



# THE Reclaimer

## Introducing the Laundry & Drycleaning Expo: East/West



IN AN UNPRECEDENTED MOVE, THE SPONSORS OF THE 4 LARGEST REGIONAL DRYCLEANING AND LAUNDRY TRADE SHOWS IN THE COUNTRY ARE COLLABORATING TO STRENGTHEN THE EXHIBITIONS.

The South Eastern Fabricare Association (SEFA), California Cleaners Association (CCA), Southwest Drycleaners Association (SDA) and Pennsylvania Delaware Cleaners Association (PDCA) are co-branding the shows and working together on marketing agreements, but the shows will still run independently and retain their local flair. Moving forward, the groups have reduced the number of live equipment shows from the traditional four on off Clean Show years to only two: DLE expo East & DLE expo West.

“This is a great move for the industry,” observed SEFA President Randy Parham, “and one we think will only strengthen each show. These shows are important. Without them, the typical drycleaner doesn’t have access and the opportunity to see all the new and innovative products and services. By reducing the number of shows from 4 to 2, we have made it easier for exhibitors to commit to exhibiting and having a much bigger presence. We will be able to showcase the best of the industry.”

The Drycleaning and Laundry Expo East will be held on June 7 - 9, 2024 at the Gaylord Palms Resort and Convention Center in Kissimmee, FL. The Drycleaning and Laundry Expo West will be held October 4-6, 2024, at the Horseshoe Resort and Casino in Las Vegas, NV. Moving forward, the DL Expo East will move to the Baltimore/Washington area and the DL Expo West will be held in Texas in 2026. The associations are still exploring options for 2028 and beyond.

In addition to live equipment exhibits, the shows will also feature top quality educational sessions and unique networking opportunities. These conventions are designed for the everyday drycleaner to get a chance to experience the best of the industry and to explore ways to run more efficiently, more productively, and drive more profit. With a greater anticipated attendance, the shows will have more resources to bring in great speakers and leaders to share their stories.

“This is an exciting opportunity for the entire industry,” offered CCA Convention Chair

NOVEMBER/DECEMBER, 2023  
VOLUME 23, NO. 1

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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,  
SEFA 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 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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## SDLS is now Drycleaning & Laundry Expo East

Continued from page 1

Toran Brown. “I think limiting the shows to only two, an East Coast one and a West Coast one, each of the shows will be bigger, have a greater attendance, and will be a better experience for everyone. With all the changes in the industry, we really feel four shows was just too much, and we all feel the excitement, attendance, and the exhibitors were all being diluted. These will be tremendous events and I am confident the value will resonate with our members – and the entire industry.”

### WHAT LIES AHEAD

Beginning the first of the year, SEFA will begin heavy promotion of DLEXPo East on June 7 - 9th. The Convention and Exhibit will be held at the Gaylord Palms Resort in Kissimmee, FL.

“We are really excited about the event and the venue,” expressed Peter Blake, SEFA Executive Director. “We feel this will be one of the best shows we have ever had. With the long lay-off in

between regional shows, and the reduction in opportunities to see live equipment, we know drycleaners and laundrerers will make attending a high priority. In addition to the innovations you can explore on the show floor, we will also have some incredible educational opportunities.”

The Gaylord Palms Resort is extending a convention rate of only \$229/night. It is one of the premier family resorts in all of central Florida. Making this event one of the best industry opportunities of 2024.

“The facility is incredible,” offered Blake, “and I can’t wait to bring my family. With everything under one roof it is easy to get around, easy to balance work and family commitments. It is really an unique property and features some of the best restaurants in the area. It is close to the parks, but set away enough you don’t feel the crowds. I can’t wait to see everyone in June!

### IN MEMORIAM...

## 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.

## 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, SEFA 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](mailto:Peter@macassocation.org)/617-791-0128*



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# SEFA and SDA Host Joint Educational & Board Meeting in the Big Easy

TWO OF THE DRYCLEANING INDUSTRY'S DYNAMIC SPEAKERS HAVE BEEN ENLISTED TO SPEAK AT THE JOINT SEFA (SOUTH EASTERN FABRICARE ASSOCIATION) AND SDA (SOUTHWEST DRYCLEANERS ASSOCIATION) MEETING, SCHEDULED FOR MARCH 8-9, 2024, IN THE BIG EASY.

The event will be held at the newly renovated Hotel Indigo French Quarter, which is just steps from several New Orleans restaurants and entertainment.

"For the first time in memorable history, SEFA and SDA will join forces for a free event-filled meeting. Dry cleaners won't be able to pass up this opportunity to network with colleagues from the two largest regional dry cleaning organizations in the nation," noted SEFA President Randy Parham. The meeting is free for dry cleaners and SDA/SEFA allied members. Non-member vendors can attend for a \$100 registration fee. Registrants may choose to attend an optional dinner on Friday, March 8, at Deanie's Seafood, which will be at an additional cost. See the schedule of events and register for the meeting at [www.sda-dryclean.com](http://www.sda-dryclean.com).

SDA President Kyle Nesbit comments, "We made sure to secure speakers for this meeting who will focus on expanding and improving your business. Jason Loeb of Sudsies, the 'King of Culture,' will provide his secret recipe for creating dynamic, cheerful and productive teams. Mike Nesbit will share how to diversify your revenue with little to no investment funds." Here are details on their seminar topics.

## DIVERSIFY OR DIE: UNVEILING THE VISION OF INCREASED PIECE COUNTS

Mike Nesbit, Nesbit Consulting, will present a unique idea centered around diversifying your revenue stream with garment returns. With little to no investment money, you can increase your piece count, diversify and secure a brighter future for your business.

## CREATING A CONTAGIOUS BUSINESS CULTURE

Jason Loeb grew Sudsies from 2 to 200 employees and 54 routes with only 6 of them having prior dry cleaning experience. If you've ever seen Sudsies team members, you know they resemble more of a happy and empowered posse than simply employees. Jason will share how he builds a contagious business culture that



The graphic features a background image of a historic building in New Orleans. On the left, two circular portraits of speakers are shown: Jason Loeb (top) and Mike Nesbit (bottom). Below each portrait is a dark blue box with white text. Jason Loeb's box says "CREATING A CONTAGIOUS BUSINESS CULTURE". Mike Nesbit's box says "DIVERSIFY OR DIE: UNVEILING THE VISION OF INCREASED PIECE COUNTS". On the right side of the graphic, the text "JOINT SDA & SEFA MEETING" is displayed in large, bold, dark blue letters. Below this text are the logos for SEFA (South Eastern Fabricare Association) and SDA (Southwest Drycleaners Association). Further down, the dates "8-9 MARCH" are shown in large white letters on a dark blue background, followed by the location "Hotel Indigo French Quarter 705 Common Street, New Orleans". At the bottom right, a small white box contains the text: "Meeting is free for dry cleaners and allied members of SEFA & SDA. Non-member vendor price is \$100".

cultivates high employee retention, extreme efficiency, increased sales and a fun work environment.

The host hotel for this event is the Hotel Indigo French Quarter, located at 705 Common Street, in New Orleans. A special hotel rate of \$199/night is available through February 13, 2024. A link for this rate is provided on the SDA website at [www.sda-dryclean.com](http://www.sda-dryclean.com).

## ABOUT SDA & SEFA

**Mission-**The purpose for which these organizations were formed is for the advancement of the interest and general welfare of the association members; the education of the general public with regard to the benefits conferred by the utilization of the textile maintenance industry; to gather, analyze, disseminate accurate and reliable information pertaining to the textile maintenance industry and further a positive relationship to the general welfare of the consumers.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION:

Members are always welcome to attend Board and Committee Meetings. The program is FREE for all members, but we urge you to register in advance. To hold your spot, simply call Peter Blake at 617-791-0128, or send an email to [peter@sefa.org](mailto:peter@sefa.org).

SEFA is invested in your success, and is committed to providing valuable, low-cost education in each area of SEFA's territory. If you have any specific requests for programs, speakers, or events in your local region, please contact the SEFA Office and we will work to accommodate those options.



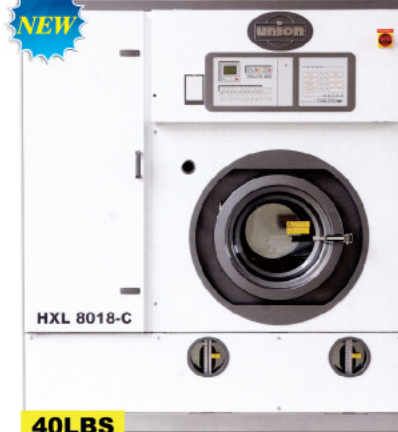
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## On the Road with SEFA

IT WAS A BUSY END OF THE YEAR FOR SEFA. WITH EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMS IN ORLANDO, FT. LAUDERDALE, AND NASHVILLE, 2023 ENDED ONE OF THE BUSIEST YEARS IN RECENT MEMORY.

In addition to the educational programs, also SEFA traveled to Nashville, TN to provide input on proposed changes to the DCERP requirements. Executive Director, Peter Blake, continued his commitment to serving the membership by visiting over 50 drycleaning plants throughout the year.

### LEADERSHIP WORKSHOP WITH JENNIFER WHITMARSH

Earlier this Fall, SEFA brought training expert Jennifer Whitmarsh of Snappy Drycleaning and The Route Pros to lead full day workshops in Orlando and Ft. Lauderdale.

The Programs were very well attended and all those that participated were able to learn valuable techniques to develop their teams.

“Management Training is in high demand,” observed Peter Blake, “and we are fortunate to have some great leaders we can utilize to share their experiences. There is a big difference in being a boss and being a leader. This program helped them learn the difference.

### HOW TO HIRE, RECRUIT AND RETAIN YOUR TEAM WITH BRIAN FISH OF PIER DRYCLEANERS

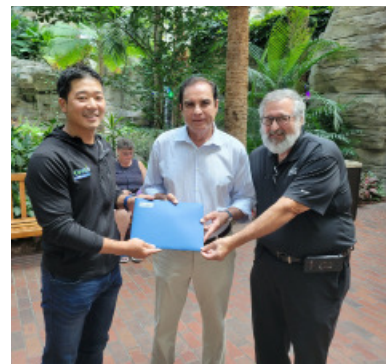
SEFA hosted an engaging discussion on effective ways to seek out new team members and how to retain the ones you have. Brian drew on his experiences in running routes and recruiting staff to explore common best practices for attracting new employees. He demonstrated his prowess in using InDeed and showed attendees how to best leverage the service to find the best applicants.

“Staffing is a major problem in our industry,” observed SEFA Board member Don Holecek. “It was great to learn some new techniques and tips I can use to help develop my own staff. It is such a competitive job market, we need to look at new ways of doing things.

### TN LOOKING TO ALTER DCERP PROGRAM

Peter Blake traveled to Nashville in December to provide input on the proposed changes to the TN Fund requirements. John Holt of FabriClean Supply joined Blake at the hearing, and SEFA Board Member Don Holecek was able to participate virtually.

“The changes were pretty straight forward,” observed Blake, “but it is important to closely monitor all regulatory changes and to learn the motivations behind the changes. In this case, it was also a good start to rebuilding some of the relationships SEFA has had with the Department. In many cases the people we have worked



(From top left, clockwise) Brian Fish in Nashville, TN explores effective recruitment strategies, SEFA Board Members Daniel Cha and Arthur Weiss welcome a new member, Don Holecek virtually joins regulatory hearing, Orlando Leadership Training participants.

with throughout the years have retired and there are new faces that we need to get to know.”

The hearing was very straightforward and SEFA was able to provide some guidance on some of the details and offer assistance in developing compliance tools for the industry.

One thing of note was the State of TN’s commitment to the program. The legislature recently provided an one-time grant to the program of \$5,000,000 from the general fund. Like most of these clean-up funds throughout the country, they are under funded and over subscribed. TN is one of the first states to ever invest in the program. SEFA applauds the efforts of the DCERP team and looks forward to working with them in the future.

### WHAT IS NEXT?

SEFA is committed to continuing its strong emphasis on education and membership retention. The Board has set a goal for Peter to visit 75 SEFA members and Non Member plants in the coming year. SEFA has also charged the Education Committee to develop at least one educational opportunity in each of the SEFA States.

The Board will be meeting Saturday, January 27th at the Shingle Creek Resort in Orlando, FL. Plans are underway to develop an educational opportunity to coincide with the meeting. Watch for email invites, call Peter at 617-791-0128, or check SEFA.Org for more details!



# Looking Ahead to 2023

Continued from page 3

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

Peter@sefa.org  
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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 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:

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