

## **\$5 Million Gift from Richard and Susan Smith Family Foundation Announced at the Esplanade Association's Moondance Gala**

Foundation's leadership gift inspires additional major support for Charlesbank Landing on the Commonwealth's Charles River Esplanade, on an evening honoring Jeryl Oristaglio.

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**September 26, 2023** – Boston, MA – On Saturday, September 23rd at their annual Moondance Gala, the [Esplanade Association \(EA\)](#) publicly announced, and garnered more, major support for [Charlesbank Landing on the Esplanade](#). This once-in-a-generation project will transform more than two dormant acres of the landmarked Charles River Esplanade into a vibrant year-round, universally accessible "landing" space with new welcome center and landscape amenities that will host communities' indoor and outdoor recreational, civic, artistic, educational, environmental, and cultural activities while providing exceptional and sustainable care for the Commonwealth's most visited state park.

The [Richard and Susan Smith Family Foundation \(SFF\)](#) has appreciated the invaluable contribution that this collaborative project between the Esplanade Association and Massachusetts's Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) will make to the physical, mental, social and economic health of the region. On Saturday, SFF's \$5 Million leadership gift for Charlesbank Landing on the Esplanade was announced among State officials, EA leadership and over 475 Gala guests, spurring additional support among attendees for a vision that directly aligns with the Foundation's mission.

The Foundation, whose philanthropy is dedicated to improving human health, raising educational attainment, increasing economic security, and meeting community needs, recognized early on the potential for Charlesbank Landing. The project will directly enhance the community and create a welcoming space for the more than 4 million visitors to Boston's iconic riverfront. SFF's commitment has secured the future of the project, which will activate the beloved 130-year-old park with more inclusive visitor services, cultural attractions, all-ages play opportunities, nature immersion and environmental stewardship.

"We are thrilled to help bring the gift of a signature park and new visitors center to the historic Esplanade," said Debra Smith Knez, chair of the Richard and Susan Smith Family Foundation. "Charlesbank Landing will be a dynamic and accessible destination for residents and visitors alike. We are especially excited about the ways in which it will enrich the park experience for families, helping them fully enjoy the beauty of our riverfront city. We hope the thoughtful design, amenities, and programs will connect and inspire visitors for generations to come."

Jen Mergel, the James and Audrey Foster Executive Director for EA shared her sentiments. "After years of planning, the Smith Family Foundation has provided what EA needed to confidently move forward from preparation to execution for Charlesbank Landing on the Esplanade. The completion of this project is now very much in sight, and we are thrilled that

the commitment by SFF has already inspired others to support what will make the Esplanade a truly welcoming gateway to the Commonwealth's expansive state park system."

The announcement coincided with EA Co-Founder Jeryl Oristaglio being honored that evening with the [Charles Eliot Vision Award](#) for her many decades of commitment to the Esplanade. Following introductions by Gala Co-Chairs, Carolina S ve, Christie and Bob Hedges, and Barbara and Michael Eisenson, and with on-screen tributes by friends including the Commonwealth's 71<sup>st</sup> Governor Deval Patrick and the Landmark Orchestra's Music Director Christopher Wilkins, Oristaglio accepted her award noting, "The Esplanade is about enjoying life... and it takes a village! I hope we will all continue to help make sure the Esplanade has a great future."

While each year's Moondance Gala encourages and celebrates support toward EA's mission, this year's event announcing SFF's campaign support for Charlesbank Landing and honoring Oristaglio inspired especially significant generosity. EA dedicated the evening's paddle-raise to name a significant space in Charlesbank Landing in Jeryl Oristaglio's honor, prompting many to contribute in unique ways. Mergel invited Steve Conine to the stage to take over as MC, and he announced that he and EA Board Chair Alexi Conine would offer a one-to-one match for every dollar raised for "Jeryl's Space" in Charlesbank Landing that evening.

"Jeryl has been such a consistent inspiration to so many to care for the park," said Steve and Alexi Conine afterward. "While we have been committed to this effort from the start, it was fantastic to see so many more people excited to get involved." Mergel added, "Since the first park improvements that launched our organization in 2001, Jeryl has always seen the potential of the Esplanade, and specifically Charlesbank Landing, to be a more beautiful and more welcoming community space. With the announcement of SFF's extraordinary gift, what perfect timing to invite others to honor her legacy."

The challenge prompted an outpouring of contributions that evening, all made even more memorable by announcements and appearances from on screen. For example, the EA introduced a video message from Oristaglio's "fellow greenspace champion" Tom Brady, who is contributing major support to both Charlesbank Landing and the EA's year-round youth programming. Likewise, Brady's former teammate Rob Gronkowski offered an auction experience, to join him and friends on a Duck Boat, what EA noted was "his favorite mode of champion transport through Boston," to attend next year's dedication of the Gronk Nation Youth Foundation's playground renovation next to Charlesbank Landing.

At the start of the evening, EA had confirmed SFF's milestone \$5 Million gift ensured 75% of the Charlesbank Landing project fundraising goal had been achieved. By night's end, Moondance Gala raised \$3,729,000 overall for EA's operations as well as for Charlesbank Landing—increasing support for this transformational project to more than 81%. EA is committed to closing the funding gap for this year-round facility and welcomes community participation.

Present at the Gala for these milestones were esteemed attendees, including Board leadership and staff of the Richard and Susan Smith Family Foundation, and award-winning architect Maryann Thompson, who with Michael Van Valkenburgh Landscape Associates has worked closely with EA and DCR on the Charlesbank Landing designs; and event appearances by actively supportive state partners included DCR Commissioner Brian Arrigo and State Representative Jay Livingstone.

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**About the Richard and Susan Smith Family Foundation:**

The Richard and Susan Smith Family Foundation is committed to effecting permanent positive change in the lives of individuals and families across Greater Boston. Today, two generations of the Smith family oversee the Foundation, stewarding approximately \$17 million annually in grants aimed at improving human health, raising educational attainment, increasing economic security, and meeting community needs. For more information, visit [rssff.org](https://rssff.org).

*[Image 1 – Richard and Susan Smith Family Foundation Executive Director Lynne Doblin, Trustees Nicolas Dulac, Jessica Knez Dulac, Charlesbank Landing lead Architect Maryann Thompson, Debra Smith Knez, and James Audrey Foster Executive Director Jen Mergel \(left to right\) - Lindsay Ahern, Elevation Photography](#)*

**About Charlesbank Landing on the Esplanade:**

Learn more about the Charlesbank Landing project and donate at [Esplanade.org/charlesbank](https://esplanade.org/charlesbank).

*[Charlesbank Landing on the Esplanade Schematics as of September 2023 by Maryann Thompson Architects](#)*

**About the Charles Eliot Vision Award:**

In 2004 the Esplanade Association established The Charles Eliot Vision Award to honor an individual or organization who made a significant contribution to the physical condition of the Esplanade or to the care and preservation of green space more broadly. The Award is only conferred on special occasions, with previous recipients being the Friends of the Esplanade Play Space in 2012 and David Solomon of the Solomon Foundation in 2013. Learn more about awards [esplanade.org/awards](https://esplanade.org/awards)

*[Image 2 – Jeryl Oristaglio, Esplanade Association Co-founder and 2023 Charles Eliot Vision Award Recipient, Addressing 2023 Moondance Gala Crowd - Lindsay Ahern, Elevation Photography](#)*

**About the Esplanade Association (EA):**

The Esplanade Association is the community-supported nonprofit organization that works to revitalize and enhance the Charles River Esplanade, sustain its natural green space, and build community in the park by providing educational, cultural, and recreational programs for everyone. Working in collaboration with the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation, the Esplanade Association is dedicated to improving the experiences of the millions of visitors who enjoy Boston's iconic riverside park. Importantly, the Esplanade Association acknowledges that the 64 acres of its care were originally inhabited by the Massachusett, Wampanoag and Nipmuc peoples in what was the tidal Quinobequin River, now called the Charles River. Through its work, the Esplanade Association strives to honor, respect, and recognize the connection between this site and our local indigenous tribes' and neighbors' ongoing stewardship of these lands and waters. For more information visit, [Esplanade.org](https://esplanade.org).

*[Image 3 – Alexi Conine, Esplanade Association Board Chair; Brian Arrigo, Department of Conservation and Recreation Commissioner; Jeryl Oristaglio, Esplanade Association Co-founder; and Jen Mergel, James and Audrey Foster Executive Director \(left to right\) - Lindsay Ahern, Elevation Photography](#)*

**About the Esplanade Association's Moondance Gala**

Learn more at [Esplanade.org/moondance](https://esplanade.org/moondance).