do is see the show," says Callanan, whose South Boston company, JCalpro, sometimes employs up to 200 riggers for a single concert. "Our guys

During the filming of 'The Perfect Storm,' his crew played a lot of 3-on-3 basketball with George Clooney.

want to rest, because in a few hours, we need to take it all down.

"Nothing is ever routine. You can never let yourself get lackadaisical," he says. "We're hanging heavy equipment over the heads of some of the most famous people in the



HERALD PHOTO BY ILVA MIRMAN

ABOVE THE SPOTLIGHT: Jimmy Callanan has been the chief rigger for loads of concerts, but he seldom watches.

world. My stomach is always churning until all our stuff is back on the ground safely.

"In this business, you only get one mistake."

Among his craziest assignments was "flying" a motorcycle down a cable from the top balcony of the Boston Garden to the stage for an Aerosmith concert a few years back. He's also lowered professional wrestlers into the ring from 100 feet in the air, using a forklift as a counterweight.

Callanan began his career in the late 1970s while he was a student at Northeastern University. He joined the stage crews at area theaters and later latched on as a roadie with the Boston Symphony Orchestra and Boston Pops — setting up for shows in 20 countries.

"There was no such thing as safety harnesses when I started," he says. "Some of my older guys still ask me why they have to wear one now."

Although he insists he's never starstruck, the veteran rigger does hang onto some cherished celebrity memories.

At the old Boston Garden, singer Bruce Springsteen once stuck his head in the rigger "closet" (what they called their office) and autographed the wall. Callanan had that section of wall carefully removed during the demolition, intending to display it in his new office. But it was stolen.

During the filming of "The Perfect Storm," his crew played a lot of 3-on-3 basketball with George Clooney, and they fit in softball games with Steve Martin and Goldie Hawn in between scenes of "House Sitters."

"Sometimes this job is a lot like summer camp," Callanan jokes.

More recent Hollywood gigs for JCalpro have involved transforming the spacious lobby of the Boston Convention & Exhibition Center into Las Vegas' McCarran International Airport for this year's MIT gambling ring movie, "21," and into Paris' Charles de Gaulle International Airport for the upcoming "Pink Panther 2."

Away from hanging cele-



STAFF PHOTO BY MARK GARFINKEL

BALANCING ACT: Veteran rigger Jimmy Callanan recently helped transform the Boston Convention & Exhibition Center into airport scenes for two different movies.

brity spotlights, Callanan has no desire to partake in recreational climbing on the weekends.

"I've scaled the Astrodome

and almost every arena in the world," he shrugs. "I don't need to climb any rocks."

Darren Garnick's "The

Working Stiff" column runs every Wednesday. Check out the Working Stiff blog at www.bostonherald.com/blogs/workingstiff