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**STEPHEN MORRISSEY OF EASTERN STATES EXPOSITION
WINS HOWDY AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE IN HOSPITALITY**

Each year, Explore Western Mass hosts the Howdy Awards Gala, a celebration of the region's finest individuals in hospitality. In 2025, Eastern States Exposition (ESE) was well represented: President and CEO Gene Cassidy presented the Spotlight Winner; Anne-Alise Pietruska, director of Marketing, presented the Retail category; and numerous employees attended to honor the organization's two finalists, Freddie Marion and Stephen Morrissey. During the gala, Morrissey was announced as the winner of the Transportation category.

Explore Western Mass developed the Howdy Awards program to shine the spotlight on individuals working in public-facing roles. Recipients are the best of the best within the hospitality industry, surpassing all expectations within their career roles. The logic is simple; when visitors are treated well, they feel inclined to return to the region, which means more dollars go back to the local economy, maintaining jobs and supporting businesses.

Morrissey, of Springfield, Mass., is an employee in the Operations department. Both during The Big E and throughout many of ESE's other events, he directs traffic, parks vehicles and, due to his caring nature, is often spotted going above and beyond his role. He never hesitates to retrieve keys from locked cars, shuttle guests, accommodate those with ADA accessibility limitations, find missing vehicles or reunite lost visitors with their friends and families. He is always quick to lend a helping hand to those in need.

"I am here with a team that is just a small number of people from Eastern States [Exposition] out of all of the people that we work with," Morrissey said after accepting his award. "The reason I'm there is because I love those people. I got to know them when I joined less than two years ago, and I love the people that come and visit."

"I knew about the 17-day Fair [before working at ESE]," Morrissey continued, "but I didn't know about all the shows that run there all year long. The greatest gift I have is to be able to greet people and hope that they have a fun time at the Fair and a fun time at the shows that they attend."

In 2024, Morrissey was recognized as a Host of the Day during The Big E. This internal hospitality award is presented to individuals that perform their role with a smile and embody the mission of ESE by inspiring, entertaining and connecting people across New England and beyond. If you ask Steve Ferraro, ESE's director of Operations and Morrissey's manager, he will allege that he knew from first point of contact that Morrissey would be a standout employee.

"The flipside of me is always safety first," Morrissey said. "You might hear me scold you if you're speeding too fast on site! But, if I can make you smile, that's a homerun. If I can make you laugh, that's a grand slam. That,

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for me, is everything. You people mean more to me than you know, and that's why I try to make your day the best it can possibly be," he concluded.

ESE congratulates Morrissey and Marion and welcomes visitors to do so, too, throughout the 17 days of The Big E, September 12-28, and beyond.

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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 Storowton Village Museum, Eastern States Farmers Market & Wine Café and Storowton 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, or find us on social media.

About The Big E

The Big E is America's only multi-state fair celebrating the rich history, culture and traditions of the six New England states. As the principal event of Eastern States Exposition, The Big E has presented the finest livestock; agriculture; innovative commercial, industrial, and artistic developments; and the highest caliber of varied entertainment to the people of the northeastern United States for over a century. The 17-day event has grown to become the largest fair in the Northeast.



Above: Stephen Morrissey, an employee in the Operations department at Eastern States Exposition, gives an acceptance speech after receiving his Howdy Award.

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Above: Eastern States Exposition President and CEO Gene Cassidy announces the Spotlight Winner at the Howdy Awards Gala.



Above: Anne-Alise Pietruska, Eastern States Exposition's director of Marketing, announces the winner of the Retail category at the Howdy Awards Gala.



Above: Freddie Marion, an employee in the Entertainment department at Eastern States Exposition and Howdy Award nominee, poses with his wife, Patti, at the Howdy Awards Gala.

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