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**EASTERN STATES EXPOSITION ANNOUNCES SHOWMEN'S PARK,
A PERMANENT TRIBUTE TO THE PEOPLE BEHIND THE FAIR**

Every great fair is built not by bricks or banners, but by people—the showmen whose work transforms empty lots into vibrant experiences shared by millions. Eastern States Exposition (ESE), producer of The Big E, hosted a press conference on Tuesday, February 10, at the International Independent Showmen's Association (IISA) Museum in Riverview, Fla., announcing Showmen's Park, a permanent walk of fame to be installed at its West Springfield, Mass., fairgrounds. The initiative honors the individuals, families, organizations and businesses whose visions and work have shaped The Big E and the broader outdoor amusement industry.

Riverview, Gibsonton and the Greater Tampa Bay region serve as an active hub, home and winter quarters for many of the industry's showmen—the concessionaries, exhibitors, carnival and amusement operators, performers and impresarios who work at fairs throughout the country. Though essential to the American story, many of these individuals rarely receive public recognition for their contributions. The Exposition's goal is to amend this with Showmen's Park, which will be located south of ESE's Coliseum, in the area that is home to North American Midway Entertainment's (NAME) Kiddieland during The Big E.

Gene Cassidy, president and CEO of Eastern States Exposition; John Juliano, Jr., co-founder of Mellowship Entertainment; and Anne-Alise Pietruska, director of Marketing for Eastern States Exposition and co-founder of Mellowship Entertainment, announced the inaugural class of inductees during the press conference. In attendance were inductees, their families and representatives, industry media and associates in the area for the National Independent Concessionaires Association (NICA) Business Expo & Fare Foods Food Show, Outdoor Amusement Business Association (OABA) events and the International Independent Showmen's Association's (IISA) Gibtown Trade Show. Collective membership of these organizations exceeds 8,000.

"Eastern States Exposition has a \$1.2 billion annual regional economic impact. We are one of nearly 1,400 annual fairs and fairgrounds in the United States which have a collective measured impact of more than \$50 billion, according to the International Association of Fairs and Expositions," Pietruska said during the press conference. "We outpace entire sectors of the entertainment and tourism industries. I share this to emphasize the magnitude of what this industry represents, and what everyone here

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contributes to. Our work fuels the economy, supports small businesses, sustains agriculture and creates jobs. Our individual impact is often far more significant than we give ourselves credit for.”

Showmen’s Park 2026 inductees named during the press conference include Johnny and Tina Doolan of Doolan Amusement Co.; Joie Chitwood, Jr. of Joie Chitwood Thrill Show; Bob Commerford of R.W. Commerford & Sons; Bob and Bea Negus of Conklin Shows; Fred Pittroff, creator and manufacturer of the Giant Slide; and North American Midway Entertainment.

Following the announcement, Juliano said, “All of these individuals, and those within NAME, have made an enduring impact on not only Eastern States Exposition and the broader industry, but on us as fair managers. They were our mentors, our friends and set the standard for how to be best in the business.”

The unveiling of the stones at Showman’s Park will take place on Opening Day of The Big E, Friday, September 18, on the ESE grounds.

The press event coincided with the opening of a new ESE exhibit at the IISA Museum, further underscoring the historic partnership between ESE and the showmen who have helped build generations of fair experiences. The exhibit is located on the second floor of the IISA Museum.

ESE extends a special thanks to Lee Stevens, two-time past president of the IISA and executive director of the IISA Museum; Joe Pottillo, past president of the IISA and owner of Pottillo Specialty Service, Inc.; Vinny Valentino of the IISA and Mellowship Entertainment; and Mike Pietruska of Design Presentations.

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About Eastern States Exposition

Founded in 1916, Eastern States Exposition (ESE) is a not-for-profit organization based in West Springfield, Massachusetts, dedicated to advancing agriculture, education and community. The Eastern States Exposition complex hosts more than 120 annual events, consumer and trade shows, including its signature events, The Big E—the largest event on the East Coast and fourth largest fair in North America—Hooplandia, Fiber Festival of New England, Maple Harvest Day and Yuletide at Storrowton. Through its year-round events, educational programming and community initiatives, ESE generates more than \$1.2 billion in regional economic impact, supports thousands of jobs and welcomes millions of visitors each year while honoring more than a century of tradition and innovation.

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Above, L to R: ESE President and CEO Gene Cassidy and John Juliano of Mellowship Entertainment introduce the Showmen's Park 2026 inductees at a press conference in Riverview, Fla.



Above: Anne-Alice Pietruska, ESE Director of Marketing and co-founder of Mellowship Entertainment, welcomes guests to the Showmen's Park press conference in Riverview, Fla.

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Above, L to R: Mike Pietruska and Anne-Alise Pietruska, both of whom were instrumental in devising and producing the Eastern States Exposition exhibit at the IISA Museum, stand before the display.

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