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**REMEMBERING GEORGE JONES:  
A LEGACY OF LEADERSHIP AND DEDICATION AT EASTERN STATES EXPOSITION**

George Jones, former president and chief executive officer of Eastern States Exposition (ESE), who championed the organization from 1976 to 1991, passed away on December 30, 2024, at the age of 91. In place of a formal obituary, Jones left behind a self-penned farewell note to friends and family, showcasing his characteristic wit and humility. He wrote, “Sometimes newspaper obits sound as though the person who died could walk on water. If the truth be known, I spent more time treading water.”

Jones was an important contributor to the success of ESE, leaving an indelible mark of growth and achievement. He led the expansion of the Fair from ten to twelve days, and, under his leadership, attendance exceeded one million in 1978. As the last CEO to work alongside founder Joshua L. Brooks, Jones was committed to carrying out Brooks' mission.

In his writing, Jones reflected on a well-lived life. He was married to his high school sweetheart, Judy, and was blessed with children and grandchildren. Born on May 4, 1933, Jones fondly recalled his formative years growing up in Hanover, Mass., surrounded by fun, friends and a loving family.

Jones contracted polio as an infant, making him a “permanent water boy” in sports instead of the star athlete. Despite his coordination challenges caused by the disease, Jones enjoyed ice skating. When he joined ESE, he felt the ice rink in the Coliseum was for his own benefit. He faced scrutiny when an engineering study led him to make the difficult decision to close the beloved rink permanently following the 1990-1991 season.

It was 4-H that first introduced Jones to ESE. He wrote, “I’m very proud to have had a ten-year career in 4-H. Its teachings, wonderful experiences and contacts [led] me to the Exposition. Many times, it’s about being in the right place at the right time and luck.”

Actively involved in agriculture from an early age, Jones grew up raising sheep with his family and exhibiting at local fairs. As a 16-year-old 4-H Club member, he was honored to represent Plymouth County by displaying sheep at The Big E. His passion for agriculture continued through his studies at the University of Massachusetts, where he majored in animal sciences and earned his bachelor’s degree in 1955. From his first visit to the Exposition grounds as a teenager, Jones attended The Big E every year—whether as a participant, an observer, or an employee—until his retirement. [\[MORE\]](#)

George Jones began his professional journey with ESE in 1969 when he was hired as assistant general manager by then-General Manager G.W. Wynne. Following Wynne’s retirement in 1976, Jones took the helm as general manager and executive vice president—the fifth individual to hold that role. In 1989, his title was officially changed to president and chief executive officer, though his responsibilities remained the same.

During his tenure, Jones upheld the Exposition’s founding traditions with a strong focus on youth and agriculture. Under his guidance, The Big E expanded from ten to twelve days in 1975 and broke the million-attendance mark for the first time in 1978, becoming firmly established as a “million-plus” fair. Beyond the Fair, Jones expanded ESE’s year-round operations exponentially, drawing an estimated 700,000 visitors annually outside of Fair season.

*Since 1916*

Jones spearheaded significant capital improvements that transformed the Exposition grounds. His building initiatives, which began with essential infrastructure upgrades like underground wiring, sewer systems and increased bathroom facilities, culminated in several major capital projects. Among these were the Young Building (1978), Storrowton Carriage House (1984), the renovation of the Brooks Building (1987-1988), the Mallary Agricultural Complex (1989), and the Visitors' Centers West (1985) and East (1986), the latter is still affectionately referred to "McGeorge's" among staff due to its uncanny resemblance of an 80s-style McDonald's.

Jones also prioritized beautification efforts to create a more inviting and park-like setting for fairgoers. Enhanced seating, picnic areas, floral plantings and landscaping became integral parts of the Fair experience. Beginning in 1982, he led a program to revitalize the Exposition's Memorial Avenue frontage, resulting in the construction of the New England Flag Plaza (1983) and the addition of ornamental fencing and walkways along the avenue in subsequent years.

The economic boom of the 1980s fueled Jones' ambitious plans, and ESE flourished under his stewardship. His vision and leadership ensured not only the growth of the organization but also its enduring legacy as a cornerstone of the region's agricultural and cultural identity.

Jones knew and appreciated everyone at The Big E, from agricultural show participants to the midway ride operators. He notes, "During my time at the Exposition, my style of management was 'walking around, and hopefully keeping out of the way.' I found it the best way to see first-hand what's going on and to get to know the folks who make the Exposition perform so well. While at the Exposition a lot of recognition and awards flowed my way...or should I say our way. The awards we received were because of the excellent reputation of the Exposition. And the result of an ethical, hardworking, and loyal staff."

Jones represented ESE in the International Association of Fairs and Expositions (IAFE). Throughout his involvement, he achieved Certified Fair Executive status, meeting rigorous professional qualifications, served as president of the trade association in 1984 and was inducted into the IAFE Hall of Fame in 1988. Jones was also once president of the Massachusetts Agricultural Fairs' Association as well as the Mid-West Fairs Association.

Outside of the job, Jones was on the Board of Overseers for Baystate Health Systems, Inc., the Dean's Advisory Committee at the University of Massachusetts, president and director of the Greater Springfield Convention and Visitors Bureau, on the Board of Directors for the Greater Springfield Chamber of Commerce and a member of the West Springfield Rotary Club. While listing lesser-known facts about his life, he noted that he was a proud Mason and a lifelong blood donor who generously contributed 173 pints.

Jones retired as president and chief executive officer of Eastern States Exposition on June 30, 1991, at the age of 58, after 23 years of dedicated service to the organization. Citing his age, health considerations and the Exposition's long-term benefit as reasons for stepping down, Jones demonstrated the same forward-thinking approach that had defined his leadership all along.

George Jones' life was a shining example of dedication, humility and ambition at work. From his early days in 4-H to his selfless leadership at ESE, Jones left a profound impact on every community with which he came in contact. His commitment to progress inspired everyone around him, but he never lost sight of the value of the individual, no matter how large his vision grew. Jones may have perceived that he was constantly "treading water," but that is because he always chose routes through uncharted waters. In doing so, he developed a fundamentally solid foundation for ESE that allowed it to expand tenfold and support itself following his departure. It is through Jones's devotion that we have endured for generations, and we will continue to do so in his name.

### **About Eastern States Exposition**

It's always showtime at Eastern States Exposition (ESE), a 501(c)(3) not-for-profit corporation located in West Springfield, Mass. ESE is committed to excellence in providing opportunities for the development and promotion of agriculture, industry, education and family entertainment while preserving our New England heritage. The 175-acre campus holds five exhibition

buildings, equivalent to 355,000 square feet of ground level indoor space. The year-round, on-site dining and entertainment locations include Storrowton Village Museum, Eastern States Farmers Market & Wine Café and Storrowton Tavern & Carriage House. The facility also hosts more than 120 shows and events annually, such as The Big E, the fourth largest fair in North America, and Hooplandia, the Northeast's Ultimate 3x3 Basketball Tourney + Festival. For more information, check out [EasternStatesExposition.com](http://EasternStatesExposition.com), or find us on social media.



*George Jones holds a photo of himself posing on the Brooks Building balcony during his time serving as president and chief executive officer of Eastern States Exposition, September 2015.*



*Former Eastern States Exposition President & CEO George Jones stands in front of the facility's 40,000 sq. ft. agricultural complex as it was being erected in 1989.*



*From left: Chad Yergeau, the millionth fairgoer to walk through the gates during the 1978 edition of The Big E, is held by George Jones, former president and chief executive officer of Eastern States Exposition. Yergeau holds a lifelong admission card, gifted to him by Jones.*