

# Headlines & More



## “Profit Fest 23” Draws Rave Reviews



NEFA RECENTLY HELD ITS 16TH FALL MANAGEMENT CONFERENCE IN NOVEMBER AT THE NEWLY OPENED ARTISAN HOTEL AT TUSCAN VILLAGE IN SALEM, NH. BY ALL ACCOUNTS THE PROGRAM WAS A TREMENDOUS SUCCESS. THE PROGRAM FEATURED NEW AND INNOVATIVE TOPICS WITH SPEAKERS THAT HAVE NOT BEEN PREVIOUSLY FEATURED FOR THE EVENT.

“After 16 years, it can be difficult to find new and innovative ways to attract people, offered NEFA President Larry Fish, “but Peter Blake and our ProfitFest Committee have done a terrific job. As an added enhancement for all those that came this year, NEFA Hired a professional photographer to take professional head shots of all the attendees. We always preach professionalism, but how many small business owners have a professional head shot for their website? Business cards? We wanted to have a take-a-way for everyone they could use. You are the face of your business, and your head shot IS your business card. It turned out even better than we hoped. People LOVED it.”

The program started on a somber note with a moment of silence for John Dallas, former NEFA President and industry icon in the Boston area who had passed away earlier in the week. Afterwards, the 17 vendor exhibitors introduced themselves and Mary Scalco of DLI took the spotlight as she delivered a State of the Industry address. She highlighted some of the interesting findings from the recent DLI recent cost survey of the membership and presented some of the information from Cleaner’s Supply’s recent Consumer Attitude Survey. Her messages were clear. The industry must be watchful for the continuing escalation of costs and recognize ways to control those costs and to account for the impact on the business. The other clear message was for the industry to understand the changes in consumer attitude and purchasing choices. The future of the industry remains bright, but you must recognize trends and be willing to adapt and change to take advantage of the opportunities.

Those messages were not lost as the next speaker, Nathaniel Dubasik of Metalprogetti, who picked up on those themes and explored automation. While his presentation focused on some of the strides his company has made in automation like unattended kiosks, locker systems, and automatic baggers, he also explored the need to reduce the labor force for

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NOVEMBER/DECEMBER, 2023

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### EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT

Peter Blake

Cell: 617-791-0128

### NEFA OFFICE

P.O. Box 920

Pelham, NH 03076

617-791-0128

[www.nefabricare.com](http://www.nefabricare.com)

[peter@nefabricare.com](mailto:peter@nefabricare.com)

## EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE...

# Happy New Year!

USUALLY AT THIS TIME OF THE YEAR WE LIKE TO REFLECT ON THE PAST, EVALUATE WHERE WE ARE. WE MAKE NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTIONS AND PLANS TO MAKE BIG CHANGES GOING FORWARD.

Last year I made only one resolution --to be better than I was. I think I accomplished that, but I have a very long way to go, so I am going to make the same resolution this year. I want to keep getting better, and I want to help you do the same. Wherever you and your business want to improve and be better, I want to help in any way I can.



*Peter Blake,  
NEFA Executive Director*

One of the keys to growing any business is effective networking. I think it is as important for me as an association executive as it is for you as an entrepreneur. One of the best programs DLI has established is the Peer-to-Peer open forum zoom calls held every Tuesday at 11:30 EST. This has been a tremendous resource for the membership, for DLI Leadership and even association executives like me. It keeps me in constant touch with the members and what questions drycleaners are looking for answers to. I find it's a great way for me to keep a handle on all the important issues facing our industry. I then can take those issues and try and help cleaners to answer those challenges and take advantage of opportunities.

One of the next steps was to go out and meet with our members and prospective members. To get out of the office, and on the road, to explore the challenges and opportunities our members were experiencing by visiting with cleaners up and down the eastern seaboard. I set a personal goal to visit at least 50 DLI members plants and 100 non-member plants in the course of 2023, and I am pleased to say I EXCEEDED that number. The information I was able to learn is invaluable. I plan to do even more in 2024. I have raised that Goal to 200 total visits. This is your chance to reach out to me if you are somewhere within my territory and let me know if you would like me to stop by at some point. I would love the chance to meet you and see how we can work together. This industry is full of great people and I would love to help aid in your success.

## PLANT VISITS

My 2023 road tour kicked off in Central Florida where, over the course of three days, I visited 13 nonmembers and 18 members so I am almost a quarter of the way to my goal. As I said before with DLI Zoom calls, this networking provides an opportunity to learn firsthand where people are struggling, and I can use that information to better develop tools and programs to help them succeed. I am proud to say we have 3 new members because of this trip, and had a few others seriously considering joining the DLI/SEFA team.

Over the course of the year, I did more of these types of trips and signed up over 15 new members to NEFA/SEFA/MAC, and reinforced the benefits DLI and Affiliate Membership provide our member. There is no question -- our members are better positioned to succeed.

I was really amazed at some of the things I saw and some of the things I learned. Keep in mind -- I am approaching each of these through the front door, so my initial impressions are as a consumer would see the plant. I always take a few moments to look around the call office and make mental notes of what I see and how I am greeted. It helps to see how that particular company is positioning their business.

Continued on page 7

## John Dallas: NEFA Leader, Industry Icon



JOHN G. DALLAS OF NORWELL, PASSED AWAY PEACEFULLY AT HOME WITH HIS FAMILY AFTER A SLOW BATTLE WITH ALZHEIMER'S DISEASE EARLIER THIS FALL.

"John was an amazing person," offered Peter

Blake, NEFA Executive Vice President, "and he meant a lot to me. He was not only an industry icon, but well known in his community for his generosity, infectious spirit, and unrelenting joy in life. Those fortunate enough to know him will miss him dearly, for he had a way of making all our lives better. He left a tremendous legacy behind and we are all so grateful."

He was a loyal member of NEFA, Past President, and served on the DLI Board of Directors.

He was born on October 16, 1952, in Krenti, Evritanias, Greece, a rural mountain village. From a young age he was thoughtful and curious. He built a make-believe shop by the stream at the bottom of the field below his family home and dreamt of his future. Like

many others at the time, he and his family moved to Athens in the 1960s. He attended Rizarios Ecclesiastical School before serving in the Greek Army.

In 1977 at the age of 24 he moved to America, cracking open a world of new dreams and new opportunities. On his first day here, he met Eleftheria Kotsianas while wearing a light blue safari suit. They married the following year and lived in Framingham, MA, where their two daughters were born. John began working in dry cleaning, seeking mentorship from his colleagues, bosses, and friends and in 1986 John and Terry purchased their first store in Norwell. John became involved in his church community, various Greek and American philanthropic societies, and several industry groups, forever gaining knowledge and building a network around him of love and respect. He helped handfuls of family members and friends to start their own American dreams. He was a giant motivator for all, booker of fantastic vacations, parties, concerts, and sporting events that lifelong dreams are made of.

John is survived by his wife Eleftheria, daughter Angela, son-in-law Ali John Mehdian, their four children, Nima, Navid, Eleftheria, and Yianni, his daughter Vikki, son-in-law Giovanni Petruzzello, his three sisters, Persephone Triantafilou, Maria Makkas, and Athanasia Dallas-Ertsenian and their families. All will be honored by their memories of him forever. He is preceded in death by his father George, mother Angeliki, and sister Zoe.

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## Learn from Your Peers and Share Your Expertise



EVERY TUESDAY MORNING AT 11:30 EST, CLEANERS FROM ACROSS THE COUNTRY JOIN TOGETHER ON DLI/NEFA'S PEER-TO-PEER CALLS.

The calls are designed as an open forum for members to ask questions,

pose thoughts or ideas, and to voice concerns over the latest happenings. On the calls, people share their ideas, problems and successes. Some of the cleaners who participate have very large operations, while others have only one location and just a couple of employees. But, they all say they gain meaningful information to help their business succeed in difficult times.

The open forum design allows for a very diverse and wide range of topics. Members are free to ask anything and to offer their opinions. DLI is on the call to facilitate discussion and to help bring up newsworthy topics if needed. Recent conversations have included discussions on:

- Poly Recycling & Reusable Garment Bags
- Hours of operations & Holiday schedules
- Tax relief and incentives for hiring
- How to find reliable staff
- How to better develop routes and increase sales
- How to communicate with customers and use of texting
- Marketing best practices and the viability of some methods
- Lead generation & follow-up including incentives

"This is one of the best programs developed for our members," offered Peter Blake, NEFA Executive Director. "It is a great way to get feedback from the people that are facing the same challenges, the same issues and are trying to accomplish very similar goals. You have this community of people ready and willing to offer their experience, and I hope you will take advantage of it. One of the best benefits membership gives you is access to a tremendous community of people who are invested in your success."

The calls start at 11:30 a.m. EST. To join, go to:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/85363286735Zz09>

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under the CARES  
Act, is a refundable

tax credit that rewards businesses who kept employees on their payroll during the COVID-19 pandemic shutdown. Many businesses do not think they qualify, but the rules have changed and now there are multiple ways to get the money you are owed. In the beginning there was a prohibition against using both the PPP and the ERC -- but that restriction has been deleted. There is also a general misconception that the revenue qualifier was the only pathway to filing for the Credit, but there are additional criteria that are non-revenue qualifiers such as a significant change in process or business changes. Companies that had to change strategies

and change their scope of business may also qualify.

There is currently a moratorium on new applications, but the program is not over. There is an incredible time lapse between filing and receiving the actual credit owed, so the IRS has paused accepting new applications. This doesn't mean you should wait. Now is the perfect time to explore the Tax Credit and see if it is applicable to your situation. If it is, then you can prepare all the necessary documents and get in the queue and be ready when the ERC re-opens for new applicants.

The good news is many businesses have already claimed and received ERTC for both 2020 & 2021. The bad news is the majority of small businesses have not filed for the program or have not taken full advantage of all they are able to. The truth of the matter is the program is new and has been evolving and changing constantly. The more you look into the program the more nuances you notice that can have a direct impact on the applicability for dry-cleaners. The maximum relief is over \$26,000 PER EMPLOYEE!

Not sure if you qualify? Contact Peter Blake at the NEFA office and he can help you research your applicability. Contact us at 617-791-0128/peter@nefabricare.com.

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# Looking Forward to 2024

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One of the overriding themes that gets brought up on the DLI weekly Zooms is the term “drycleaners” and whether there needs to be a dynamic shift to something that better illustrates what we do. I think this question and dilemma was on full display during these visits. As an industry we discussed the proper terms to be using like: Fabricare Specialist, Garment Care Professional, Cleaners. One thing I found that was of particular interest during my field visits was the proliferation of companies that have a simple “Cleaners” sign out on the marquis or above their store. Some have not even done anything with the internal signs to differentiate their entity from others in the industry. Almost making “Cleaners” a generic service. I think this has two effects. It reinforces some of the negative stereotypes that cleaners are all the same, but at the same time it provides a unique opportunity for cleaners to brand themselves and set themselves apart. If you don’t do anything to differentiate yourselves from the competition, then what service are you selling? Why should a consumer choose you?

Not only do these generic dry cleaners using poor signage, but there are also no logos prevalent, no uniforms, no attempt for a positive experience. I did see a dramatic difference between visiting members and non-members. I saw members of organizations like DLI were more apt to have uniforms. To have professional signage. To be better informed of the business itself. I wish it was just because they were members and it was automatic, but actually I think it is because members of professional associations know they need to invest in their business to excel and succeed.

One cleaner I visited recounted a survey project they did on brand recognition where they had college interns surveying consumers leaving drycleaning plants and only 7% of the consumers could accurately recall them name of the cleaning shop they had just used. Only 10% could recall the name of the person that waited on them. True story – and one that demonstrates the need and the opportunity to really strengthen your brand awareness and set yourselves apart from the industry. There is tremendous potential there.

I am a firm believer that branding matters. Drycleaning and laundry may be seen as a luxury service, but it is a valuable, needed and desired service when done right. You need to ask yourself what makes you different and why you are different from the other cleaners in your area. Once you can answer those two basic questions then you can begin to focus attention on your brand.

## FUTURE LOOKS BRIGHT

Dry cleaning is important. It prolongs the life of your wardrobe. It keeps people looking their best and helps build confidence. We often fear the younger generation won’t appreciate the service, but I think there is great potential to expand your services. The younger generation is more apt to spend money to save time. They value their time a great deal more than our generation does. Trust me, there is a place for drycleaning, and the future is brighter than you think. I am just starting to learn about the effect of the secondary market for apparel. Whether it is high-end re-sellers like Poshmark and TheRealReal, or vintage clothing stores, there is a growing used clothing market with some very highly fashionable and very difficult to clean garments. I have even heard that people are trading clothing like I used to trade baseball cards. At least with baseball cards, I didn’t have to clean and sanitize them, lol.

Another observation was the lack of professional training for the Customer Service personnel. I was amazed at how I was greeted in a few shops. Counter people were unable to identify the name of the manager or even the owner. I firmly believe that some counter personnel didn’t even know the owner’s name – or what cleaners they were working for. They were just punching the clock at “The Cleaners”.

Am I wrong? Secret shop some of your competition or just drive down the main streets in towns nearby and share your observations. There is a very wide discrepancy between cleaners out there, and some very big differences. My suggestion to you is to look at your front counter with a fresh set of eyes. Really look at the image you and your staff are projecting and make sure it is the message you want to convey.

I would love to hear your thoughts... or bring you a cup of coffee and talk about the industry. If you are in my service areas, let me know and I will try and make it happen in 2024! As for me, I sincerely hope I can just be better than I used to be and keep moving forward. I would love to play a part in you also meeting that simple goal in the coming year.

## Peter Blake

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# ProfitFest a Huge Success

Continued from page 1

cleaners. Attendees all shared their belief that labor was one of the most significant expenses in the industry and the fear is that it will keep getting worse. The more we can do with newer technology, the better off the industry will be.

“One of the best features of our conferences is the diversity of the vendors,” offered Peter Blake, NEFA Executive Director, “and having companies like Sankosha, Unipress, Forenta, EzProducts International, XplorSpot, SMRT, RISE Engineering enables the attendees to immediately explore some of the ideas brought out in the workshops.”

Trudy Adams of LaundryLux led the next session on diversification. She unveiled her thoughts on incorporating more wash-dry-fold into the industry. She also discussed a new trend where some drycleaners are incorporating smaller laundromats in their drop stores to increase business, better utilize staffing and resources, and to increase profitability of satellite locations. One of her key concepts is the need to take a look outside of the traditional drycleaning garments and to look into marketing a greater menu of services including household items, laundry items, even homewares like patio cushions and rugs. If you don’t currently do them onsite – find a wholesaler you can send them out to so you can still market yourself as a full service textile care facility.

NEFA’s Brainstorming Luncheon is a popular feature of NEFA’s ProfitFest conferences. It enables a great networking opportunity for the attendees and the vendors. It provides time for some of the key experts to visit with each of the attendees during lunch and to lead some small group discussions to learn more about potential services.

After lunch, Glen Gould of Drycleaning Connection in Peachtree City, GA gave a keynote address that was the talk of the conference. His presentation, “Fired! With Enthusiasm”, included a bit of his backstory and a unique look at the consumer trends and workforce issues of the day. His presentation struck a chord with everyone in the room as he outlined the need for enthusiasm-based leadership. He captivated the audience as he showed what is needed to succeed in today’s climate. He explored ways to help build your team – and to understand the dynamics and attitudes of your team members. Understanding what to expect and how to motivate are essential concepts in knowing how to reach them and increase productivity.

“Every year we feature a spotlight drycleaner,” continued Blake, “and this year we were fortunate enough to have a drycleaner who



*(From top left, clockwise) DLI and NEFA Boards hosted a Welcome Cocktail Party, Glen Gould stole the show with a program on leadership, NEFA hired a professional photographer to supply head shots for attendees, the brainstorming luncheon is a great personal way to discuss challenges.*



is also an accomplished author and a sought-after member of national speakers bureaus. He has given similar presentations to national audiences for large corporations, but his industry experience enabled him to dial down on the specific issues facing everyone in the room.”

Mike Nesbit of Nesbit Consulting and former DLI President was the final Saturday Speaker. His program, “Diversify or Die” provided attendees with a new concept on maximizing the under utilized areas of the business. He showed ways you can look outside the industry and develop other revenue generating business. One of the key concepts he is developing is a network of cleaners to act as return service centers for the overwhelming online shopping industry. The program opened up many of the attendees’ minds and got them thinking “outside the box” for ways they can increase revenues even outside the mainstay fabric care services.

After a great day filled with education, fellowship and networking, the attendees could relax with a few cocktails and some great food at NEFA’s Silent Auction & cocktail party.

“The greatest benefits of these programs”, offered Larry Fish, “remains the discussion over cocktails. When you talk to your peers and discuss what you have heard. How the ideas can be applied. The return program might not be for everyone – but it gets you

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# ProfitFest a Huge Success

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thinking. How can I utilize my staff? My Counters? How can my drop stores become more profitable? Will a coin-op work in that location? These ideas and more are all food for thought and the networking is the best part of the event for me.”

## SUNDAY PROGRAM

NEFA traditionally uses Sunday morning for Team Development and Customer Service topics and speakers. This Sunday was one of the best in 16 years. Dennis Zaia from FOCUS Associates worked with NEFA Board Member Carlyn Parker of Dependable Cleaners to explore the best ways to communicate with team members and the public. The presentation explored the use of DISC profiles, and each attendee was given a profile and it was scored on premises so they could see what category they are best identified as. Once the category is established, communication strategies can be developed to best reach and work with those team members. You can learn the most effective ways of motivating and teaching team members. The program included carefully designed team exercises that portrayed those traits and how they are manifested during tasks. The program was one of the weekends’ highlights.

Afterwards, NEFA Board Member Rechelle Balanzat of Juliette Technologies brought in Zahra Sahebzada a Global Flagship Manager for Dolce & Gabbana to discuss techniques of making every customer a VIP. The VIP experience is essential to reach the couture market and the need to understand how and what these consumers value is critical to success. The program featured a “fireside chat” approach with the audience listing in on a conversation as Rechelle interviewed Zahra. The style was completely different than the traditional lecture and let people listen in and be more involved in the discussion. Many of the attendees felt the style and information shared was one of the best of the weekend. They explored the need to recognize high fashion. To learn more about your customers, and



(From top left, clockwise) DLI President Kathy Benzinger and Peter Blake welcome two new NEFA Members, Saturday Night dinner at Tuscan with Table side flaming Parmesan pasta, learning about the industry with vendors from across the country, and participating in team building/communications exercises!



the need to empower your team managers to act to correct any problem immediately. Time is critical and team managers have to have some authority to make situations right.

## LOOKING AHEAD

We are very proud of what we accomplished,” concluded Fish, “and we are already looking ahead how to make ProfitFest ’24 unique. We are gathering names of speakers, have some suggestions for new additional value-added ideas for the attendees. This year it was the headshots for everyone, and we will have to find a way to raise our game even higher next year!”



(From left to right) Networking is one of the strongest elements of ProfitFest: Attendees relaxing at the Silent Auction Saturday night, visiting vendor tables, joining in the discussion on employee communications strategies with leader Dennis Zaia.



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