

EXPO EDITION

IN THIS ISSUE

PAGE 2

Storowton & PVHN
Fiber Festival of New England
Foreigner Announced

PAGE 3

Noreen Tassinari Retires: 45 Years

PAGE 4

ESE Staff News
In Memoriam

PAGE 5

ESE Staff on the Road
ESE President Visits White House

PAGE 6

Melvin Jones Fellowship
Golden Tractor Award
4-H Beef Sale & Donation
Reader Raves: Best Fair Award



THE BIG E's HISTORIC YEAR

This year's Fair was a landmark chapter in Eastern States Exposition's (ESE) storied history, drawing a record-breaking 1,633,935 attendees and setting an all-time single-day attendance record of 178,608 on September 21. Energized by an outstanding stretch of beautiful sunny fall weather, the 17-day event was a vibrant celebration with a diverse concert lineup, delicious Fair foods, thrilling rides and unique shopping opportunities.

This season's accomplishments were not without challenges. The team navigated an unprecedented volume of fairgoers, media pressure and operational complexities. We leaned on each other, learned invaluable lessons, remained unified and persevered, delivering an unforgettable experience for visitors.

From morning to night, The Big E's stages were alive with the music of legendary acts and rising stars,



THE BIG E CAMPAIGN REVEAL

Get ready for a Big Mood! The Big E's 2025 campaign theme has been rolled out across all digital platforms. Big Mood brings vibrant summertime vibes and features a cast of "too cool for school" funky, farm animals.

HOOPLANDIA REGISTRRTION

Registration is now open for the third annual Hooplandia, the Northeast's Ultimate 3x3 Basketball Tourney + Festival, June 20-22, 2025. Teams can sign up now via the registration link at Hooplandia.com.

including sold-out performances by **Ludacris** and **Big Time Rush**. Captivating shows, attractions and international talent from the Halfway to St. Patrick's Day festivities, daily variety programs and Circus United, kept the fairgrounds abuzz with excitement, along with new additions to The Big Parade—Al. E. Gator, a freshly refurbished USA Float and Mardi Paws. The standout attraction of the evenings was North American Midway Entertainment's Sky-High Super Wheel, where more than 67,600 riders enjoyed sweeping views of the grounds.

Returning fan favorites and 75 new food offerings added to the flavor of the Fair. Three-Buck Bites, a food sampling day, debuted as the hit promotion of the year. The Big E Bakery's limited-edition Cookies 'n Cream Cream Puff was a sweet success and helped usher the Bakery to achieving milestone pastry sales.

Success extended to agriculture and creative arts. Competitions saw record participation, with unmatched representation from 26 states and four Canadian provinces—a reach that far exceeds any other fair.

As we reflect on this triumphant year, we extend heartfelt gratitude to ESE's dedicated team of staff, volunteers and trustees, vendors, exhibitors, partners and every fairgoer who makes The Big E great.

Above: Ludacris performs to a sold out crowd at The Big E Arena, September 14.

Above: Mardi Paws, the new giant puppet, leads The Big Parade's Mardi Gras contingent.

STORROWTON & PVHN

Pioneer Valley History Network at ESE



ESE is proud to collaborate with the Pioneer Valley History Network (PVHN), an organization dedicated to connecting and supporting historical institutions and societies across Western Massachusetts. ESE's Storrowton Village Museum has participated in various PVHN promotions.

Storrowton recently hosted the PVHN 2024 Fall Gathering, coordinated by **Jessica Fontaine**, director of Education & Human Resources, October 17. The topic for the event was "Making History with the Next Generation." The itinerary was loaded with workshops and presentations. ESE staff members, **Greg Sanocki**, Digital Content Manager, and **Mackenzie Coburn**, Sales Innovation Manager, taught a lesson on tactics for engaging younger audiences and media outreach. Attendees were predominantly members of local historical societies looking to connect with new demographics.

Additionally, Storrowton and ESE: A Walk Through History museum participated as two of the five destinations on PVHN's *History on the Go!* Western Mass. Women's History Trail, Saturday, November 2, pictured above. The History on the Go! series provides self-guided tour opportunities that connect multiple historical locations, telling the tale of a mutual topic to create an immersive educational experience for visitors. The all-day event was free to the public and was hosted in unison with Storrowton's Blacksmithing Day.



Above: Foreigner's **Kelly Hansen** and **Bruce Watson** perform live. Photo Credit: **Krishta Abruzzini**

FIBER FESTIVAL

Record-Attended Year for the Premier Fiber Arts Event



Fiber Festival of New England attendees brought home bundles of beloved woolen wear and warm memories when the popular event took place, November 2-3, in the Mallory Complex at Eastern States Exposition.

The event was co-promoted by ESE, with primary management from the Exposition's Agriculture department, and the New England Sheep and Wool Growers Association. Scenes from the weekend's festivities are pictured above.

This year marked the highest-attended festival to date with more than 6,000 fiber fans present for shopping, demos, educational workshops and fun.

Next year's Fiber Festival will take place December 1-2, 2025. Visit FiberFestival.org for more information.

FOREIGNER ANNOUNCED

Legendary Classic Rock band, Foreigner, is returning to The Big E, Sunday, September 21. Catch the highly anticipated headline show at The Big E Arena, sponsored by Truly Hard Seltzer. Tickets are on sale now at TheBigE.com.

Foreigner recently celebrated their induction into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame, October 19, 2024, with a celebratory tour announcement, which includes a date in West Springfield.

Known for timeless hits like "I Want to Know What Love Is" and "Cold as Ice," Foreigner promises to deliver an unforgettable evening of iconic music and an electrifying performance.

NOREEN TASSINARI RETIRES: 45 YEARS AT ESE



This June, **Noreen P. Tassinari** retired from her position as Director of Marketing. Tassinari will be remembered as a force within the world of communications, a trusted colleague and a philanthropist.

Tassinari attended Cathedral High School in her youth and later earned a bachelor's degree in English with a concentration in writing and journalism from the University of Massachusetts Amherst. It was her devout professors that first sparked her interest in public relations and helped her hone her editorial skills.

Soon after graduation, a peer of hers began a summer internship at Eastern States Exposition under Public Relations Coordinator **Betsi Sheehan Taylor**. Tassinari reached out to Sheehan about similar opportunities.

Thus began a long mentorship with Taylor that led to Tassinari assuming Taylor's role upon her retirement in 1990. Over the years, the role of public relations coordinator evolved into communications manager and later the director of what was then the newly formed Marketing department.

Tassinari served three of seven presidents while at ESE and she feels that she owes Taylor endless thanks for her commitment to offering students and recent graduates experiential learning opportunities before such internships were commonplace.

In interviews with The Reminder and MassLive, Tassinari has reflected fondly on those first few years in her new role, where she faced many trials, such as motherhood, while becoming acclimated

to a position she was not yet at home in.

Throughout these tests, Tassinari persevered with aplomb. She once told MassLive that "the variety of each day brings and the vast number of people I [had] the opportunity to work with directly" made her job unique and gratifying. She loved her role at ESE, most notably her hand in the success of The Big E:

"On Opening Day, there is that magic moment when the National Anthem has been sung, the band organ has been cranked up, the sun is rising in the sky and people come streaming through the gates and you think 'I'm part of this great event and people from all over the Northeast have made the decision to spend their day with us in West Springfield.' It's exhilarating yet humbling, as well."

It is in her spirit of giving and her pride for the Western Massachusetts community that one finds Tassinari's most wonderful characteristic: her munificence. She looks for every opportunity to give her time to others, both at the ESE complex and beyond.

By the age of 30, Tassinari served on three boards. Over the years, she has added numerous other organizations to that list. She once shared that she has "learned that there is always a need for a skilled communications person. My advice to young people is, if you have this to offer, please start volunteering."

Tassinari leaves behind an unparalleled legacy and a Marketing team made stronger by her impact. **Anne-Alise Pietruska**, co-founder of Mellowship Entertainment and former ESE intern, has stepped into Tassinari's role as interim director of Marketing. We wish both women the best of luck in their current endeavors.



Top Right: **Noreen Tassinari** poses with ESE's former mascot, Mr. Biggie.

Upper Middle Right: **Tassinari** with **Gene Cassidy** and former ESE President & CEO **Wayne McCary** at her retirement celebration held at Partner's Restaurant.

Lower Middle Right: **Tassinari** with her husband **John**.

Bottom Right: From left, **Nancy Delson**, **Laura Kalisz**, **Tassinari** and **Robert Kelley**, look through a memory book of Tassinari's career at ESE.

EXPOSITION STAFF NEWS



Anne-Alise Pietruska
Interim Director of Marketing

Anne-Alise Pietruska, through her company Mellowship Entertainment, has assumed management of the Exposition's Marketing department, taking on the role of Interim Director of Marketing with support from Mellowship co-owner, **John Juliano**.

Pietruska, of Southwick, Mass., previously served as ESE's Brand Content and Entertainment Coordinator under **Noreen Tassinari** and Juliano's leadership from 2013-2017.

She went on to form Mellowship in 2017 with Juliano, and the duo continued to book talent, manage The Big E's entertainment program, and provide marketing assistance for ESE.

Pietruska now works with several Top 50 Fairs, among other clients in the live events realm, and is a member of numerous industry trade associations and agricultural organizations.

She received *BusinessWest's* 40 Under Forty distinction in 2021.



Laramie Coffey
Livestock Program Coordinator

Laramie Coffey, of Stillwater, Okla., joined the Agriculture department as Livestock Program Coordinator.

Coffey holds a Bachelor of Science in Agricultural Sciences and Natural Resources from Oklahoma State University where she majored in Agricultural Communications and minored in Agribusiness.

She previously interned with Oklahoma Youth Expo, Cattlemen's Congress, New Mexico State Fair and the American Hereford Association. She additionally worked with the Oklahoma 4-H Foundation prior to coming on board at ESE.

Coffey is responsible for coordinating competitive livestock events during The Big E and year-round shows; working with breed representatives, regional and national associations, and other agricultural fairs; as well as supporting livestock show facilitation, initiatives and educational programming.



Elizabeth Gourde
Communications & Public Relations Coordinator

Holyoke native Elizabeth Gourde joined ESE's Marketing department as a Public Relations and Marketing Intern at the end of August, and joined the Exposition's year-round staff in October.

Gourde earned a Bachelor's in English degree with a concentration in writing through Elms College in May of 2024 and took additional courses through Western New England University.

Writing, education and community outreach are cardinal to Gourde's character. During her undergraduate career, she revived Elms' literary magazine, pioneered a journalism internship and hosted a writing workshop at The Care Center in Holyoke.

In early 2023, she attended service trips to Texas and Puerto Rico; in February, she became Holyoke's 2024 Grand Colleen, an honor for young Irish women; and she recently joined the Homework House's Board of Directors.

CATHERINE PAPPAS: MENTOR & FRIEND



Left: From left, Mackenzie Coburn, Greg Sanocki, Catherine Pappas, Bridget Kelleher, Elizabeth Gourde and Anne-Alise Pietruska of ESE's Marketing department at The Big E's Big Mood ad campaign shoot.

ESE and the Marketing department extend gratitude to **Catherine Pappas**, former Public Relations & Communications Manager, for returning to her post on a part-time basis to serve as a mentor during staff transitions this past year.

Pappas, a West Springfield native, retired in 2022 after dedicating more than 32 years to ESE.

Her journey at ESE began in February 1990, after she covered The Big E in 1989 as a reporter for the Springfield Republican. Inspired by her experience, she made the leap from journalism to a full-time role here.

Over this past year, Pappas offered her guidance, trained new staff in media relations, assisted with interns, and gave us access to her institutional knowledge of the organization.

We thank Catherine for lending us her time and talents throughout the Fair season frenzy.

IN MEMORIAM

It is with great sadness we
note the passing of:

Paul Johnston, of West Newbury, Mass., former ESE Trustee, July 8, 2024.

Judy Jones, of Wilbraham, Mass., wife of former ESE General Manager **George Jones**, August 10, 2024.

Bea Negus, of Miami, Fla. formerly of North American Midway Entertainment, August 28, 2024.

Betty Jordt, of Blandford, Mass., former ESE Information employee, November 5, 2024.

Christy Corduff, of Dingle, Ireland, father of ESE restaurateur **Mick Corduff**, December 8, 2024.

EXPOSITION STAFF ON THE ROAD



Above: **Johnny Cloherty**, **Anne-Alise Pietruska**, **Brad Parker**, **Darby Moeller** and **Aaron Green** at IEBA.



Above: Fair representatives and concessionaires gather at the NICA Marketplace conference.



Above: **Samantha DePergola** and **Bridget Kelleher** at the MAFA Conference in Devens, Mass.

The International Entertainment Buyers Association (IEBA) is the leading not-for-profit trade organization for live entertainment industry professionals that scout and sell talent.

This year, the annual conference took place October 5-8, in Nashville, Tenn. **Anne-Alise Pietruska** both attended and presented at the event, speaking on the Ask Me Anything: A Fairs & Festivals Town Hall panel with **Johnny Cloherty**, of Songflencer; **Brad Parker**, of C3 Presents; **Darby Moeller**, of Sixthman, who moderated; and **Aaron Green**, of The Country Fest.

Gene Cassidy and **John Juliano** were also in attendance for agent meetings and networking opportunities.

Gene Cassidy, **John Juliano**, of Mellowship Entertainment, and **Anne-Alise Pietruska** attended the annual NICA Marketplace conference held November 9-12, at the Tuscany in Las Vegas, Nevada.

All three individuals spoke on various pieces of the program. Juliano was on the Prioritizing Infrastructure Upgrades panel and Pietruska presented on Using Interactive Technology & Marketing to Drive Customers to Your Location.

Cassidy closed out the program with motivational words about the relationship between NICA and the Fair industry—sharing insight on the beginnings of the organization and its continued importance to cultivate relationships between fairs and concessionaires.

The Massachusetts Agricultural Fairs Association's (MAFA) annual conference took place November 15-16 in Devens, Mass.

MAFA exists to support fairs in Massachusetts and celebrate their steps to promote farming in our home state.

In partnership with Eastern States Exposition and its ad agency, Mascola Group, MAFA hosts media awards to encourage growth within the fair industry and recognize outstanding achievement in marketing and advertising.

Samantha DePergola, Adult Education Coordinator at Storowton Village Museum, and **Bridget Kelleher**, Assistant Director of Marketing, presented this year's awards at the conference.

ESE PRESIDENT VISITS THE WHITE HOUSE

On October 24, **Gene Cassidy** accompanied representatives from the **Outdoor Amusement Business Association** (OABA), **International Association of Fairs and Expositions** (IAFE), **North American Midway Entertainment** (NAME), **Ray Cammack Shows, Inc.** (RCSFUN), **Wisconsin State Fair** and **Iowa State Fair** to Washington, D.C. where they appealed to Congress in an effort to pass the Carnivals Are Real Entertainment (CARE) Act.

The CARE Act advocates for the fair industry by addressing the labor shortage issue faced within the unique carnival setting and calls for a correction of laws that exclude mobile entertainment employers from utilizing the P non-immigrant visa classification to secure temporary, seasonal staff.

The group has traveled to our nation's capital on multiple occasions to advance the CARE Act and its companion legislation in the Senate, the Restoring Industry Development in Entertainment (RIDE) Act.

Cassidy shared that this was "the first time that important policy writers were directly communicated to, and [he] was surprised by their deep interest in the matter. The shared hope of the industry is that this is a step in the right direction to secure jobs and American business."

Without the reliable carnival labor force that often hails from beyond U.S. borders, our organizations cannot deliver the same caliber of entertainment that we have for years. Our missions are jeopardized by the lack of labor and will crumble without immediate change.

ESE is proud to be a figurehead for this change by petitioning in our nation's capital.



Top Right: **Gene Cassidy**, stands behind the lectern in The White House Press Room.

Bottom Right: The contingent of representatives from fairs and carnivals pose together inside The White House.



MELVIN JONES FELLOWSHIP

On November 8, the **Agawam Lions Club** recognized **Gene Cassidy** as a Melvin Jones Fellow (MJF) with a ceremony in the Brooks Building.

This prestigious title is named for the founder of Lions Club International Foundation (LCIF), Melvin Jones, and it is the highest award which the LCIF can bestow. The MJF recognizes outstanding donors for their commitment to LCIF. Gene is the first non-member to receive the MJF within the history of the Agawam Lions Club.

During the presentation, Gene showed the room a small lion statue from his own collection. "As a member of the West Springfield Lions Club, my grandfather kept this [lion figurine], which he was awarded in 1948, on his office desk. Now, I proudly keep it on mine. He was also a Melvin Jones Fellow, which makes this an even greater honor."



GOLDEN TRACTOR AWARD

ESE's Chairman of the Board, **David Henry**, was recently recognized by the Rhode Island Farm Bureau with the Golden Tractor Award for his work upholding and campaigning for the preservation of farming in the state of Rhode Island, as well as sustaining agriculture for future generations.

The Golden Tractor Award was first established by the Rhode Island Farm Bureau in the late 1900s as a version of the American Farm Bureau's Golden Plow Award, which celebrated individuals in Congress who have a solid, visible record of work on behalf of farmers and ranchers. Like its parent award, the Golden Tractor Award has been presented to political leaders and others who have blazed the way.

"Suffice to say, Dave is in good company," **Heidi Quinn**, Executive Director of the Rhode Island Farm Bureau, said in regard to the honor.

ESE has been a major part of Henry's life for more than 50 years. In his youth, he was an accomplished FFA (Future Farmers of America) student and served as Rhode Island's FFA president.

At the age of 12, Henry began growing Christmas trees as an FFA project on his family's 130-acre farm in Hope, Rhode Island. He continued to grow trees for nearly seven decades.

Henry is the fifth generation to farm the land, which has been in his family since 1851. For 67 years, he proudly operated **Henry's Christmas Tree Farm** until his retirement at the end of the 2023 season.

The tree farm, which opened back in 1956, was one of the first in the state where residents could pick their own Christmas trees.

Henry's story is a true testament to the importance of agriculture education. His FFA project turned into an enduring profession, and he has been part of thousands of customers' holiday traditions for a lifetime.

ESE is abundantly proud to be represented by long-time friend of the Fair and advocate for farmers everywhere.

*Top Middle: Daughter, **Kristen Cole**; ESE Chairman of the Board, **Dave Henry**; and his wife, **Linda Henry**, pose with the Golden Tractor Award.*

4-H BEEF SALE & DONATION

As ESE's 4-H Beef Sale continues to grow, so does its impact. The annual event, held during The Big E, raised more than \$250,000 this year—a 30% increase from 2023.

Year after year, the sale sets the Mallary Complex abuzz with auctioneers, business owners and individuals eager to support the hardworking 4-H students that give their all to raising their market animals.

This year, ESE bought two Mass.-raised steers; **Matilda Gervais'** Overall Commended Steer and **Zoey Violette's** Second Place Medium Weight Steer. The steers yielded enough beef to allow for a cumulative 450 lb. donation to local food shelters to combat food insecurity within our region.

On November 21, a team of ESE employees delivered the beef to the Parish Cupboard in West Springfield, accompanied by city mayor **William Reichelt**,

the Open Pantry in Springfield; and Friends of the Homeless in Springfield.

ESE's donation takes place during the lead-up to the holiday season, a time when our neighbors are often in the greatest need of assistance. By supporting America's future farmers and aiding the immediate community, ESE's mission comes full circle.

*Top Right: **Mackenzie Coburn**, **Gene Cassidy**, **Elizabeth Gourde** and **Catherine Pappas** at the 4-H Beef Auction.*

*Middle Right: **Elena Hovagimian**, **Dennis O'Connor** of the Parish Cupboard, West Springfield Mayor **Will Reichelt**, **Bob Fatsie** of the Parish Cupboard, **Gene Cassidy** and **Steve Ferraro**.*

*Bottom Right: **Steve Ferraro**, **Gene Cassidy** and **Michael Akers** at the Open Pantry.*



BEST FAIR AWARD

The public voted The Big E as "Best Fair in the Pioneer Valley" in *The Republican's* annual Reader Raves poll. The award ceremony was held at the Log Cabin, September 16. ESE is grateful for support from townies and tourists.