



# THE Messenger

## MAC and PDCA Take Steps to Formalize Partnership



OVER THE PAST FEW MONTHS, THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS OF BOTH THE MID-ATLANTIC ASSOCIATION OF CLEANERS (MAC) AND THE PENNSYLVANIA DELAWARE CLEANERS ASSOCIATION (PDCA) HAVE BEEN MEETING TO DISCUSS THE FUTURE OF THE INDUSTRY AND THE RESPECTIVE ASSOCIATIONS.

Through those discussions, it has become clear that a merger of the two groups would be in the best interests of their members.

While both organizations have been providing great programs and a high-level of service for our members, there is a duplication of services that could be streamlined and these resources could be better implemented in developing additional programs and better benefits to help our membership grow and prosper.

MAC and PDCA recently partnered in developing the East Coast Leadership Conference and both Boards saw that partnership relationship growing. By combining the two smaller groups into one larger entity will provide a stronger foundation for the association to build on. The new MAC would be able to cut expenses while allowing for more member driven programs and services.

“It is our belief that this merger will breathe newfound life and excitement into the organization as we look to grow our membership,” offered Mike McKay, MAC President. “We will be looking to add to our leadership and to provide our members with a greater voice as we move forward. As we look ahead, the current volunteer leadership will be looking to have more of the membership involved. We are confident the creation of a larger entity will provide a stronger foundation to build upon, creating newfound life and excitement.”

A letter had been sent out to all MAC and PDCA Members highlighting the potential of the

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER,  
2023

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## 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,  
MAC 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.

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## Nora Nealis: NCA Leader, Industry Icon



WITH PROFOUND SORROW, WE ANNOUNCE THE PASSING OF NORA NEALIS, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OF THE NATIONAL CLEANERS ASSOCIATION (NCA). NORA PASSED AWAY EARLIER THIS FALL.

Nora, a beacon in the dry cleaning industry, served as the revered Executive Director of the National Cleaners Association. Her extraordinary journey began at Diversitron, where she sold and repaired equipment for dry cleaners, amassing invaluable insights and expertise.

Nora's tenure as Executive Director was marked by her remarkable acumen and dedication. She passionately advocated for the responsible use of perchloroethylene (perc), masterfully navigating environmental concerns while safeguarding the interests of countless small businesses. Her diplomacy and foresight were instrumental in harmonizing industry and governmental goals.

Yet, Nora's legacy extends far beyond her professional feats. Her boundless generosity and wisdom touched many lives, particularly those within the dry cleaning community. She was a mentor and a guiding light, offering her time and knowledge selflessly, even to

those struggling to meet dues. Her compassion and commitment to inclusivity were unparalleled.

"I first got to meet and know Nora over 20 years ago as we worked closely on drafting the New York Regulations for Drycleaners, offered Peter Blake, MAC Executive Director, "and the one passion she had for the industry was unequalled. We worked closely together to protect all drycleaners from the large to the "mom and pop" and she never lost sight of the people she was helping. That was as true today as it was back then. The industry lost an icon and a champion, but those who knew her lost even more -- a tremendous friend. She will be missed by many."

Nora's impact was not confined to those she directly assisted; her efforts to ensure environmental compliance have left an enduring imprint on the industry, benefiting even those she never met.

Nora leaves behind a loving family, a legion of friends, and an industry forever enriched by her contributions. Her spirit of magnanimity and her relentless pursuit of industry excellence will be profoundly missed.

The family graciously suggests that, in lieu of flowers, donations be made to Coats for Kids, a charity dear to Nora's heart. (<https://www.coatsforkidsusa.com/>)

As we mourn her loss, we also celebrate the monumental impact Nora Nealis had on our lives and the industry. Her legacy serves as a steadfast foundation for a brighter, more inclusive future in the world of dry cleaning.

### ASSOCIATION UPDATE...

## MAC/PDCA Merger

Continued from page 1

Merger, and members were invited to contact the associations and provide input. Members were asked to provide input by November 28th, 2023. After the letter was sent, MAC received comments from several members applauding the move and supporting the efforts.

At the recent MAC Winter Board of Directors Meeting, the Board took a formal vote which resulted in a unanimous decision to approve the merger plans and to proceed.

### THE NEXT STEPS

The PDCA Board of Directors also recently met and voted to support a merger as well. The MAC leadership has officially informed DLI of our intent to merge PDCA into MAC. The next step will require changes to the existing MAC By-laws. The changes are very minor in scope, but in effect will expand the "footprint" of MAC to include Pennsylvania and Delaware, and

will increase the number of Board seats appropriately to reflect the two organizations becoming one.

MAC will hold a special meeting of the membership via Zoom on Wednesday, January 24th at 10:00 EST. A special notice will be emailed out to members with the link for participating.

If you would like a copy of the proposed changes to the MAC By-laws, or would like to provide any comments, questions, or concerns, please contact Peter Blake ([Peter@macassociation.org](mailto:Peter@macassociation.org), 617-791-0128).

"Thank you for your support," expressed Peter Blake, MAC Executive Director, "we are excited about what the future could hold for a larger, streamlined, member-drive organization. Our membership has begun to grow over the past year, and we are looking to build MAC into one of the premier drycleaning regional associations in the country!"



## Learn from Your Peers and Share Your Expertise



EVERY TUESDAY  
MORNING AT 11:30  
EST, CLEANERS  
FROM ACROSS THE  
COUNTRY JOIN TO-  
GETHER ON DLI/NE-  
FA'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>

Dial by your location: 929 205 6099

Meeting ID: 853 6328 6735

Pass code: 920927



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## MAC “Meet & Greet” a Great Success

MAC RECENTLY HELD AN OPEN HOUSE AND PLANT TOUR AT PURITAN CLEANERS IN RICHMOND, VA FOLLOWED BY A “MEET & GREET” DINNER FOR ANYONE INTERESTED IN ATTENDING: MEMBERS AND NON-MEMBERS ALIKE.

“This is a great program,” offered Peter Blake, MAC Executive Director, “and one I am looking forward to replicating in other areas.” One of the best, and often overlooked, benefits for our members is the networking opportunities. This program is a very informal program highlighting that peer-to-peer interaction many small businesses covet.”

The plant tour of Puritan was well attended and many of the members took the opportunity to explore different ways of doing things. There were representatives from RichClean and Kreussler to help those interested learn about some of the innovative products in use by the facility.

Participants seemed to really be interested in some of the packaging innovations and some of the wash-dry-fold procedures in place. Norman Was and Gary Glover were both on hand to help people understand the strategies incorporated by Puritan.

“I know one thing,” continued Blake, “drycleaners love going to other drycleaning plants and poking around asking questions. There are often more than one way to do things and people can always pick up little nuggets of knowledge and tips and tricks they can implement in their own plant.”

After the plant tour, all attendees were invited to join in a dinner “Meet and Greet” at a local restaurant. All participants paid their own portion of dinner, and the program was very low-key. After a brief welcoming by Peter Blake, and a group thank you for the hospitality of Puritan Cleaners leadership -- the networking just took over the spotlight.

“I was really concerned that there would be a pause in conversations, concluded Blake, “and had prepared a number of thought provoking questions to spur discussion, but there was never a need-- the program just naturally flowed. I wasn’t sure how many people we would be able to get, but people saw the value in getting together face-to-face and sharing experiences. We had people



*(From top left, clockwise) The program was attended by over 20 people interested in talking shop, DLI District Director with New member Dianne Lee of Press, Exploring processing tips, Norman welcoming all who came from as far as 2 1/2 hours!*



drive in excess of 2 hours for the program and all of the attendees left energized and asking for another similar program in the coming months.”

### WHAT LIES AHEAD

MAC is planning on doing more of these programs and local dinner meetings in 2024. Education is one of the key components of MAC’s membership plan moving forward. In addition to the local dinner meetings, MAC is planning a weekend leadership conference in the spring featuring top-notch speakers, topics and tabletop exhibits to showcase the best of the industry.

MAC is also developing a Wash-Dry-Fold workshop that will cover pick-up and delivery options, pricing strategies, and production tips and tricks.

Later in the year, MAC will also host a Management/Employee Retention Workshop.

“There are a lot of great things ahead,” observed Mike McKay, MAC President, “and I am excited about the new directions MAC is taking. Now is a great time to be a member. The value is constantly increasing.”



# Looking Ahead to 2023

Continued from page 2

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.



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DLI is working with ERC Help Desk to provide a no-risk, contingency based filing solution to help members receive their ERTC. If you have not filed, or if you want to check if you got the maximum amount owed to you, call Peter Blake at 617-791-0128 or send a quick email: [peteblyke@aol.com](mailto:peteblyke@aol.com)



THE DEADLINE IS DRAWING NEAR FOR RE-FILING YOUR 941X TAX FORMS AND CLAIMING THE EMPLOYEE RETENTION TAX CREDIT (ERTC) YOU DESERVE.

“In reality, the ERC has done what it was intended to do, observed Peter Blake, MAC Executive Director. “It has provided a boost to small businesses that endured through the pandemic and survived while keeping employees working. This is not a handout -- this is a credit you deserve. It is our belief that most every member will qualify for some relief, and we encourage you to explore the program.”

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](mailto:peter@nefabricare.com).

The ERTC, passed 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 revenues 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.

## MEMBERSHIP BENEFITS...

## How to Get The Most From Membership



**DLI Services You Are Using**

**Other DLI Services available to help your business**

DLI AND MAC ARE COMMITTED TO YOUR SUCCESS. WE WANT TO MAKE SURE YOU GET THE MOST FROM MEMBERSHIP, AND WANT TO BE AS ACCESSIBLE AS POSSIBLE.

At 3:00 EST, on the first Wednesday of every month, MAC Executive Director, Peter Blake, joins Jon Meijer, DLI Vice president of Membership, on a live Zoom conference to explore

membership and show you how to find and use all the benefits DLI has to offer.

“I love this program,” offered Blake. “It is a chance to interact with our members, answer questions, and display all that we can help you with. Too often Members don't realize all that we have to offer, or don't know how to use the tools we provide. This is a perfect forum to explore all you have available to you -- and more importantly, how you can use them to help strengthen your business.”

Join the conference and you will learn how to use the new, re-designed DLI website, how to find critical education tools, how to implement key quality control services, and more.

This program is not only for new members, but for long-time members to re-discover the benefits of membership. DLI invites not only owners, but managers and key personnel to participate. These front-line workers often need the services first, and are the last to hear about them.

**Contact Peter Blake at the MAC Office to join and get the link.**  
[Peter@macassocation.org/617-791-0128](mailto:Peter@macassocation.org/617-791-0128)



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**DLI Membership Pays**



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