

# Headlines & More



## First Ever Virtual Fall Fest Expo a Huge Success



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WITH NEFA'S TRADITIONAL FALL FEST PUT ON HOLD DUE TO THE STATE MANDATED COVID-19 RESTRICTIONS, MEMBERS WERE LEFT SCRAMBLING TO FILL THE EDUCATIONAL VOID.

In order to help answer those needs, NEFA, PDCA, and SEFA joined forces to produce the first ever virtual Fall Fest Expo. The virtual event was designed to combine some of the most important aspects of tradi-

tional trade shows: education, equipment demonstrations, and peer-to-peer interactions, in a virtual setting that would allow for people to attend from across the country. The on-line Zoom event brought outstanding speakers straight to the computers of those attending.

Among the highlights was keynote speaker was Beth Z., Your Nerdy Best Friend, whose lively presentation was full of suggestions and web sites that showed attendees tech tools that can help and protect their businesses.

Trudy Adams, a popular expert on customer relations, gave tips on preparing employees to give profitable consumer service. James Peuster spoke on creating a sales culture with your route team. There were tips on finishing, maintenance and specialized stain removal.

Economist Chris Kuehl talked about what he thought the just concluded election would mean for businesses next year, expecting pretty solid growth. There were panel discussions on many aspects of our businesses, including equipment maintenance, employee relations, legal questions and more.

The event was recorded allowing participants to see the sessions either live or on demand. The recordings will be available until February 28, 2021 for viewing.

Due to the success of Fall Fest EXPO, plans are underway for Spring Fest EXPO, April 14-16, 2021 and the second annual Fall Fest EXPO during the weeks of November 1-12, 2021.

*There is still time to register and access all the recordings. Visit [www.nefabricare.com](http://www.nefabricare.com) to register or call Peter Blake at 617-791-0128 for more information.*

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NOVEMBER/DECEMBER, 2020

### IN THIS ISSUE

Executive Director's Report: Time to Turn the Page on 2020 .....2

In Memoriam: Alvin Reiner of Mayflower Laundry & HCDLA .....4

Pandemic Relief Payments Give Employees Assistance .....5

Thank You for Making the Fall Fest Expo a Huge Success .....6

MA Family Medical Leave Act Changes Take Effect .....7

NEFA/DLI Members Find Strength in Unity .....10

Allied Trade Members .....11

NEFA/DLI Live Training Schedule for January .....12

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## EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR'S MESSAGE...

# Time to Turn the Page on 2020

AS I WRITE THIS, WE ARE NEARING THE END OF A MISERABLE 2020 AND WELCOMING THE HOPE OF A NEW YEAR. MY SINCERE WISH FOR ALL OF YOU IS FOR A 2021 THAT IS A DAMN SITE BETTER THAN THIS PAST YEAR.

Trust me, we have weathered a great storm, but the new year is bringing with it some much needed hope. There is a light at the end of this long dark tunnel -- I just wish it were a lot brighter and closer than it looks to be. President Trump has finally signed the new stimulus bill we have been asking for providing more PPP funding, making forgiveness much easier for loans \$150,000 and less, and providing clarity on the tax-free intent of the loans. With that package comes more Pandemic unemployment Aid in the amount of \$300/week which still provides an incentive to keep working.

The vaccines are starting to be rolled out nationwide. The first tier of recipients have already gotten them, the first responders and essential workers are next. Within the next few months, my hope is that it will be widely available to all so we can truly get people back to work and start being able to end "social distancing" a term I hope to never hear again.

My firm belief is that January will also bring about the rollback of some of the state and local restrictions on people and activities that have been strengthening since Thanksgiving week. I know I am not alone when I say I have Covid-fatigue and I am ready to turn the page and start rebuilding our industry.

## TIME TO BEGIN THE REBUILD

Covid-19 has left an indelible mark on our industry. Some of the changes we have seen are here for the foreseeable future and we need to accept that, and make those changes a part of our on-going plan to revitalize fabric care.

Pre-covid, our customers had been making a slow steady crawl to a more casual appearance and dress. It was always headed in that direction, and drycleaners had been slowly dipping their toes into the water and deciding whether this was a worthwhile venture -- but along comes Covid and makes us jump into the deep end and figure it out. Now this segment of the market is far ahead of all projections, and it is now here to stay. We are going to have to accept it, adapt to it, and figure out how we can make it profitable.

The same can be said for pick-up and delivery. Amazon has been conditioning our clientele to expect instant gratification and delivery of whatever they need or want for years. Along comes Covid, and now people don't want to have to go out for anything. Contactless Delivery is now the norm and is something every business owner has had to adapt to. The public health crisis will dissipate in the coming months, but the consumer's thirst for convenience won't. They have built it into their lifestyle and now enjoy the freedom of being catered to and the demand for these services will continue to grow.

As we start to claw and climb our way back, we need to reflect on some of the other changes in society. With less physical and social contact, social media, email, and texting have become even more popular and even more essential to keeping connected. The fabricare industry needs to embrace those changes as well. We need to develop a



*Peter Blake,  
NEFA Executive Director*

Continued on page 4

# Turning the Page

Continued from page 2

multitude of ways we send our messages. There is no easy answer: It takes hard work, dedication, consistency, and a vary diversified approach. You need to understand and embrace as many different ways of communicating with your customers, and potential customers, that you can. I can't tell you how many times I get asked: "What is the best way to contact my customers?" My answer is always the same: "EVERY way you can." Email is a GREAT tool, but it can't stand alone. Texting is a GREAT service, but it will only reach a fraction of your customers.

Small businesses need to develop a comprehensive plan that includes a good website, a business Facebook page, a strong social media presence, an email marketing strategy, and a texting service. All these tools should be used in a coordinated fashion, and in many respects should be backed up with some direct mail marketing. If you are like most cleaners, you have some of that list, but not all of it. You should be working towards a program that will encompass all of it. Don't worry – you are not alone. If you need help there are plenty of low cost, high value programs out there to assist you. I can help. Reach out – DLI can help – reach out!

Let me give you one key piece of advice: Don't Wait. If you only have a couple of these tools in place, start using them. Build up your presence. Don't have everyone's email address? Don't wait – start a program and build to it. The longer you wait, the farther you fall behind, and the more excuses you will find to delay. Make a plan to use what you have and then add and build upon it.

Not only have the lines of communication changed, so have the messages. Time is one of the most important commodities we have. We need to demonstrate the time savings of our industry. We need to promote the benefits of lessening the workload and increasing family time. Trust me, I recently endured a couple days of working while Zoom-schooling my 5-year old grandson, and then taking care of dinner. There is no time or energy left to do laundry or anything else. People that work from home are far more likely to be stressed for time and in need of services like ours!

People are recognizing the value of local businesses. They realize that these main street businesses are important to the landscape of the community and help build a strong foundation. People see the need to keep businesses in town open and thriving. Your messaging can capitalize on that by promoting yourself, but also use cross promotion with other businesses that are dealing with the same stresses. You can find some great local marketing partnerships with companies that provide landscaping services, lawn care, car washes, and house cleaning services. Take advantage of alliances you can build within a community.

Don't fall into the trap of always looking for a "Drycleaning Customer", be on the lookout for people that live a certain lifestyle. People that value their time and recognize service. People that care for their personal items like their yard, their vehicles, their homes – these are where you may find your biggest potential growth.

## LOOKING AHEAD

Like many of you, I have had to make drastic changes in my life. For those who have gotten to know me over the years – I am not built well for "Social Distancing". I enjoy people. I like meeting

with people, sharing insights and experiences, learning from them, and helping people in their efforts to make their businesses more successful. I will be happy to never hear those 2 words again in that context, and it is my profound hope this isn't one of the changes that remain. We can't lose the humanity that is so important, and my fear is that this distancing has caused far too many people to withdraw from society. The more we accept it, the more normal it all seems.

I for one, can't wait to get back out to meeting people, have live conferences and board meetings, and join society once again. SEFA is planning on holding its first live Board Meeting in April and are discussing potential Educational programs for as early as February. Like you, we are all anxious to move forward and start rebuilding some of the momentum we lost. I can't wait to be able to see and meet with you all again. I firmly believe the worst is now behind us and we are in fact "Turning the Page".

Help us all to reconnect... reach out and share your stories with me. The good, the bad... your hopes for 2021 and beyond. Share your fears of what lies ahead.

## Peter Blake

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# Industry Icon Alvin Reiner Passes Away at 95



INDUSTRY ICON ALVIN REINER (PICTURED ABOVE, 3RD FROM RIGHT AT A HCLDA BREAKFAST MEETING) OF MAYFLOWER LAUNDRY PASSED AWAY RECENTLY AT THE AGE OF 95. HE WAS A FORMER IFI PRESIDENT, AND A TRUE ICON IN THE DRYCLEANING INDUSTRY.

Al was well known in Connecticut where he remained at the helm of Mayflower Laundry and Dry Cleaning since 1929. He was still involved with portions of the business up until this summer. He created the Drapemasters of Hartford division in the late 1950's which is still in operation today by the family.

Al was also instrumental in keeping one of the oldest fabricare

associations in the country, the Hartford County Laundry and Dry-cleaning Association, in continued existence and relevance. The HCLDA played key roles in fighting the sales tax in CT, monitoring the Drycleaning Clean-up Fund, and providing much needed advocacy for CT drycleaners. They also provided great educational and social opportunities for industry members.

"He may have been known for his signature red jacket and socks", offered Peter Blake, NEFA Executive Director, "but I will remember him more for his stories and great (and some not so great) jokes. Just the name Archie Asslebrock makes laugh. He was never at a loss for bringing a smile to your face by giving you his card -- a completely blank card with just the words 'my card' on it... followed by another with 'my other card' on it, or with his quick wit coming up with a story on the spot as if he was doing improv. He was a great friend, a great advocate, and very generous with his spirit and knowledge. I know I echo so many by saying I will truly miss him."

"Dad was generous", offered his children Gail and Jimmy, "a good listener, appreciative, never talking about his accomplishments or abilities; he was just about being, doing, loving, and living."

The entire industry agrees and acknowledges a lifetime of service. Al will be missed, and we hope we can carry his spirit forward.



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# Pandemic Relief Payments to Give Employees Financial Assistance



AS EMPLOYERS CONTINUE TO NAVIGATE THROUGH THE MURKY WATERS OF PANDEMIC-RELATED TAX RELIEF AND CREDITS, THERE IS

ONE LITTLE-KNOWN SECTION OF THE IRS CODE THAT OFFERS EMPLOYERS ONE INTERESTING WAY TO HELP EMPLOYEES THROUGH FINANCIAL BURDENS: PANDEMIC DISASTER RELIEF PAYMENTS.

This aspect of IRS code 139 allows employers to reimburse employees for expenses incurred due to the pandemic, whether it be personal, family, living or funeral expenses related to the pandemic disaster, or repair or rehabilitation to their home (or contents) as a result of the pandemic disaster. These payments are not subject to FICA taxes and are tax-free to the employee.

How would an employer initiate such a program? Best practice would be to create a policy to identify a few key elements includ-

ing who is eligible to participate, what expenses will be reimbursed or paid (and any limits imposed), whether employees must provide receipts for reimbursement (highly recommended), and how and when payments will be made.

The IRS is relatively vague on the topic of what kind of expenses can be reimbursable. A few suggestions include un-reimbursed Covid-19 medical expenses (testing, treatment, etc.), work from home expenses (desk, chair, printer, monitor, etc.), dependent care expenses such as childcare, remote learning expenses, or educational resources, increased transportation expenses due to public transit being unavailable, and even funeral expenses.

One important aspect to remember is that qualified wages are not considered disaster relief payments. Qualified wages are what an individual would otherwise earn as compensation, and not payments to offset any expenses that an individual would incur due to COVID-19. This program is meant to help employees deal with the cost of expenses as a result of the pandemic, not replace their wages.

*For more information, visit [PuzzleHR.com](http://PuzzleHR.com) or e-mail Sue Boardman at [Sue@puzzlehr.com](mailto:Sue@puzzlehr.com).*

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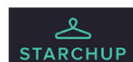
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It's only \$359 for DLI members,  
\$399 for non members.



## Special Thanks to Our Sponsors



*"I took 12 pages of notes over the course of the event."*

"My time was well spent. Not only did I learn a lot, I found it to be uplifting as well. The interaction with the other participants was also a big plus for me."

~ Fall Fest EXPO attendee



**Save the Dates 2021:** Spring Fest EXPO April 14-16 • Fall Fest EXPO during the weeks of November 1-12

For more information, contact Peter Blake at [Peter@SEFA.org](mailto:Peter@SEFA.org) or Leslie Schaeffer at [Leslie@pdcclean.org](mailto:Leslie@pdcclean.org)



# MA Family Medical Leave Act Changes Take Effect January 1, 2021



ON JAN. 1, 2021, EMPLOYEES IN MASSACHUSETTS MAY BEGIN TO APPLY FOR AND RECEIVE PAID LEAVE UNDER THE STATE'S NEW PAID FAMILY AND MEDICAL LEAVE (PFML) LAW.

- up to 20 weeks for a worker's own serious health condition
- up to 12 weeks for the worker to a) bond with a child after the child's birth, adoption or foster care placement, or b) address a need arising out of a family member's active duty or impending call to active duty in the armed forces
- up to 26 weeks for the worker to care for a family member who is a covered service member with a serious health condition

Massachusetts employers should therefore take any final steps necessary to ensure they comply with their obligations under PFML. The following information provides an overview of the benefits provided by PFML updates from the Massachusetts Department of Family and Medical Leave (Department).

## OVERVIEW OF PAID LEAVE UNDER PFML

Starting Jan. 1, 2021, most Massachusetts workers will be eligible to take up to 26 weeks of paid leave per benefit year under PFML. Leave is available for the following qualifying reasons:

Beginning July 1, 2021, eligible workers may also take up to 12 weeks to care for a family member with a serious health condition.

During PFML, an employee will receive a weekly benefit amount, calculated based on a percentage of the employee's earnings, capped at a maximum weekly benefit amount of \$850 per week. The Department will reevaluate the maximum weekly benefit annually. There is a seven-day waiting period before an employee can receive the weekly benefit amount. During the waiting period, an employee may elect to use accrued paid time off (PTO), but an employer cannot require an employee to use PTO during the waiting period.

Continued on page 8

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# MA Family Medical Leave Act Changes

Continued from page 7

PFML is funded by payroll contributions paid by employees, employers and self-employed individuals. Employers were required to start remitting contributions to the Department effective Oct. 1, 2019, unless the employer was approved for a private plan exemption.

Employers are required to provide their employees with written notice of the benefits available under PFML. Employers can find the PFML written notice requirements, as well as a copy of the PFML poster that employers are required to display in the workplace on the Department website. To provide notice to non-English speaking employees, employers can use translated notices also made available by the Department.

Before Jan. 1, 2021, employers should implement a PFML workplace policy providing information about PFML, whether the employer is participating in the program administered by the Department or an approved private plan, PFML contributions made by the employer and employees, the circumstances under which employees can take PFML, how to apply for PFML benefits, how PFML will interact with the employer's other leave policies (e.g., clarifying when the leave will run concurrently), and addressing how much notice an employee must provide the employer before taking PFML.

"The entire landscape of Human Resources is changing," observed Peter Blake, NEFA Executive Vice President. "Regulations like this are very complex and we are providing as much information as possible. I can see efforts like this acting as the first domino as other states look to make changes. I fear that with all the information about Covid-19, Minimum wage increases, unemployment -- measures like will slide under the radar."

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

PuzzleHR has provided two sample notices that must be used and maintained. One is for employers with over 25 employees and one for those with under 25. Both notices are available in the regulatory section of nefabricare.com.

PuzzleHR has been providing NEFA, DLI and all our members with information to help members comply with all Human Resource issues. They have offered special discounted pricing for DLI Members.

"I can't stress how important compliance with these regulations are," continued Blake. "I know PuzzleHR has helped numerous NEFA and DLI Members with PPP loans, Tax Credits, Workshare, and other programs. I strongly urge you to consult experts like them to ensure your compliance."



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# NEFA/DLI Members Find Strength in Unity: 2021 Starts with Live Webinars & Peer-Peer Meetings



**"THAT WHICH DOES NOT KILL US MAKES US STRONGER," IS A TIME-TESTED ADAGE FIT FOR THE CURRENT MOMENT. THE CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC'S IMPACT ON THE DRYCLEANING INDUSTRY HAS BEEN DEVASTATING.**

However, there is a bright side to everything. Members of the Drycleaning & Laundry Institute are pulling together to share ideas and help each other survive in new

ways. In response to the crisis, DLI has strengthened its focus on education and fellowship, presenting two virtual training sessions each week and hosting separate opportunities for members to share ideas an equal number of times.

"Our school may be closed for now but DLI is committed to sharing information drycleaning professionals need to survive this crisis," said Brian Johnson, DLI's Director of Education. "So far we've produced more than 50 webinars and we're not slowing down anytime soon. Drycleaners need this information. We're here to help them survive this and come out stronger on the other side."

## TWICE-WEEKLY ZOOM MEETINGS

DLI offers members two opportunities each week to discuss any and all industry-related topics. Zoom meetings are held Tuesdays at 10 a.m. and Wednesdays at 3 p.m.

## JANUARY 2021 WEBINAR SCHEDULE

In addition to twice-weekly Zoom meetings, DLI offers two webinars each week to help drycleaning business owners adapt and train employees. DLI presents the following schedule of webinars and virtual training opportunities:

- Tuesday, Jan. 5 – Using LinkedIn to Generate Business with Lou D'Autorio
- Wednesday, Jan. 6 – 29 Tech Tools to Create Social Media Content with Beth Z
- Tuesday, Jan. 12 – Wetcleaning with Laundrylux's Dan Goldman
- Wednesday, Jan. 13 – Little Known COVID Tax Benefits with PuzzleHR
- Tuesday, Jan. 19 – Tailoring with Dale Kaplan of Kaplan's Careful Cleaners
- Wednesday, Jan. 20 – Create Your Marketing Plan for 2021 with Dave Coyle
- Tuesday, Jan. 26 – Using Bleaches with the A.L. Wilson

Chemical Company

- Wednesday, Jan. 27 – Top 10 Things to Do Now to Prosper with Diana Vollmer

"COVID has hit the drycleaning and laundry industry hard," said LeAnn Glasser of Plantengas Cleaners in Spring Lake, Michigan. "DLI continues to work hard to help us succeed. Whether it's information on how to process garments and bedding during Covid, navigate the financial tools that have been provided by the government to help keep us afloat or create new marketing strategies to obtain additional sales, they are there for us."

## ON DEMAND VIDEO LIBRARY

Each week DLI adds recordings of the presentations to make them available to members who may have missed the live program. Members simply login to [DLIonline.org](http://DLIonline.org) and click the program to watch. DLI's archive currently contains these videos and more:

- Routes are More Important Than Ever with James Peuster
- 4M Rule for Route Drivers with James Peuster
- Wash-Dry-Fold, Pt. 1 & Pt. 2 Webinars
- Wash-Dry-Fold Panel Presentation
- How to Clean Wedding Gowns with Michael Schapiro
- Best Practices for Setting Up & Operating Locker Systems
- Drycleaning Machine Maintenance with Bill Hay
- Proper Maintenance: The Key to Productivity and Efficiency with Jerry Moore
- Boiler Maintenance: Picking the Low Hanging Fruit with Bruce Grossman and Mike Leeming
- Hiring Do's and Do Not's with PuzzleHR
- How to Streamline Processes and Save your Business Money by Leveraging Technology with PuzzleHR
- The OSHA Man Cometh with Mike Tatch, OSHA Consultant
- Three Ways to Enhance Your Business
- WSDLA's Fireside Chat: A Discussion About How to Survive Tough Times
- Lease Negotiation with Riaz Chauthauni
- COVID-19 Crisis, Preparing for Restart with Puzzle HR
- Business Changes I Made in Response to COVID-19

**... and much more! Visit [dlionline.org](http://dlionline.org) for the entire Members Only Library of Videos!**

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## LIVE TRAINING JANUARY 2021

- **Tuesday, January 5**  
Using LinkedIn to Generate Business with Lou D'Autorio
- **Wednesday, January 6**  
29 Tech Tools to Create Social Media Content with Beth Z
- **Tuesday, January 12**  
Wetcleaning with Laundrylux's Dan Goldman
- **Wednesday, January 13**  
Little Known COVID Tax Benefits with PuzzleHR
- **Tuesday, January 19**  
Tailoring with Dale Kaplan of Kaplan's Careful Cleaners
- **Wednesday, January 20**  
Create Your Marketing Plan for 2021 with Dave Coyle
- **Tuesday, January 26**  
Using Bleaches with the A.L. Wilson Chemical Company
- **Wednesday, January 27**  
Top 10 Things to Do Now to Prosper with Diana Vollmer

### ..... Sharing Ideas That Work .....

Join your peers on Zoom every Tuesday & Wednesday.  
Exchange new strategies to help drive business.



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