

SEFA Strengthens Scholarship Program for Its Members



AT A RECENT BOARD OF DIRECTORS MEETING, THE BOARD VOTED TO INCREASE SCHOLARSHIP AWARDS, CREATE NEW OPPORTUNITIES, AND CHANGE SOME OF THE PARAMETERS FOR USE.

SEFA is committed to investing in the success of its members, and firmly believes education is one of the foundations members can use to help grow. This commitment recently got even stronger as they have increased the value of all their scholarships and added in some new uses.

All new scholarship applications will be up online by the first of the year. In order to qualify, you must fully complete the application, be a member in good standing, and use the award as outlined in the program.

BARRY MCELVEN/BOBBY FLANDERS MEMORIAL SCHOLARSHIPS

The SEFA Board realizes it can be hard to find the local training when you need it, so they have developed an extremely generous Scholarship Program affording members the opportunity to go to the DLI Resident Courses. SEFA has set aside up to \$12000 a year in funds for Members to attend DLI Schools. The Board recently increased the amount of the scholarship to \$2000 for the first week, and \$1,000 for each additional week attending (Total available is \$4,000/award)

IN PLANT CONSULTATION PROGRAM

SEFA has a grant program that would allow for members to apply for a reimbursement for having private, in-plant training done at member plants. The grant allows for a reimbursement of \$750/day -- up to a \$1,500/award There are selection criteria on what consultation events will qualify. More information is available from the SEFA Office

DLI VIRTUAL PROGRAMS AND/OR HYBRID PROGRAMS

Recognizing the change in how education programs are delivered, SEFA has decided to make up to 10 scholarships available for use on DLI Virtual Training Programs. The awards are based on 100% of the cost of tuition to the program. Contact SEFA for more information.

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WISHING YOU A HAPPY AND **PEACEFUL** New Year!





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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.

Do you do this? I admit, while I very seldom make them publicly, I do make them to myself. Sorry to say, but I very rarely hit the mark, usually fail, and find myself making the same ones the following year. But not this year. This year I have only one goal, and I hope you can do the same for you and your business. I will get back to that in a minute.



Peter Blake, SEFA Executive Director

First, let me forecast my thoughts on our industry. We are poised for growth. We have a lot of opportunities ahead of us, and we have the ability, desire, and tools to capitalize on them. Those that see the challenges and react, be proactive, and invest will succeed. Those that see the obstacles, don't learn from the past, keep their heads down, and don't utilize the plethora of business assistance tools at their disposal will fail. To succeed takes work, effort, and investment. By the sheer fact you are still here today and rebuilding you know you have what it takes to move forward and to thrive.

As an industry we are on a good path. People are returning to the office. Covid is a part of life and we have found ways to adapt. With the high inflation we are experiencing, garments are becoming less disposable. People are investing in caring for them properly to expand the life of their textiles. We can use that to our advantage. People still want to look their best, and that is what we do. We keep people looking and feeling good. Time is still a person's most valuable asset, and through our convenient services, we save time.

Back to my goal for 2023. My goal is not to be better than anyone else, but to be better than I used to be. It is that simple. I am not going to worry about what others are doing, I am going to focus my efforts on controlling the things I can control. How does that relate to your business?

I plan on doing a better job. I know I have a lot to work on and I have a lot of areas I am not very good on. But realizing that is the biggest hurdle. Looking introspectively can be difficult but moving forward I plan to be better. I am sure you all have areas like that as well. Give yourself a true introspective look. Identify the areas you need help with.

Look at your quality. Is it a product you are proud of? Is it their ways to improve? If you are a DLI Member, we have tools to help you do this. We can test your cleaning quality, tell you how it ranks, how well your system is performing. Are your Customer Service Reps well trained? You can use DLI's Secret Shopper program or another similar service out there. How does your store front look? Ask your friends to come in and give you some feedback.

One of my good friends was telling me the other day, one of her biggest fears in her cost group was having other members visit her plant and critique her process and her plant. It was also the biggest benefit. They saw things and pointed out things that she had just become accustomed to and had a blind spot. Don't be afraid to ask for help.

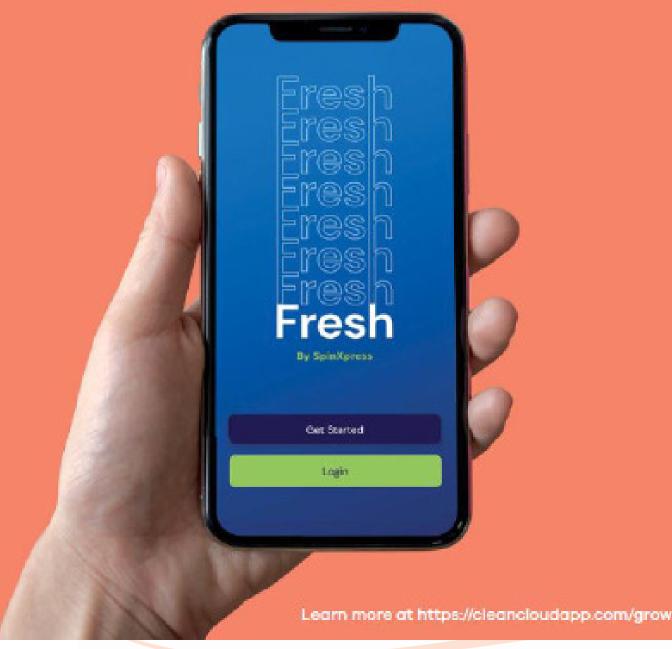
One of the areas I am working on is helping build a much stronger community. We

Continued on page 6



In the same amount of time that it takes you to read this, you could have started a pickup and delivery service for your business

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SEFA Board to Meet in Orlando and Host FREE Membership Reception



THE SEFA BOARD OF DIRECTORS WILL BE MEETING AT THE SHINGLE CREEK RESORT IN ORLANDO,, FL ON JANUARY 29TH. ALL MEMBERS ARE INVITED TO ATTEND.

The Board meeting will be held from 8:30 - 12:00

noon. SEFA is looking for more Board members to get involved from each state. Join in and find out how you can help shape the industry.

SEFA will also be hosting a FREE "Wine & Whine, Beer & Brainstorming" Reception from 4:30 - 6:30 that afternoon. The Reception is designed as a meet and greet for all members to come together and discuss the latest happenings, ask questions, and share experiences. SEFA is deeply committed to building a strong com-

munity among members and to provide opportunities like this to join in a social atmosphere and learn from each other.

"I love to coin the phrase we are not all in the same boat, we are more often than not in the same storm," offered Peter Blake, SEFA Executive Director. "Programs like this enable you to share your common challenges, discuss obstacles, and learn how to take advantage of opportunities that are out there."

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Members are always welcome to attend Board and Committee Meetings. The reception is FREE for all members that register in advance. To hold your spot, simply call Peter Blake at 617-791-0128, or send an email to peter@sefa.org.

SEFA is looking ahead to 2023 and will be hosting similar events and educational programs throughout the region. We are currently working on a series of Spotting Workshops and some Marketing programs.

Like to see some education events in your area? Contact SEFA and let us know what you would be interested in learning about!



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Looking Ahead to 2023

Continued from page 3

have laid the grass roots and we have done a great job getting people together on Zoom meetings and such – now I need to help focus on a more regional basis so you can have non-competitors visit and share insights. I need to build a better mentoring system. My father always told me if you're 18 or 80 – you still have a lot you can learn.

Look at the systems in your plant. How is your marketing? Can you do any better? What are your marketing goals? Where do you want to focus more energy? What investments will pay high dividends? If you need help – there is plenty out there. I love to discuss marketing programs and ideas – so feel free to reach out and we can have a great discussion. If you are on the East Coast I just might be in your area and we can sit down and have a cup of coffee and review your ideas. I would love it.

There are some great Marketing Companies that you can also call for help. I know people that use these services and can provide some referrals and thoughts. If you are a member of DLI you Dave Coyle should be no secret to you. He is fantastic and has done some great things. You have probably seen some of the great work being done by Be Creative 360. They have helped their members grow and prosper through lead generation and social media marketing. Another great resource is Cohen Wills at Cleaner Marketing. Honestly, succeeding at marketing and branding takes commitment and investment.

You can invest in these tools, or you can invest time and learn how to do much of it yourself with DLI's training and resource library. DLI has also developed a Marketing Lab program to help you create content and refine your marketing pieces. I am not saying your competition doesn't matter, but I am saying to focus your energies instead on how to make your brand better and some of those competitive issues should start to fade away. I hear it all the time: "they only charge xxx, we can't make it at that price" or "They are discounting everything". There are so many pricing strategies, and each comes with their own benefits and obstacles. Care less about what they are charging – and more about what you need to charge to make the profit you deserve and produce the quality you demand. Worry less about what their ads are saying and focus your energy on determining what you stand for, and how you convey that message to your potential customers.

Where else can you get better? What do you do for your community? What have you done to help promote your community awareness. Read my last article "Doing Good is Good Business" for more insight. Determine what areas you need help in, and then find ways to overcome those obstacles.

You can call, email or even say hi on Facebook and I will help you find strategies to take advantage of the bright future that lies ahead. 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.



SUPPORT THE ASSOCIATION THAT SUPPORTS YOU

DLI Defeats Plastic Bag Ban

The Los Angeles city council considered banning drycleaning plastic bags. A member alerted DLI to the proposal and with about a week's notice DLI and the California Cleaners Association mounted an authoritative defense and succeeded in getting the city to reconsider. What would have happened if the associations weren't there, would the outcome be the same? Who knows but because DLI and CCA took action a very costly outcome for the industry was stopped short.

Once enacted, similar measures are often replicated by other municipalities and states. DLI fights to protect your business from reckless legislation like this and works to keep it from spreading.

DLI can only fight for you with the resources that come from dues dollars. If you are not a member this is a perfect example of why you should be. Join today at DLIonIne.org/Membership or call 800-638-2627 to discuss how membership works for you.

Get Involved

Your Membership Matters



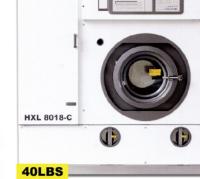
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Mark Watkins, Mark's Cleaners in Birmingham, AL

THOMAS MARK WATKINS DEC. 20, 1947 - NOV. 28, 2022 MARK WATKINS WAS BORN IN BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA AT ST. VINCENT'S HOSPITAL TO TOMMY AND BETTY WATKINS. MARK WAS THE OLDEST OF FIVE CHILDREN.

He grew up in Southside until they moved over the mountain to Vestavia. He was so proud to be able to say that he was in the first graduating class at WH Berry High School in 1966, where he played football and baseball. He then went on to graduate with a Business Degree from Jacksonville State; in addition to earning many other life degrees.

He and his best friend/cousin, Alan, decided to move to Corpus Christi to start their sales careers. Soon after, he made his way down to Jacksonville, Florida to work for Clow Corporation. This was one of his favorite places; where he made many of his lifelong friends. Working for Clow took Mark to Mobile, Alabama. While living in Mobile, he came home to visit family and friends, and ended up out one night with his brother Johnny. That night, he also met the love of his life, Gretchen.

The moment they met, there were sparks. There was an undeniable chemistry that everyone could see. Those sparks never faded.

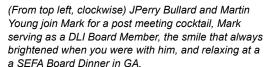
Mark and Gretchen didn't waste any time before getting married and starting a family. They moved to Birmingham, Alabama to be near both of their families and start a family and a business of their own. Mark and Gretchen were married for 42 years and have four beautiful children: Josh (Sophie), Rachel (Benjee), Sarah, and Wes. They also have 7 wonderful grandchildren: Andrew (9), Aaron (7), George (7), Levi (5), Mark (4), Lydia (2), and Astrid (2). He couldn't spend enough time with them. God, Family and friends were most important in his life.

When it came to his family, he was "blessed out of his socks". For over 20 years, Mark was able to coach little league baseball for his sons and daughters. His favorite names to be called were daddy, pop, sweetheart and friend. The business of drycleaning was in Mark's blood, so it was only natural that he start and grow one of his own. In 1981, Mark's Quality Cleaners was established which also happened to be the same year his son Josh was born. Through the years, the Cleaners allowed Mark to be able to spend extra time with all of his children. Many years ago, Mark was fortunate to have Josh and Sarah both join his executive team. At the cleaners, he was always a LIFE coach for all of his employees.

Mark was always on the cutting edge of technology in his drycleaning business, which brought him recognition for being one of the first cleaners to barcode and digitize all aspects of his business. To stay at the forefront of the industry, Mark joined groups such as DLI, and SEFA, where he was a member of the board.











Mark loved Alabama Football. Many weekends were spent in Tuscaloosa, Alabama and going to games with family and friends. He was even okay with his oldest daughter, Rachel, attending Auburn, as long as she remained an Alabama fan. His love for Alabama football brought him to be a member of the Monday Morning Quarterback Club and the Red Elephant Club where he was taught their secret handshake.

Mark had many hobbies. He loved riding motorcycles; whether it be riding dirt bikes with his sons or trailering his newest bike to the mountains with his wife and friends. He was looking forward to many more motorcycle trips, but his favorite trip was going to Saint Martin with his beautiful wife, Gretchen. His love of music was passed down to all of his children, but none more than his son Wes. From attending concerts together to borderline stalking Stephen Stills in Atlanta, their love for music only strengthened their relationship.

Mark loved the Lord, He was a member of Hunter Street Baptist Church, where he was able to become close with their Pastor, Buddy Gray through the love of Jesus. He went to be with the Lord fast, and we all know punctuality wasn't his strong suit. He loved all of you. P.S., so does Gretchen.

Donations can be made to the Monday Morning Quarterback Club. Their mission is to raise money for Children's Hospital. Donations to be made payable to: Quarterbacking Children's Health Foundation, 2019 4th Ave N, Suite 101, Birmingham, AL 35203

DLI Helps Defeat Proposed Plastic Bag Ban



THE DRYCLEANING & LAUNDRY INSTITUTE (DLI) AND CALIFORNIA CLEANERS ASSOCIATION (CCA) MOBILIZED MEMBERS TO DEFEAT A PROPOSED BAN ON DRYCLEANING BAGS IN THE CITY OF LOS ANGELES.

DLI and CCA learned about the city's proposed ban about one week before the city's December 1 vote. DLI and CCA immediately worked to mobilize members and share comments in defense of the industry's use of poly bags.

"DLI and CCA headed off what might have been a very costly outcome for the industry," said DLI CEO Mary Scalco. "Once enacted, measures like this are often replicated by other municipalities and states across the country."

While the industry supports recycling and the use of re-usable gar-

ment bags, there is no easy answer to the issue. In many cases automation devices prove to be even more difficult. Most of these measures are aimed at reducing litter and improper disposal, but we don't usually see drycleaning poly in these instances.

"While this measure was in the city of LA," cautioned Peter Blake, SEFA Executive Director, "It could just as easily be in your back yard next. We will continue to see issues like this come up and we need to respond as quick as possible -- and that takes all our members to keep watch and alert us to local issues that need our attention.

FOR MORE INFORMATION:

American Drycleaner interviewed Scalco and CCA President Toran Brown who is also DLI's District 8 Director and owner of Rytina Fine Cleaners and Launderers in Sacramento, California, about the issue for its special report, "L. A. Cleaners, Associations Fight Proposed Poly Bag Ban," released in audio format on December 8, 2022. A transcript of that report can be found on DLIOnline.org. Readers may also listen to the report on the American Drycleaner website: https://tinyurl.com/4zsm4pdf

BUSINESS ADVICE...

Have You Filed for an ERTC Yet?

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

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.

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 drycleaners. The maximum relief is over \$26,000 PER EMPLOYEE!

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



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COUNTRY JOIN TOGETHER ON DLI/SEFA'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 new programs developed for our members," offered Peter Blake, SEFA 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 tis 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/84063392764 Dial by your location: 929 205 6099 Meeting ID: 840 6339 2764

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The pandemic is causing drycleaners to consider their exit strategies. Many are confronting the fact that 75% of drycleaning operations have contamination*. Plus, business and real estate transactions are expediting the discovery of environmental impacts. Luckily, we have your back.

EnviroForensics is a full-service environmental consulting firm that protects you against the environmental liability of perc. We use your old insurance policies as an asset to fund your site remediation and legal fees. We work with attorneys, carriers, and regulatory agencies on your behalf.

We've been partnering with drycleaners for over 20 years. Call us today \$\mathbb{c}\$ 866-888-7911 \$\bigoplus \text{ enviroforensics.com}\$

