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## John Sykes Named 2015 Chair of IAFE

LAS VEGAS, NV — December 11, 2014 — John Sykes, president and CEO of The Park of East Texas, Inc., which produces the East Texas State Fair and Academic Rodeo in Tyler Texas, was elected the 2015 chair of the International Association of Fairs and Expositions (IAFE) today during the final business session of the 124<sup>th</sup> IAFE Annual Convention. The convention began Dec. 7 and continues through today at the Paris Hotel in Las Vegas, Nev.

After graduating magna cum laude from Texas A&M University, Sykes began his career ranching. He operated a 200 head cow-calf operation and a 300 sow farrow-to-finish swine farm. In 1984, he was chosen as Texas' Outstanding Young Farmer and Rancher.

Furthering his professional career, Sykes was recruited to promote the USA pecan industry in international markets. He has traveled extensively in Mexico, Central and South America, Southeast Asia, and Europe developing relationships with international companies and individuals. He returned to his alma mater and became a member of the Texas A&M University System Agriculture Program as the legislative liaison for the Texas A&M Agrilife Extension Service and as director of the Texas Agricultural Lifetime Leadership program.

Because of his strong agricultural background, extensive knowledge of event management, fundraising proficiency, and his established professional relationships, Sykes entered the fair industry in the early 1990s as assistant general manager of the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo, leading all facets of the livestock show, horse show, calf scramble, wine competition, international program and the renowned auction programs. There, he also served as a member of the team building NRG Stadium and NRG Center as the show moved from the Astrodome and Astrohall, a \$600 million project.

Sykes applied his knowledge and experience to bolster the East Texas State Fair and design and build a new year-round entertainment venue, expo park, and fairgrounds. The company purchased 240 acres two miles from the current fairgrounds. He rebranded the fair association into The Park of East Texas and is leading the development of a community-supported master plan, construction phases, and fundraising involving both private and public funds. The ultimate goal is to create a year-round park that will support the East Texas State Fair and other special events. Ultimately, The Park will become a destination entertainment venue.

Sykes has served the fair industry as president of the Texas Association of Fairs and Events and has served as a director on the Board of the IAFE. In 2004, Sykes received the Fair Manager of the Year award from the Texas Association of Fairs and Events.

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