More Info: Bridget Kelleher
Assistant Director of Marketing
BKelleher@TheBigE.com
(413) 205-5039

For Immediate Release–West Springfield, Mass.

October 19, 2026

**OPENING NIGHT HUNTER CLASSIC AT THE BIG E PROVES RECORD-BREAKING COMPETITION**

The return of The Big E also meant a renaissance for the Eastern States Exposition (ESE) Heritage Horse Show, which kicked off with the highly anticipated Hunter Classic on Opening Night, Sept. 18. A significant increase in attendance rose the stakes.

Hunter week welcomed exhibitors from 17 different states, including Florida, Alabama, Pennsylvania, North Carolina and more. Attendance was up by 35%, with attendance in the Opening Night Hunter Classic increasing by almost 19%. There were 69 entries in that class, which is an all-time record high.

A significant $15,000 purse and entries welcome from all horses or ponies that have entered and shown in at least two over fences classes at The Big E within the last year made this competition particularly enticing for exhibitors. The two-round competition with open numerical scoring was conducted under the Hunter Classic format. The top twelve scorers were asked to return for the second round, and their first-round scores were carried over and added to the second-round scores to determine results.

The class was conducted with two fence heights at 3 ft. and 3.5 ft. to accommodate as many exhibitors as possible. The event was pinned as a singular class, and prize money and ribbons were awarded to the top twelve finishers.

Horses in this division were judged on performance and conformation. During jumps over fences, horses must maintain an even hunting pace or a speed that would keep them up with hounds and other horses on a foxhunt. Hunters must have smooth and even styles of jumps. The obstacles laid out should simulate the types of obstructions one might encounter in a true hunt, including stone walls, posts, fence rails and brush.

The winner of the $15,000 Opening Night Classic was "Luminare" owned by Linda Evans, who is from South Hadley, Mass. She operates Orion Farm with her business partner, Kim Ferro. The rider was Julie Hogan, and she is from Hadley, Mass.

Interested in learning more? Head to TheBigE.com to read more about the ESE Heritage Horse Show and check out EasternStatesExposition.com to find more equine events coming to the fairgrounds, including the beloved Equine Affaire, the nation’s premiere equine exposition, from Nov. 12-15. Tickets are available online now.

- 30 -

**About The Big E**

The Big E is the only multi-state fair in North America, celebrating the rich history, culture and traditions of the six New England states. As the principal event of Eastern States Exposition, The Big E presents the finest in agriculture, innovative, commercial, industrial and artistic developments, and the highest caliber of varied entertainment to the people of the United States for more than a century. The 17-day event has grown and become the largest event on the East Coast, recognized as the fourth largest fair in North America by its recent record annual attendance of 1.6 million fairgoers and counting. Head to TheBigE.com or follow us on social media to see what all the buzz is about.

Find images from the ESE Heritage Horse Show HERE.