



nela music
ASSOCIATION

2025 Annual Report

Message from the President/Founder

Myra Gatling-Akers

This year was a whirlwind—in the best way. We pushed hard to spotlight the incredible musicians across Northeast Louisiana and beyond, and our work reached far past the NELA Music Awards. We celebrated a major milestone with a ribbon cutting for both the NELA Music Association and the NELA Music Awards. We hosted two nominee release parties, one in West Monroe and another in Ruston, expanding our reach and strengthening our regional presence.

We also honored Lt. Governor Billy Nungesser with an appreciation luncheon for his ongoing support of live music in our state and our region. And in a major step forward, we launched a new nonprofit—the NELA Music Association—allowing us to focus solely on elevating music and musicians in our community.

We are proud of what we accomplished this year. Our efforts made an impact, and we remain committed to building a stronger, more vibrant musical landscape for Northeast Louisiana.

Executive Committee

President, Myra Gatling-Akers
Vice President, Ross Slacks

Secretary, Celeste Heisler
Treasurer, Melinda Hill -Floyd

Board of Directors

Gwen Amelin
Gaye Auger-Laing

Jayne Smith-Green
Johnna Utzman
Tom Malmay

Steering Committee

Myra Gatling-Akers, Gwen Amelin, Mike Downhour, Melinda Hill-Floyd, Tom Malmay, Ross Slacks, Johnna Utzman

Marketing Committee

Myra Gatling-Akers, Genevieve Alexander, Santoria Black, Bill Blackwell, Averyal Goyne, Toshia Laing, Mitch Laing, Tom Malmay, Johnna Utzman, Gray Vickers, Dana Vickers, Adam Holland, Jordan Alexander

Show Committee

Genevieve Alexander, Gwen Amelin, Brittani Audirsch, Melinda Hill-Floyd, Averyal Goyne, Celeste Heisler, Gaye Auger Laing, Johnna Utzman, Jayne Smith-Green, Ross Slacks, Gray Vickers

Volunteers

Jay Waalk, Al Cherry, Tom Faber, Rick Godley, Missy Hutchins, Clay LaBeff, Josh love, Clara Rae, Mark Taylor, Danny Lee Witherington

Who We Are

Purpose: to recognize and celebrate the diverse musical talent in Northeast Louisiana. Our platform showcases the work of musicians, songwriters, live music venues, and other music industry professionals, significantly contributing to the growth and recognition of the Northeast Louisiana music scene.

Mission: to showcase the musical talent in NELA and market as a music destination.

Vision: To become a destination hub for music enthusiasts and inspire significant participation in musical arts.

Goal: to elevate awareness and appreciation for live music by showcasing a wide range of performances and promoting the talent in the region.

Service Area: (12 parishes) Caldwell-Columbia, East Carroll-Lake Providence, Franklin-Winnsboro, Jackson-Jonesboro, Lincoln-Ruston, Madison-Tallulah, Morehouse-Bastrop, Ouachita-Monroe, Richland-Rayville, Tensas-St. Joseph, Union-Farmerville, and West Carroll-Oak Grove.

2025 Action Plan

Goal: Host the NELA Music Awards to showcase and recognize the incredible talent in our region.

2025 Accomplishments

This year was a major step forward for the NELA Music Awards and the NELA Music Association. We partnered with the Northeast Delta Human Services Authority to present the awards and to spotlight the therapeutic and healing power of music. We also upgraded the NELA Music Hall of Fame with new inductee awards and welcomed 21 new members from across the music industry.

A ULM Marketing class selected the NELA Music Awards as their project, giving students hands-on experience while helping expand our reach. “Mitch in the Morning” on KTVE featured our live venue sponsors, giving them well-deserved visibility. We also secured four grants that helped strengthen our programs and operations.

We expanded our nominee announcement events by hosting two Nominee Release Parties, including a new partnership with Sundown Tavern in Ruston. Additional collaborations included the Monroe Moccasins, allowing us to reach their season ticket holders; the Black Creative Circle, helping us discover new talent; the BB King Museum & Interpretive Center, which contributed an exhibit for the awards; and Mortenson Construction, currently working on the Richland Parish Data Center.

The Monroe Chamber of Commerce and the West Monroe West Ouachita Chamber of Commerce hosted a ribbon-cutting for the NELA Music Awards, marking another milestone. Throughout the year, we recognized and presented 30 artist awards, inducted 21 individuals into the NELA Music Hall of Fame, and honored 12 with Lifetime Achievement Awards.

Attendance at the NELA Music Awards increased by 50%, marking our strongest year yet. American Idol contestant Clara Rae and her husband Zane Anderson hosted the show, artist Gaye Auger-Laing painted live onstage, and we featured more performances than ever. We also took a meaningful step back in time with reunions of Easy Eddie and the Party Rockers, Leroy Marshall, and Gary Brown. A special tribute was presented to Tim McGraw in recognition of his induction into the NELA Music Hall of Fame.

Overall, this year showcased the depth of talent in our region and strengthened the foundation we are building for the future of music in Northeast Louisiana.

Goal: Market Northeast Louisiana as a Music Destination

2025 Accomplishments

We expanded our promotional efforts in a big way this year. We developed the video “We’ve Got the Music in NELA,” produced by 3 Bridges Productions, and partnered with them again on “Behind the NELA Music.” We also launched new merchandise, including “Birthplace of Dreams” and “We’ve Got the Music in NELA” T-shirts, to strengthen brand visibility.

To keep the community connected to the live music scene, we introduced a weekly texting service that anyone can subscribe to for updates on where to find live performances. We also created the “Sounds of NELA” playlist to highlight artists from across Northeast Louisiana.

Gray Vickers, Dave Gore, and Tom Malmay made regular media appearances on KTVE’s “Louisiana Living” and on KWCL-96.7 FM in Oak Grove, sharing updates each week about what was happening in the music scene.

To further support local talent, we launched an additional website, NELAMusic.org, and created a musicians' registry to provide an accessible list of performers available for hire. We continued pushing the “We’ve Got the Music in NELA” campaign throughout the year, keeping momentum strong and awareness growing.

Goal: Market NELA Music Association and what we do

2025 Accomplishments

We expanded our educational and community impact this year through several key partnerships and initiatives. We partnered with the Union Parish Library in Farmerville on the SPARK Program, which provides music education for teens, including mentoring in songwriting, vocal development, music video production, and live performance.

We also partnered with the Murphy Arts District to promote their entertainment offerings and to create more performance opportunities for NELA musicians, helping them broaden their reach and grow their fan base.

The Monroe Chamber of Commerce and the West Monroe West Ouachita Chamber of Commerce hosted a ribbon-cutting for the NELA Music Association, formally recognizing our organization’s new focus on music. We also hosted a reception for Lt. Governor Billy Nungesser to express our appreciation for his continued support of the music community.

To strengthen our visibility and communication, we created a LinkedIn page and added our organization to Culturalyst, allowing more people to learn about our work. We also added a Resources tab to our website to better serve musicians and community partners.

We collected testimonials from members of the music community about the impact of our efforts, reinforcing the value of our mission. Additionally, we became members of both the Monroe Chamber of Commerce and the West Monroe West Ouachita Chamber of Commerce, further integrating our organization into the regional business and cultural landscape.

This year proved one thing without question: Northeast Louisiana's music community is rising, and we're not slowing down. The work we accomplished—across events, partnerships, outreach, and recognition—set a new standard for what the NELA Music Association and the NELA Music Awards can achieve. We expanded our reach, deepened our impact, and built stronger connections across all 12 parishes we serve.

But this isn't the finish line. It's the launchpad.

With a growing network of partners, a stronger organizational foundation, and a community that shows up with passion and pride, we are positioned to elevate NELA music even further. Our goals are bold because this region deserves bold leadership. We will continue pushing for more visibility, more opportunities, more stages, and more recognition for the artists, venues, and industry professionals who make this region's music culture worth celebrating.

Thank you to our committees, volunteers, partners, supporters, and every musician who trusts us with their stories, their talent, and their dreams. Together, we are building something lasting—something that will define Northeast Louisiana as not just a place where great music lives, but a place where it thrives.

We're proud of how far we've come.
We're energized for where we're headed.
And the best is still in front of us.

