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OPENING WEEKEND OF THE BIG E CELEBRATES HALFWAY TO ST. PATRICK'S DAY WITH ENTERTAINMENT & CULTURAL EVENTS

The Big E, North America's seventh largest fair, opens Sept. 13 with a weekend long "Halfway to St. Patrick's Day" celebration, *sponsored by Aer Lingus*. The celebration's focal point is Ireland's Dingle Peninsula Showcase in the Young Building, which will feature vendors, artisans, whiskey distillers, educators, craftworkers and vacation-itinerary planners from across Ireland's famous Dingle Peninsula and Wild Atlantic Way for a 25th year. In addition, Irish-themed entertainment will appear on The Big E's stages from Friday through Sunday, Sept. 13-15, including a headline performance by the Young Dubliners, Saturday, Sept. 14 on the Court of Honor Stage. All programming is free with admission to The Big E.

Halfway to St. Patrick's Day & Special Events:

- Sept. 12-17: Kerry County Council, including Cathaoirleach (Mayor of Kerry) Breandán Fitzgerald, arrive and participate in events around The Big E.
- Sept. 12: Irish Cultural Center, West Springfield, Mass: Mayor Will Reichelt of West Springfield, Former West Springfield Mayor Ed Sullivan and president of the Dingle-West Springfield Sister City Committee, Kerry County Council, Údarás na Gaeltachta and Dingle Peninsula Showcase businesses attend welcoming reception to help mark the 250th Anniversary of West Springfield.
- Sept. 13: Kerry County Council-hosted networking breakfast briefing showcasing Kerry as a destination for business, investment and tourism.
- Sept. 13-15: Halfway to St. Patrick's Day entertainment at The Big E, including: Irish Dance Workshops on Storowton Gazebo, Sept. 13-15 at 11am; Siamsa Tire: The National Folk Theatre of Ireland performances on the Court of Honor Stage, Sept. 13-15 at 2pm; Irish music with Sláinte at The E Stage, Sept. 13 at 8:30pm; The Corner Boys at The E Stage, Sept. 14 at 12:30pm; the Black Rose Academy of Irish Dance at Storowton Gazebo, Sept. 14 at 1:30pm; live music with Irish Thunder of Springfield in the Young Building, Sept. 14 at 3pm; headline entertainment with the Young Dubliners on the Court of Honor Stage, Sept. 14 at 8pm; and Sarah the Fiddler at The E Stage, Sept. 15 at 4:30pm.
- Sept. 14: Ireland Consul General Sighle Fitzgerald attends The Big E Fair where a "pop-up" Irish Consulate will be located at the Dingle Peninsula Pavilion in the Young Building.
- Sept 14: Mickela Mallozzi, the four-time Emmy Award winner, host and executive producer of the travel series Bare Feet with Mickela Mallozzi that airs on PBS stations, will be at The Big E. She will appear at Ireland's Dingle Peninsula Showcase and other related venues on Saturday, Sept. 14, for a series of dance workshops, chats and fun.
- Sept. 14-17: Watch Dingle Art School's Anne Lundon develop over four days on-site a commissioned painting in acrylics to commemorate West Springfield's 250 anniversary. She also will offer short, afternoon Dingle themed art classes for interested fairgoers (limited numbers available).
- Sept. 17: Media Event at the Springfield Museums celebrating Blasket Island Legacy.

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UNITED WE FAIR

Caroline Boland, the Dingle Peninsula Tourism Alliance's marketing director, said the Mayor of Kerry, along with Kerry County Council elected representatives, Údarás na Gaeltachta, the regional authority for the economic, social and cultural development of Ireland's Irish-speaking regions, and members of the Irish Consulate in Boston will join the celebrations with a "pop-up" Irish Consulate onsite at the Showcase on Sept. 14.

"Our vendors and artisans from the Dingle Peninsula and County Kerry have celebrated Irish heritage and our Gaeltacht culture at The Big E for more than two decades, as we also mark our Sister City relationships and historical ties with West Springfield, Springfield, Holyoke and the Western Massachusetts region," said Boland. She added that visitors to the Showcase in the Young Building can take a survey and enter for a chance to win a vacation to the Dingle Peninsula. Aer Lingus will award plane tickets to Ireland for two people as part of their sponsorship of the Halfway to St. Patrick's Day weekend.

"This year, our Irish Pavilion in the Young Building will allow fairgoers to watch the Dingle Art School's Anne Landon develop over three days a commissioned painting in acrylics to commemorate West Springfield's 250 anniversary," said Boland. "In addition, people can take a painting lesson and bring home their work, or stop by to watch how pottery is made, crystal designed and cut, sample a Dingle Distillery's award-winning gin, whiskey or vodka, pick up a gift or memento from our world-famous jeweler or hand-made goods and fashions from any one of our crafters."

Many from Ireland's Dingle Peninsula and County Kerry region—including families from the Blasket Islands—left Ireland to settle in Western Massachusetts, leading in recent years to Sister City relationships between the Dingle Peninsula and West Springfield, Holyoke and Springfield, Mass. "County Kerry continues to have strong economic and cultural ties with the Greater Springfield areas through our diaspora, twinning partnerships, trade and friendship. These connections are valued.

"In addition, as part of the program of activities for the week, Kerry County Council will be hosting a Networking Breakfast Briefing to showcase Kerry as a destination for tourism, business and investment", said Mayor of Kerry, Councillor Breandán Fitzgerald. The networking event is an exciting opportunity to build upon existing partnerships and links between Kerry, West Springfield and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

Ireland's Boston-based Consul General Sighle Fitzgerald will be in attendance at The Big E on Sept. 14 introducing for the first time, a "pop-up" Irish Consulate. In addition, representatives from other Irish Cultural Centers across New England have been invited to "Mingle with Dingle" during the fair.

Mayor Will Reichelt said he looks forward to greeting Kerry County Council, Údarás representatives and other dignitaries and noted that 2024 marked the 25th year for the Dingle Peninsula Cultural, Educational, Trade and Tourism Showcase. "It's a great honor and with great pleasure that West Springfield again welcomes our long-time friends from the Dingle Peninsula and across Ireland as our community marks its 250th Anniversary. The Irish diaspora, especially those from County Kerry, helped build West Springfield and remain active across our community."

Dónal Ó Liatháin, Regional Manager for Údarás na Gaeltachta, emphasized the importance of this cultural exchange: "The Big E provides an unparalleled platform for showcasing the rich cultural heritage and contemporary creativity of Ireland's Gaeltacht regions, particularly the Dingle Peninsula. This event strengthens our ties with the Irish diaspora in Western Massachusetts, while promoting our unique language, crafts and businesses to a wider American audience. Údarás na Gaeltachta is proud to support this initiative that bridges our communities across the Atlantic."

The businesses participating in the Fair's Dingle Peninsula Cultural, Educational, Trade and Tourism Showcase are among the west of Ireland's most famous pottery, jewelry, weaves, tweeds, felt and woolen and crystal artisans, leading educational institutions and tourism executives.

Businesses, craftworkers and organizations representing the Dingle Peninsula at The Big E include:

- **The Blasket Centre**, which overlooks the Great Blasket Island, where many of the Irish Diaspora in Western Massachusetts originated. The Centre represents a fascinating heritage and cultural display and museum honoring the unique community who lived on the remote Blasket Islands until their 1953 evacuation. It tells their story of island life, subsistence fishing and farming, modes of work and transport, housing and entertainment. With a variety of exhibitions, interactive displays, artifacts, audio visual presentations and

artworks, the Centre details the community's struggle for existence, their language and culture, and the extraordinary literary legacy.

· **Dingle Art School**, a new-comer to the Pavilion, will offer fair-goers an opportunity to take a painting class during the Fair's opening days, Sept. 16-17, when students can learn school owner Anne Lundon's secret method of using five colors, five brushes and a palette knife to paint a frameable creation. During her four days at the Fair, people can also watch as Anne develops a commissioned painting in acrylics to commemorate West Springfield's 250 anniversary, Sept. 14-15.

· **Original Kerry**, another newcomer to the Dingle Pavilion, will showcase original designs from seven of 30 professional County Kerry craftworkers, displaying a curated collection of gifts, including jewelry, knitwear, cozy throws, ceramics, felting, textiles, weaves and tweeds of traditional style and skills.

· **Brian de Staic Jewellery**, crafters of distinctive jewelry for over 40 years, features one of Ireland's leading goldsmiths, Brian de Staic and his wife, Máiread, who opened in 1981. This is their 25th Anniversary attending The Big E! Celebrities including Tom Cruise, Julia Roberts, Saoirse Ronan and Laura Dern own Brian de Staic creations.

· **Celtic Gift House** returns to The Big E for a 22nd year, offering a range of Celtic jackets, hoodies, tee shirts and baseball caps, as well as a variety of musical instruments and accessories, including tin whistles, bodhrans and guitar straps. Also available will be ELFIS and the full range of "Craic House Chopper" products that have proved a hit with The Big E Fairgoers.

· **Dingle Crystal**, which designed and created the St. Patrick's Day Shamrock Bowls presented by the Irish Prime Minister to President Biden at The White House in 2022, 2023 and 2024, will unveil a new product called The Nightcap Set, a smart-looking stackable decanter and two tumblers available in nine different designs. Sean Daly, who apprenticed in Waterford Crystal and worked for 15 years to become a master cutter, established Dingle Crystal when Waterford Crystal moved production out of Ireland. Bringing a traditional cutting wheel, Sean followed by Jonathan will demonstrate Dingle Crystal's original glass cutting and design at their booth.

· **Sacred Heart University** in Dingle is Sacred Heart University's global campus. For the last two decades, SHU in Dingle has welcomed students from universities and colleges across the US to complete semester-long and short-term study abroad programs, immersing them in the rich culture and history of this beautiful seaside town. At SHU in Dingle, students take courses across the arts and humanities, sciences, nursing, and health sciences, enriching their lives invaluable with the transformative experience and transferable skills offered by a global education.

· **Louis Mulcahy Pottery** has been crafting pottery in the heart of the Kerry Gaeltacht since 1975. Louis, his son Lasse and a team of craftspeople hand-make everything from dainty posy jars, dinner sets and elegant lamp bases to ovenware and towering urns at their workshop located west of Dingle town on the Sleah Head drive. Drop by the stand to find out more about the Pottery's extensive range of home and giftware, presentation pieces, corporate gifts, golf prizes, and wedding gifts. And visit the pavilion to see expert potter Janet give a throwing demonstration on a potter's wheel.

· **Lisbeth Mulcahy** opened Siopa na bhFhíodóirí in Dingle in 1986 to showcase her personally designed, handwoven tapestries and wall hangings, as well as her range of seasonal scarves, stoles and throws woven by a small team of weavers, including her daughter Sally.

· **Dingle Distillery** will showcase its limited Wheel Of The Year Celtic Series, and their award-winning Dingle Original Gin (the World's Best Gin and the World's Best London Dry Gin 2019), Vodka and Dingle Single Malt Whiskey. Built on the edge of Dingle, County Kerry, Dingle Distillery is celebrating its 12th anniversary as Ireland's first independent, family-owned, purpose-built artisan spirits distillery in more than a century. Its spirits are available in the United States through Hotaling & Co. importers. Their limited-edition Descendants 2024 Cask Programme will be introduced and of course, their tastings of their famous Whiskey, Gin and Vodka throughout the fair.

- **Meet the Maker's Program** is a Showcase of daily demonstrations (from 12 noon to 6pm) of crafts, spirits tastings, displays of hand-made Irish merchandise and memorabilia, as well as offering information on visiting the Dingle Peninsula. Daily video presentations offer Big E Fairgoers a view of what experiences lie across the Dingle Peninsula's spectacular scenery, villages, as well as the literary heritage of the Great Blasket Islands, and 'muintir na tíre' – the people of the place. Those attending The Big E can find out more by visiting the Fair's website or other social platforms.
- **Irish Cultural Center of Western New England** cultivates a connection with Ireland and generations of local Irish diaspora – many of whose ancestors left the Blasket Islands just off the Dingle Peninsula's Atlantic coast in County Kerry. The ICC provides access to Irish-oriented lectures, concerts, exhibitions of art, artifacts and memorabilia, political discussions, international relations, GAA sports, Irish language classes, student international exchange and genealogical research. It also provides a bridge between the Irish government and the Western New England region.
- **Greater Springfield Convention and Visitors Bureau (GSCVB)**, an Economic Development Council of Western Mass affiliate and a private non-profit destination marketing organization, promotes Western Massachusetts for meetings, conventions, group tours, sports and leisure travel. Irish immigration to New England peaked in the mid-19th century when countless families sought new opportunity and landed in Western Massachusetts, which still celebrates Irish culture and heritage -- from one of the largest and most-cherished annual St. Patrick's Day parades in Holyoke to The Dingle Peninsula Pavilion at The Big E.
- **Dingle Peninsula Tourism Alliance** is a non-profit sustainability-focused, community tourism and destination management co-operative owned and managed by its family-run businesses and community development members across Ireland's Dingle Peninsula. Representing over 160 local businesses, their website www.dingle-peninsula.ie offers visitors the most up-to-date information to plan and enjoy a visit to the peninsula. The Alliance also offers a virtual concierge desk to answer questions or help tailor a vacation for visitors. The DPTA's Sustainability Charter can be found [here](#).

Others involved in the Dingle Peninsula Showcase and the organization and sponsorships of the Halfway to St. Patrick's Day celebration include: from Ireland – Kerry County Council, Údarás na Gaeltachta, NEWKD, Fáilte Ireland and Aer Lingus; and from Western Mass - West Springfield City Council, West Springfield Sister City Committee, the Irish Cultural Center of Western New England, West Springfield High School, GSCVB and Eastern States Exposition.

For more information on Halfway to St. Patrick's Day and Ireland's Dingle Peninsula Showcase at The Big E, visit TheBigE.com.

The Big E, recognized as the largest event on the East Coast and seventh-largest fair in North America, takes place September 13-29 in West Springfield, Mass. Stay up to date with all the events and programs happening year-round at Eastern States Exposition by subscribing to the email newsletter at TheBigE.com or connecting with us on social media platforms.

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About Dingle Peninsula Tourism Alliance:

Comhaontas Turasóireachta Chorca Dhuibhne/Dingle Peninsula Tourism Alliance, the umbrella tourism group for the Dingle Peninsula, is a voluntary not-for-profit organization dedicated to sustainable regenerative development and responsible promotion of tourism on the peninsula. Promoting slow tourism, it supports the immense work of local tourism and community groups, businesses, festivals and events committees, and local communities. Visit www.dingle-peninsula.ie or like us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/dingle.official and follow us on Instagram and Twitter using handle [@DinglePeninsula](https://www.instagram.com/DinglePeninsula). Engage with us using [#DinglePeninsula](#) [#StayALittleLonger](#).

About The Greater Springfield Convention and Visitors Bureau

The Greater Springfield Convention and Visitors Bureau, an affiliate of the Economic Development Council of Western Mass, is a private non-profit destination marketing organization dedicated to promoting Western Mass for meetings and conventions, group tours, sports, and leisure travel. For more information on the GSCVB, visit www.ExploreWesternMass.com or like us on Facebook at www.facebook.com/explorewesternmass, and follow us on Twitter using handle @XploreWesternMA. Engage with us using #westernmass.

About Eastern States Exposition:

Eastern States Exposition (ESE) is a 175-acre multi-purpose facility located in West Springfield, Mass. Founded in 1916 by Joshua L. Brooks, the Exposition is a treasured New England tradition. ESE is home to The Big E, the nation's seventh largest fair, attracting 1.67 million visitors during its 17-day run in mid-September. The largest event of its kind on the eastern seaboard, The Big E attracts visitors from all of New England, New York and beyond, who flock to West Springfield for musical entertainment, foods from around the world, circus, agricultural animals, rides, shopping and more. The Big E is the only fair in the United States that represents more than one state, representing all six of the New England States. Eastern States Exposition's expansive and versatile facilities are also home to 120 shows and events each year.

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