

BottomLine



THE VOICE OF MIDWEST INDEPENDENT RETAILERS // VOL. 33, NO. 10 // OCTOBER 2022



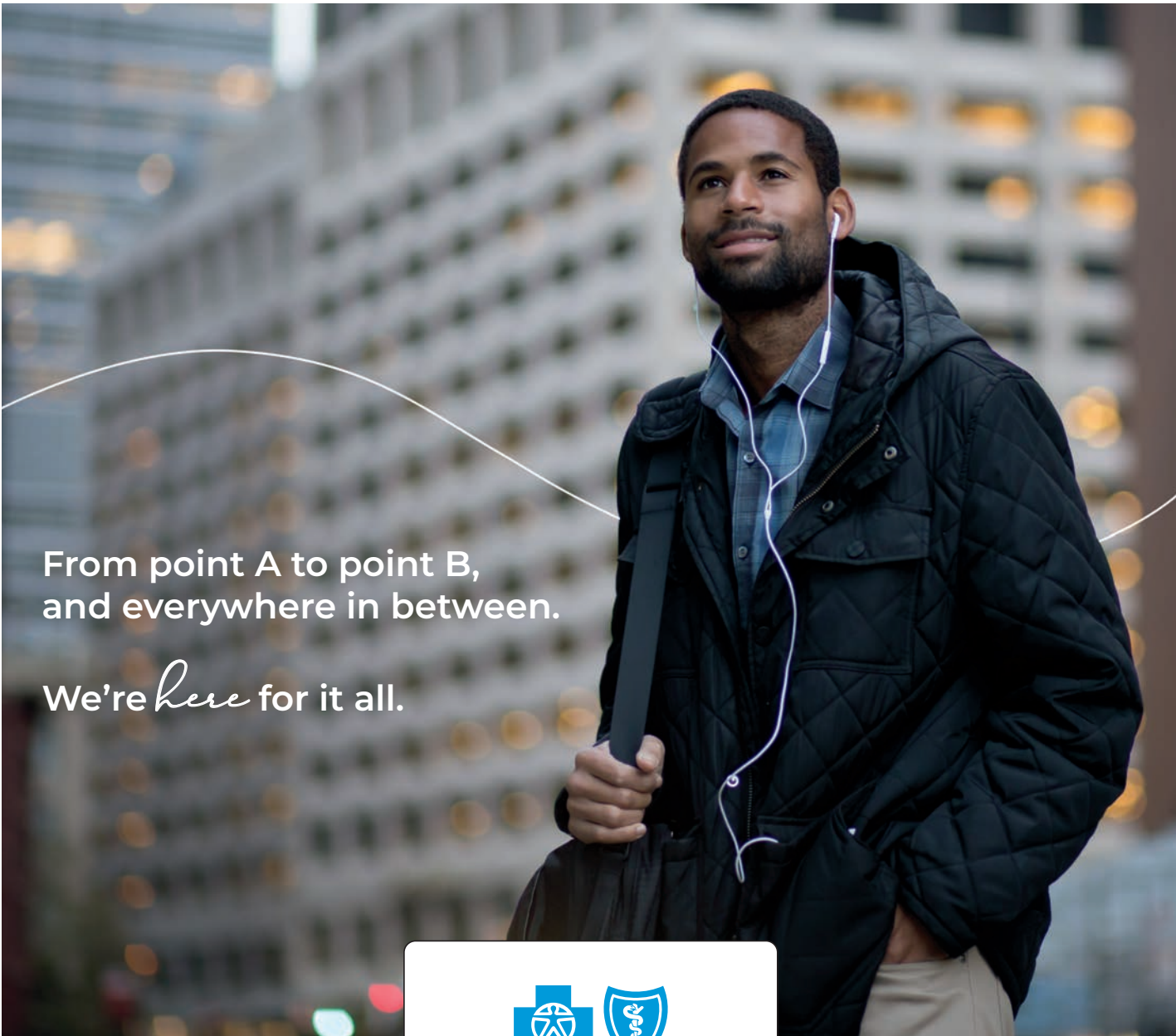
CASTING OUR VOTE IN NOVEMBER

Your Voice Your Vote

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BottomLine



THE VOICE OF MIDWEST INDEPENDENT RETAILERS
VOL. 33, NO. 10 // OCTOBER 2022

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REPRESENTING OUR MEMBERS AND THEIR CONCERNS

On August 31, 2022, members of the MIRA executive team, including myself, met with the top executives from Altria including their president and CEO, Scott Myers. I typically do not write about manufacturer meetings, but this time I felt compelled to share the details since it touched on a multitude of industry issues. It is a great example of how MIRA is both addressing industry issues that are impacting our members with top manufacturers and working with them to protect our members interests.



COVER STORY // CASTING OUR VOTE IN NOVEMBER

Voters will be deciding on Congressional seats this November as we head into the midterm elections. In some states, there are other issues that are on the ballot.



MARKETING TO ETHNIC GROUPS AND MORE DURING THE HOLIDAY SEASON

We are heading into the Halloween, Thanksgiving, Hannukah, Christmas and Kwanza holiday season and retailers are prepped to market products. In some retail establishments, decorations for all the major holidays were on display before kids were even back to school.



chairman's message

CLIFTON DENHA // MIRA CHAIRMAN

Random Thoughts as Winter Approaches

We all know the days of Summer are behind us and like it or not the chill and snow of winter is on its way! With that in mind you must prepare for the cold and snow.

Any outdoor painting should be completed ASAP.

You're just kidding yourself if you think the weather is going to be more accommodating. Don't neglect any outdoor signage and lighting. The daylight hours are getting shorter and ID lighting and outdoor lighting will become more important.

If you sell any winter products (windshield washer fluid, ice scrapers, salt, gloves, hats, etc.) now is the time to load up and display as impulse items for the "early bird" customers. Most economists are convinced that we are not retreating to 2019 prices as inflation continues. We may see a small decrease, followed by a plateauing of prices, but that's about the best we could hope for.

Therefore, it is time to revise your business plan acknowledging that we are all facing inflation. Wages, costs, insurance, utilities, credit card fees, interest rates, fuel surcharges will all edge upward, and you must consider this fact or you will slowly erode your cash. Restructuring your prices is a must. The big companies aren't bashful about increasing retail prices, neither should be a holdout.

Also consider that you need to compete using the factors of hours of operation, appearance, and service to keep and attract customers.

Additionally, strongly consider participating in MIRA's rebate and discount programs. Visit our website at www.miramw.org or call the office at (800) 666-6233 and ask about which programs can help you sell more or reduce your expenses.

Supplier and associate members are also eligible to take advantage of the rebate and discount programs. Insurance and cleaning supply programs are just two that I can think of that you can use at your place of business. I'm sure there are a few more.

Remember MIRA is here to help you compete on a level playing field. Call or email us with any questions. ■

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Food & Beverage Show Energizes and Excites With New Products for the Holidays



■ BY EPIPHANY COMMUNICATIONS AND COACHING*

MIRA's 23rd Annual Holiday Food and Beverage Show took place at Suburban Collection Showplace on September 20th. Members gathered from all over the Midwest to showcase their newest products or shop for the hottest items to put in their retail stores.

The recovery from COVID-19 has been a long road, according to MIRA members, who were excited to be back to events and shopping for products. The show was lively, featuring raffles, gifts, and other member opportunities. Mary Ann Yono, who tabled MIRA's booth at the front of the show, said she saw hundreds of people and dozens of new faces attending the event.

Many of the booths featured new and innovative takes on liquor as well as simple classics. The most animated booth must go to Floh Vodka, which brought a large corner bar that flipped through the color wheel every few seconds. Courtney Hammerle, one of Floh

Vodka's representatives, said the booth represented the products. "Our alcohol is colorful and stylish," she said. "And we brought that to the holiday show."

All of the booths gave out a plethora of samples to potential customers. Competition was fierce among liquor, wine, beer, and seltzer vendors, whose products were put to the test by independent retailers.

Another popular liquor section was provided by Benchmark Beverage Company, who offered shots of their new, colorful mixers. Benchmark Beverage Company is especially important to MIRA. Just last year, at the Annual Holiday Show, MIRA sold their 10% share of the up-and-coming business. Benchmark Beverage Company showed that it has room to grow and is back better than ever. "The selection of products we have now is astonishing," said Naomi, who was working the Benchmark booth.

Many other suppliers besides alcohol vendors came to the massive event hall to show off their products. Faygo, a local but large business,

touted their ever-changing soda flavors. Mr. Vapor and Breeze, two of the largest vape brands in the Midwest, were both present at the event flaunting their newest flavors and products. Mr. Vapor has recently come out with a disposable vaporizer that includes mesh coils to match the quality of Breeze Pro.

Even more vendors attended that, at first glance, may seem out of place, but were able to network with many interested customers and surely gained a lot of business. Insurance and security companies were well-represented, as well as Prairie Farms Dairy Co., a dairy cooperative based in Illinois.

The event had a live DJ who took turns queuing music and making various announcements including several raffle winners. The curtaining was a light and bright red color, which added to the holiday feel. Presents were scattered along the ground and in front of the DJ booth.

Another popular booth, and a sponsor of the show, was U.S. Ice. Marcus Abbo was representing his family business at the holiday show, and said he had an excellent time. "It's so great to be involved in organizations like this. It's good for business and we all help each other," he said. "I've been working with my dad, Saad Abbo, in the ice business for a while now. He's one of the best to learn from."

MIRA will continue the holiday show tradition next year on September 26th in the same location in Novi, Michigan. ■

**Writers with Epiphany Communications and Coaching are content creators for Bottom Line.*



ASK THE MEMBER: WHAT ARE YOUR FAVORITE HOT TICKET BEVERAGES FOR THE HOLIDAYS?

Vendors at MIRA's 23rd Annual Holiday Food & Beverage Show share their favorites:

"A good wine. None of that cheap stuff. A nice bottle of wine in the \$20 range."

– NAOMI // BENCHMARK BEVERAGE COMPANY

"A bottle of our Rye Old Fashioned. It's a pre-mixed Old Fashioned that you can pour straight into a glass or over rocks."

– SCOTT ROFFMAN // OAKSIDE COCKTAIL COMPANY

"Everfresh orange juice is the best mixer for the holiday season."

– PURELL DOSS // FAYGO

"Our Faygo Blue Raspberry makes an excellent stocking stuffer."

– VIDAL SANCHEZ // FAYGO

"You have to try our grapefruit vodka!"

– COURTNEY HAMMERLE // FLOH VODKA

"Bomscicle is about to blow up."

– LAITH // MR. VAPOR

"Game Day is the perfect drink as sports start up. It includes 70 mg of electrolytes to give you the recovery boost you need."

– JOSH FARNSEY // REPUBLIC NATIONAL DISTRIBUTING COMPANY

"You have to have our eggnog. It's an exclusive item we only make beginning in October."

– MARK BENEDICT // PRAIRIE FARMS DAIRY CO.





c-store news & views

JIM GREEN // MIRA VICE PRESIDENT, PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

Representing Our Members and Their Concerns

On August 31, 2022, members of the MIRA executive team, including myself, met with the top executives from Altria including their president and CEO, Scott Myers. I typically do not write about manufacturer meetings, but this time I felt compelled to share the details since it touched on a multitude of industry issues. It is a great example of how MIRA is both addressing industry issues that are impacting our members with top manufacturers and working with them to protect our members interests.

The first thing we discussed is making sure our government relations efforts and strategies are aligned. While government relations are not my area of expertise, it was great participating in those discussions. With the upcoming election we could very easily see a wave of candidates elected that are eager to increase tobacco and nicotine taxes, which will have a negative impact on many of our members' businesses. We are proactively having those discussions and Juan Escareño, MIRA's Director of Government Relations, will be working closely with Altria's team to ensure we fight those efforts on every front.

The next big topic that we discussed was Altria's retail program which is very complex. These complexities are the primary reason less than 50% of independent retailers are participating in the program. There are three different tiers to the program, and I am not going to go into every aspect of their program but the main concern for most retailers is partaking in the scan data and loyalty programs. This provides the retailer the ability to offer the promotional pricing set by Altria and be reimbursed for the promotional amounts. Everything relies on capturing and reporting the data correctly. If this is not done with 100% accuracy the retailer compliance to the program completely falls apart. This is where the problem lies. There are a lot of data providers in the market that are not reporting



MIRA TEAM MEMBERS WITH TOP ALTRIA EXECUTIVES

the data accurately 100% of the time. This causes the retailer to not be paid the correct amount for the scan data and promotional allowances they passed along to consumers. Many retailers are losing money on these sales and do not even know it. Retailers are submitting the data from their register and assume they will be paid the correct amounts. MIRA's position is that Altria is the market makers for the data program and has a responsibility to provide better guidance for retailers in selecting a data provider. We asked that Altria look at offering certification of data providers that have the quality standards necessary to accurately report the data. We also believe Altria has a responsibility to inform retailers directly and in a timely fashion when their data is not accurately submitted. Although we have not received any definitive answers on this subject, they listened to our concerns and are committed to working with us to find a better solution.

I would encourage every member that is either on the Altria retail program or who wants to be on the Altria retail program to look at Success Systems and Petrosoft. Talk to them regarding what you are doing and what you want to do. MIRA endorses their systems and MIRA members receive a discount for using them. They are great partners who have demonstrated the ability to accurately report the scan data. They also have tools that can provide more visibility for retailers and can help them manage their business. Please contact the MIRA office at (800) 666-6233 or visit our website at www.miramw.org for details. ■

INTRODUCING THE NEWEST MEMBER OF



*Melissa
Stockwell*

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proud mother of two.

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government relations report

JUAN ESCAREÑO // MIRA DIRECTOR, GOVERNMENT RELATIONS & COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Updates From the Field

“Tactics mean doing what you can with what you have.”

– SAUL ALINSKY

As MIRA’s Government and Community Relations Director, I am tasked with doing what I can, with what I have been given. I often times have to remind folks that the art of politics is just that an art in the classical sense of the term. Webster’s Dictionary defines politics as, “the art or science concerned with guiding or influencing governmental policy.”

We do try to guide legislators and regulators. We attempt to sway their opinions and decisions towards the small independent retailer. The challenge is fighting as David when you are up against Goliath. We sometimes only have one shot. We sometimes don’t even have a rock to throw. But not throwing something at Goliath means losing everything. Including our integrity. Some want us to throw boulders when in reality, we can sometimes win in the long term with just a simple small rock.

And why is politics an art? It is something that should be practiced every day and improved and learned. It is a science. The formula tends to be the same and the longer we do this, the more we learn how to win with the small rock given to us. I like to quote Saul Alinsky because he had small rocks to throw in Chicago. Small rocks that won big fights in his glory days of organizing in Back of The Yards. I was privileged to be mentored at one time by an organizer that was trained by Alinsky. The stories of how he won those early fights shape the way I see my job for you. We are taking small rocks, ready to win.

Here are some of the small victories that are brewing for you across our organization:

MICHIGAN:

- We are working to acquire the MLCC half-mile rule for municipalities. We will then offer any suggested changes once reviewing the information.
- We actively oppose expanding the bottle bill and continue to defend against the constant effort to add water bottles.
- We are working to stop ghost retailers from undercutting brick and mortar stores in the delivery of alcohol. Legislation will be introduced soon to ensure delivery is not done with independent contractors. This would hinder Amazon like operations from undercutting our members.

ILLINOIS:

- We have a growing list of aldermen in the City of Chicago that work with us on getting answers for our members
- We are actively working with the Cook County Commissioners to enact a tax abatement policy for stores in food deserts. We project this saving independent retailers will help stores expand, remodel, and train employees. We anticipate this legislation moving in next month.
- We spearheaded the Link Match pilot program in supermarkets. This program is bringing thousands of dollars for marketing to participating stores and expanding the purchase amounts of customers on EBT. Cermak, One Stop, and Pete’s have signed up for the program.

OHIO:

- We are working to stop the Columbus City Council proposed ordinance to ban menthol cigarettes.

These fights take time and energy. Without your support, all these fights would be for nothing. As we near our wins in Cook County, and Lansing, and Columbus, we will actively seek your support in sharing why these fights are important to you. Together we are able to overcome Goliath. Maybe not today, but as we refine our art, we will advance and win tomorrow. ■



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michigan liquor report

PAT GAGLIARDI // CHAIR, MICHIGAN LIQUOR CONTROL COMMISSION

SIPS+

At long last, work is underway on building our new Sales, Inventory and Purchasing System or SIPS+. This \$7 million project will completely replace the Commission's existing Legacy mainframe system with one totally modern solution. The MLCC's current albeit archaic mainframe computer application is almost 50 years old and is written in the COBOL programming language!

To say that we are ecstatic about SIPS+ cannot be overstated. SIPS+ will streamline operations by consolidating three systems: liquor registration, beer/wine registration, and sales, inventory and purchasing of alcoholic beverages. The state-of-the-art system will be customized and built to the requirements of the MLCC.

The new platform will support 23,035 retail licensees (13,985 on-premises licensees and 9,050 off-premises licensees), 13,000 spirit products, and more than 217,000 beer, wine, and mixed spirit drink product registrations.

"We are thrilled to be working with a vendor to update and consolidate current manual processes in our finance division," said MLCC Business Manager Kerry Krone. "As the wholesaler for spirit products, it is important that we bring our system to a more current level ensuring that the MLCC can continue to buy and sell liquor. Our IT team has been ready take this next step and already has a great working relationship with an experienced vendor."

SIPS new capabilities and benefits include:

- Customer-centered 21st century technology (five decades overdue) for the MLCC's rapidly growing business
- Ability to reconcile gross orders with invoices and reconcile sales including adjustments
- Ability to balance and maintain MLCC inventories and maintain daily balances
- Ability for authorized distribution agents (ADAs) to electronically send the MLCC invoices with adjustments and gross orders
- Facilitates integration with ADAs, a unique relationship; the State of Michigan Liquor Control Commission is the wholesaler, however liquor is warehoused and delivered through the ADAs and sold by independent retailers
- Removes redundant steps and streamlines data/order entry
- Improved data security and integrity.
- Ability to speedily accommodate inquiries and/or requests for data

"In our modernization effort, we are taking into account the needs of all our customers: liquor licensees, spirit vendors, authorized distribution agents, state agencies and the general public," said MLCC Finance Director Pam Hamilton. "Not only

are we creating a state-of-the-art system, we are also analyzing the way we do things, and where it makes sense, changing our procedures to accommodate our customers."

The new ability to balance our state inventory daily as compared to balancing it weekly will be a cost-saving measure for both the MLCC and our spirits vendors to help both know exactly who owns what inventory and have real-time accountability.

The new capability to pull data sets almost immediately in response to specific inquiries will be a welcome addition, whether the inquiries are for a FOIA request, a college student, a reporter, the governor, or anyone else who may need it.

For example, the MLCC often receives inquiries asking what the top five best-selling codes have been for last fiscal or calendar year. Being able to pull different sets, depending on the question, we might be able to answer trend questions. That is something we cannot do now. Providing such services will be helpful to our customers.

Ms. Hamilton said that the SIPS+ acronym was created with contributions from the MLCC staff and then a popular vote of the favorite acronym. Not only does SIPS+ stand for Sales, Inventory and Purchasing System, but it is a play on words . . . taking sips of liquor.

"SIPS+ will create a much more efficient workflow and enhance the user experience for both licensees and MLCC staff by enabling them to access more information via the web," said SIPS+ Team Product Owner Erika Hoppes. "We are excited to be working with an experienced vendor and happy to have the opportunity to make a positive impact on our licensees and the public."

I want to thank Ms. Krone, Hamilton and Hoppes for their leadership in spearheading the SIPS+ project, along with staff from our Finance and Licensing divisions. Their work has been invaluable toward making this enormous system overhaul a reality.

I also want to thank the Executive Teams of the Michigan Department of Licensing and Regulatory Affairs (where the MLCC is housed) and the state Department of Technology, Management & Budget.

Funding for the SIPS+ project comes from the State Information Technology Investment Fund which was appropriated by the State legislature. The SIPS+ project formally began with the recent selection of a vendor through a competitive bid process.

SIPS+ will not only achieve our current operational goals, but it will also be built to serve the Commission and our customers well into the future.

We are anticipating that SIPS+ will "go live" and be fully operational by the end of 2023. Good things happen to those who wait. ■

The mission of the Michigan Liquor Control Commission (MLCC) is to make alcoholic beverages available for consumption while protecting the consumer and the general public through regulation of those involved in the sale and distribution of these alcohol beverage products.

— DISCOUNTS —



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ohio lobbyist report

TERRY FLEMING // TC FLEMING & ASSOCIATES

All Eyes on November Elections

The Ohio General Assembly continues to be in recess as all members are in election mode. Running in new districts with new voters is always a challenge. The statewide elections in Ohio are for Governor, Attorney General, Auditor of State, Secretary of State and Treasurer of State. Additionally, there are two Ohio Supreme Court races on the ballot and also the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. All five of the statewide offices are currently held by Republican incumbents and it appears as if all five will easily retain their offices, that being Governor Mike DeWine, Attorney General David Yost, Auditor of State Keith Faber, Secretary of State Frank LaRose and Treasurer of State Robert Spague. Control of the Supreme Court is at stake and Republicans could be in danger of losing, but for the first time in Ohio, the party affiliation will be listed for the candidates. The race for Chief justice is between two incumbent members and will not change the makeup of the court.

As inflation runs rampant and cost of goods and services continue to rise, the federal elections will be critical to businesses and MIRA members. Ohio lost a congressional seat due to slow population growth which leaves 15 seats and it now looks like Republicans will win 12 of the 15, with an outside chance at 13. This will help national Republicans who hope to retake the U.S. House of Representatives.

The key race in Ohio is for the U.S. Senate. Incumbent Republican, Rob Portman, is not running so it's an open seat being contested by J.D. Vance (R) and Tim Ryan (D). Vance is a famous author of the book "Hillbilly Elegy" and Ryan is a current member of Congress. This should have been an easy seat for Republicans but Vance's inexperience and a poor campaign has given Ryan a chance to win, which would



be a devastating blow to Republican chances of retaking the U.S. Senate.

While there are currently no legislative issues, Ohio is in process of issuing licenses for gambling machines in retail stores and other outlets. If you are interested in obtaining a license for this or want to check on lottery license availability, please contact MIRA at (800) 666-6233.

Lastly we end on a very sad note as we say goodbye to former MIRA Chairman and longtime service station owner Pat LaVecchia. Pat was a great advocate for MIRA members and kept abreast of all federal issues and gave early warnings on anything that would adversely affect MIRA members. We extend our condolences to Pat's family as we say a fond farewell to a good man. ■



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Casting Our Vote in November

Your Voice Your Vote

■ BY EPIPHANY COMMUNICATIONS AND COACHING*



MICHIGAN

In the state of Michigan, there are three major proposals on the ballot.

- **Proposition 1 – Voter Transparency and Term Limits:** According to opponents, Proposition 1 would double how long a Representative could serve. It reduces max length a lawmaker can serve from 14 years to 12 years, but would allow them to serve the full 12 years in one chamber. Since the Senate only has 38 seats and the House 110, currently most House Representatives never make it to the Senate.

Therefore, it doubles a state representative's ability to serve from six to 12 years and Senators from eight to 12 years.

- **Proposition 2 – Promote the Vote:** Opponents believe Proposition 2 could make for vulnerable voter fraud. It allows nine days of early in-person voting with less oversight. It allows more absentee ballots and drop off boxes with less oversight with more expense. It includes No State ID required to vote, which opens the potential for non-citizens to vote. It allows public sources and charities to fund elections, potential for financial manipulation and it establishes post-election audits that can ONLY be conducted by state/local officials; denies citizens access election records, potentially making it a crime to ask questions about election accuracy.



■ **Proposition 3 – Reproductive Freedom for All:**

Proposition 3 would make Michigan the most pro-abortion state in the country. It changes the state's constitution and would allow abortion up until birth, including partial-birth abortion and the termination of babies who survive abortions. Allows minor children to obtain abortion, sterilization and puberty blockers and sex change surgery without parental knowledge or consent. It would eliminate screenings of women coerced into abortion and would remove health and safety requirements of abortion facilities.

Congressional races are at the forefront of industry leaders.

There are four competitive Congressional races in Michigan that will decide which party controls Michigan's delegation in Congress. "Michigan lost one seat in Congress before the redistricting maps were drawn taking our representation from 14 members to 13. Republicans have five safe seats entering the election and Democrats have four safe seats" said Matt Miner, CEO Capitol Strategies Group. "The remaining four seats are up for grabs and can be considered toss-ups according to national pundits."

These seats include the 3rd Congressional District in the Grand rapids area featuring Republican John Gibbs and Democrat Hillary Scholten, the 7th Congressional District in the Lansing area featuring Republican Tom Barrett and Democrat Elissa Slotkin, the 8th Congressional District in the Flint area featuring Republican Paul Junge and Democrat Dan Kildee, and finally the 10th District in Oakland and Macomb County featuring Republican John James and Democrat Carl Marlinga.

The overarching issue lingering around the country is inflation. "Gas prices and food costs remain high and the outlook for relief in the near future looks bleak. Americans are feeling the pinch on their pocketbooks and are looking for answers from their government," said Miner. "Abortion is also on the minds of many Michiganders since the actions of the Supreme Court dismantled the Roe vs. Wade decision earlier this year."

There is speculation on industry impact if the Republicans take over the House and The Senate. "If Republicans take the U.S. House, you can expect that the President's unfettered advancement of his political and policy agenda will likely come to a halt," said Miner. "It is highly unlikely that many of the remaining pieces of his agenda will advance from a Republican led House of Represen-

tatives, thus moderating legislative action coming out of Washington D.C."

If Democrats keep a hold of their seats and control both house and Senate, there is thought on industry impact as well. "It can be expected that if Democrats keep control of the House and Senate in Washington D.C., there will be much greater expansion of the Democratic agenda in 2023 and 2024," said Miner. "The Green New Deal, Student Loan Debt Forgiveness, Filibuster Reform and Court Packing will all likely be debated and possibly passed before the 2024 Presidential election."

MIRA members are paying attention to various things as they head into the polls. "Pocketbook issues are the biggest issues for MIRA members," said Miner. "Controlling inflation and the costs of goods and services are what will bring America out of this recession. If this recession gets worse, and consumer spending declines, America is in for some rough years ahead."

ILLINOIS

In Illinois, there are key congressional races. "In the 2022 primary election the Illinois 6th Congressional District – a Democratic district drawn pitting two incumbents against each other – Representative Mary Newman and Representative Sean Casten," said Curt Fiedler with Morrill and Fielder, LLC. "This district is likely to remain held by the Democratic candidate that wins the 2022 primary race. In Illinois 13th Congressional District is a new "open" district. The favorite in the Democratic primary is Nikki Budzinski; it is possible this downstate Illinois district could flip from Republican to Democrat. In Illinois 15th Congressional District – features a Republican primary between two incumbents from downstate Illinois – Mary Miller and Rodney Davis. Representative Miller recently was endorsed by former President Trump."

As we head into the 2022 general elections, Fielder highlights certain races. In the Illinois 11th Congressional District – currently represented by Representative Bill Foster (D) leans Democrat, but could be flipped as current trends favor GOP. In the Illinois 14th Congressional District – currently represented by Representative Lauren Underwood (D), but the district could be flipped as current trends favor GOP. In the Illinois 17th Congressional District – this is a new "open" district that was drawn to favor a Democratic candidate but is currently labeled a "toss up."

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GOP candidate Esther Joy King may become the favorite to win the general election.

There are issues top of mind on a congressional level that our industry is keeping abreast. “In my opinion, I think the top issues to understand where each candidate stands are economic health/inflation, supply chain concerns, labor force, and the reliability of the energy grid,” said Fielder. “Those are the issues that will most impact MIRA members to ensure they continue to operate on a daily basis. Margins are small in our industry, and any threat in operational or employment costs jeopardize stores remaining open.”

Like in Michigan, Illinois industry leaders are paying close attention to who will control the House and Senate. “It really depends on how big of a majority the GOP might have in both chambers,” said Fiedler. “While there likely would be more business-friendly legislation proposed, unless the GOP can obtain 60 votes to prevent a filibuster in the Senate, there may not be any significant change. There likely will be a larger effort to control the rise of inflation and a return to a more balanced energy sector that will ease certain financial pressures for both businesses and citizens.”

If Democrats keep a hold of their seats and control both House and Senate, there might not be much change. “I do not see much change if the Democrats retain control of Congress unless they obtain more than 60 votes in the Senate (which I don’t think is likely),” said Fiedler. “I would expect inflation to remain high and economic policies remaining as they currently are, and members should pay attention where candidates stand on the key economic policies that directly impact businesses.”

OHIO

In Ohio there are 15 Congressional seats up for election this year. “Currently Republicans have an 11-4 advantage, and they hope to add to that number,” said Terry Fleming, TC Fleming & Associates. “This is a redistricting year and after a long fight with the Ohio Supreme Court, the Republican majority on the redistricting committee drew lines favorable to Republican candidates but also left some Republican incumbents with a tough race.”

There are four seats that should be very competitive, the 1st District in the Cincinnati area represented by Republican incumbent Steve Chabot is a little less Republican and Chabot could be vulnerable. The 7th district has two non-incumbents running in what is a slightly Republican district. The 9th District has long time incumbent Democrat

Marcy Kaptur running in a very new district and could lose. The 13th district is about 50-50 in terms of Republican and Democrat voters and two non-incumbents are facing off.

“In the final analysis I believe the number will remain 11-4 Republican. Ohio has a U.S. Senate seat up this year with no incumbent as Republican Senator Rob Portman is retiring and in what appeared to be a clear win for Republicans has turned into a real race between current Democrat Congressman Tim Ryan from Youngstown and Republican J.D. Vance,” said Fleming. “Vance wrote a very successful book “Hillbilly Elegy” that was turned into a movie, but he’s had a hard time developing a real campaign, he’s currently leading by anywhere from 3 to 5 points but this is not over.”

The number one issue in all elections is the economy and that remains true in Ohio for this year’s elections, inflation, high prices for goods and services, gasoline cost soaring. “Grocery stores shelves are empty due to slow delivery and in some cases no delivery,” said Fleming. “Tax policies by the current administration have hit businesses hard and energy policies also are anything but kind to oil and gas development. If history holds true and people vote their pocketbook it should be a huge Republican year but several social issues, most prominently abortion, has rallied many women who are prochoice.”

“A Republican Congress would most assuredly mean better tax and energy policies which could only benefit MIRA members, even if the Republicans control only the House of Representatives it would stop a lot of the anti-business policies by Democrats,” said Fleming. “Failure of Republicans to gain at least one house would result in a continuation of the current anti-business policies and the far-left social agenda of many in the democratic party.”

Fleming urges that members do their research before they vote. “When voting you should always be aware of who the candidates are and what their positions are on major issues. It doesn’t take long to do a quick background check,” said Fleming.

“This will be a critical election that will determine where this country is headed. Democrats seem to be headed to a more socialist government and Republicans to a capitalist government. This election will also set the tone for the 2024 Presidential election which will begin in January of 2023.” ■

**Writers with Epiphany Communications and Coaching are content creators for Bottom Line.*



Marketing to Ethnic Groups and more During the Holiday Season

■ BY EPIPHANY COMMUNICATIONS AND COACHING*

We are heading into the Halloween, Thanksgiving, Hannukah, Christmas and Kwanza holiday season and retailers are prepped to market products. In some retail establishments, decorations for all the major holidays were on display before kids were even back to school.

“This is the time make sure the store is festive with holiday decor, music and signage,” said Bobby Hesano, president and CEO of D&B Grocers Wholesale and Distributors. “It is important that retailers know customers well and research or ask customers about what their holiday needs are for each holiday. Get in early and display prominently for ease of seeing and shopping the display. All holidays have food at the center piece of their events so having the right items in the right quantity will make your customers loyal to you for future holiday needs.”

Different ethnic groups have different traditions. “Retailers have so much data available to them, a large population of certain ethnicities should already be part of the merchandising and marketing plan for the entire year,” Dr. Russell J. Zwanka Director, Food Marketing Program Associate Professor- Food Marketing Western Michigan University. “Holidays are important, yes, but the Chinese have their new year, customers from Mexico have Day of the Dead and Three Kings Day, Africans and African Americans have Kwanzaa, there are a set flow of Jewish holidays, Muslims have their holidays, etc.”

Obviously, not all holidays are in the fall months. “The absolute best way to market to the various ethnic groups is to have a plan going into the year, do the research on the various holidays, and also review your own internal shopping and demographic data for hotspots,” said Zwanka. “Remember, there

are traditional foods accompanying each of these holidays, and you must consider lead time for supplying your stores. The plan needs to happen twelve months in advance.”

There is value in marketing to different ethnic traditions. “Marketing to various ethnic traditions shows you care about your customers, you know who they are, and you are part of their family. Grocery stores are integrated into the lives of families who shop in their stores. They are part of the solution for life,” said Zwanka. “Marketing to these traditions shows you did your homework, and you are being authentic in your relationship with your customers.”

“Customer satisfaction is the key to keeping customers loyal and from going elsewhere to find their holiday needs,” said Hesano. “If you supply them, you keep the customer. It also binds them to your store as a store that understands their needs and fulfills them.”

Different ethnic groups have different traditions and knowing your customers is essential. “The greater Detroit area is a multi-cultural area with several distinct and unique ethnic groups,” said Hesano. “Need can change in a few miles so knowing your customer base is critical. Set up displays in different areas of the store to make it easy to see and shop. Signage is also important to make them visible. Find key items and price aggressively to entice customers to



OPERATIONS
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Predicting the Prices at the Pump as we Head into Midterm Elections

■ BY EPIPHANY COMMUNICATIONS AND COACHING*

In August, the White House publicly promoted falling gas prices while, behind the scenes, officials are worried prices could rise again as they keep looking for ways to get more oil on the market.

As we head into the mid-term elections, The White House used a drop in the average price of gas to below \$4 last month to talk up President Joe Biden's response to record-high oil prices and push back on Republicans who blamed him for the earlier price spike. "We always seem to see lower gas prices during an election. I believe this is a manipulation. Let's face it, it seems to be a consistent factor," said John Abbo, MIRA member and gas station owner.

Natural disasters also play a role in gas prices, but that has not been the case over the last six months or so. "We can't blame the increase in prices on floods or hurricanes," said Ed Weglarz, MIRA president & CEO. "However, there was a significant fire in Indiana at the BP Refinery – one of the biggest ones in the country – but that story was superseded by Trump and other political stories. When there is turmoil in the world like there is in Russia and Ukraine, crude oil prices are affected."

There is still debate on what is causing the fluctuation in gas prices, which are still much higher than they were prior to the Biden administration taking over The White House. The environmentalists have been putting pressure on the government to pursue EV cars with an aggressive approach. "Gas prices are up for multiple reasons, oil is a commodity, and it is complicated. Inflation is a key factor, but not the only reason. Environmental blends remain one of the main reasons

that continue to bog down the pipelines," said Abbo. "We do not need so many blends. The lack of new oil refineries due to EPA regulations is another factor. In the past, weather has played a role in increasing gas prices. Pipeline and drilling permits have become political and are being hindered/blocked."

There is also a political push for electric vehicles (EV) even though the country does not have the power to charge electric vehicles as the level the government seems to want people driving EV cars.

In August, California State Governor, Gavin Newsom, said, "California now has a groundbreaking, world-leading plan to achieve 100% zero-emission vehicle sales by 2035. It's ambitious, it's innovative, it's the action we must take if we're serious about leaving the planet better off for future generations."

With 30 million people living in the state, which is equivalent to the size of Canada, many people question if the 2035 goal is possible. "California is at less-than 2% of the country driving EV cars and they are already experiencing brownouts," said Weglarz. "When President Trump was in office, we were independent, and the prices were lower. That is just a fact. This administration has implemented man restrictions and has made it difficult to produce our own oil. Our current administration has already tapped into our reserves, which were not created for political reason but for emergencies. It will cost our country more money to replenish the reserve because the prices are higher."

The aftermath of the pandemic continues to impact gas prices. "Less people are driving because they are working from home," said Weglarz. "The volume of crude oil sales is down. Also, there is

an employee shortage and retailers are paying higher wages. This naturally will get passed down to the consumer. There are many factors that are contributing to the fluctuation of gas prices."

Gas prices impact not just the food the retail industry, but the entire economy. "Everything in our economy is based on energy prices., Especially our supply chain," said Abbo. "Retailers should focus on getting strong margins to compensate for expenses related to high gas prices."

As the year nears an end and we head into 2023, there continues to be speculation about petroleum. "From my experience no one can predict gas prices, but based on politics if democrats stay in control, then gas prices will continue to increase, and I believe this is by design based on policy," said Abbo. "The green agenda is pushing gas prices higher and placing an extra burden on the economy, and the average citizen."

If Republicans take over the House and Senate, they will most likely put legislation together to get us back to energy independence and perhaps slow down the push for EV vehicles," said Weglarz. "Biden could veto whatever Republicans propose. We have an 8.3% inflation, and we have administration touting a success with their inflation reduction act. There is a great disconnect."

Retailers are getting hit in various directions. "Credit card fees are high and those are the companies making money because with high inflation, more people live on credit," said Weglarz. "With gas fees up, more companies are adding a surcharge for delivery fees." ■

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FOR THE
HUSTLE





OPERATIONS

continued from page 18.

buy all their needs based on the key item being priced right.”

There are various ways to market for the holiday season including having a base of merchandising that recognizes the largest population shopping each store. Not your chain, each store. “Then, go bigger where the population expands or skews towards various ethnic groups,” said Zwanka. “If you find you have an exceptionally large population shopping in your stores, or a large population surrounding your stores and not shopping there, I’d suggest you go hire the talent to attract the customer. No one can market to a certain ethnicity better than someone who is a member of that ethnicity.”

Retailers should visibly support the holidays during their season. “Advertise key items and make them prominent in the store,” said Hesano. “As said earlier, food is at the center of all holidays for all ethnic groups so be prepared. Start early, remember stores like Kohl’s or Target start selling holiday goods in September so be early. Customers tend to buy when they first see the items in the store, so make sure your store has them first.”

Different religions have different food traditions like Kosher or Hallel and it is vital for retailers to know their customer base and market to those special groups. “Most important aspect of running a store,” Hesano agreed. “You can’t satisfy your customers if you don’t know them. For example, if 90% of your customers buy Hallel then you need to be prepared to have enough

to fulfill that need. The 10% that buy Kosher will look for a smaller display and be happy to find their items. Make each group feel special with authenticity and assortment of holiday items.”

It is best to form relationships inside your community and go to them to help recognize their needs for the population they represent; “especially when it comes to blessing the food or certifying it as following guidelines that are sometimes difficult to interpret if you are not part of that ethnic group,” Zwanka explained. “Almost all holidays are related to religion or significant events for the country from which the ethnic group originated- independence days, significant freedom days, labor recognition, armed services recognition.”

A retailer with a large ethnic population, would benefit greatly by being immersed in their traditions and work to recognize them in the stores. “They won’t come to you and ask you to do this,” said Zwanka. “They will just shop elsewhere, or online. Even if you do not have loyalty data for each customer, you can find certain items in your stores that will only sell to that ethnic group and search your internal and external market data for pockets of the population. Running the sales on religious candles will tell you a ton about the pockets of Hispanic population in your marketplace.”

There are common mistakes retailers need to avoid when it comes to marketing during the

holiday. “Getting product in too late and not displaying prominently is a mistake,” Zwanka added. “Supply chain issues make it more difficult today than ever to get the product you need if you don’t order and display early. Resist the urge to price too high for profit margins. Customers know their pricing and will shop around if it appears too high. Take the seasonal sales and a reasonable profit.”

Additionally, there are must-have products that grocers, c-stores, liquor stores have during the holiday season. “All beverages both hard and soft plus seasonal wines,” said Hesano. “Key holiday snack items like salty snacks, cookies, and ethnic items like Baklava. Holiday paper items like cups, plate, cutlery, and napkins. In essence, cover all the party goods.”

There is a balance between catering to a population and separating a population. “Most immigrants want to keep hold of their past, their cultures, and their traditions; but they also want to be part of this country’s population,” said Zwanka. “People want to be recognized without being separated from the larger population. It’s a tough balance.”

“Don’t take your customers for granted; you need to earn their trust and loyalty every day,” finished Hesano. “Find some new items or surprise items to keep the shopping trip exciting.” ■

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- **Cleveland**  (216) 690-2653
- Monster Energy Company (800) 426-7367
- Pepsi Beverages **Detroit** 1-800-368-9945
- **Howell** 1-800-878-8239
- **Pontiac** (248) 334-3512
- **Cleveland** (216) 252-7377
- **Twinsburg** (330) 963-5300

TREE & ARBORIST SERVICES

- Horton's Tree Service (734) 422-1634



TOBACCO ALTERNATIVES

- JUUL Labs (810) 632-9900
- Swisher International (904) 607-7405

TOBACCO COMPANIES & PRODUCTS

- Altria Client Services (513) 831-5510
- PMI Global Services Inc. (810) 923-9732
- R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company (336) 741-0727

UNIFORMS, LINENS & SUPPLIES

-  **Socks Galore Wholesale** (248) 545-7625
-  **UniFirst Corporation** (888) 256-5255 ext. 232

WASTE DISPOSAL & RECYCLING

- Commercial Waste Systems *(Cardboard recycling buyers)* (219) 663-5678

WINE & SPIRITS COMPANIES

- Benchmark Beverage Co. (734) 744-6132
- Cornerstone Wine Distributor (586) 839-2552
- Hard Truth Distilling Co. (812) 720-4840
- Heaven Hill Brands (248) 885-5664
- Luxco (313) 333-4637
- Proximo Spirits (810) 278-0599
- Tito's Handmade Vodka (248) 885-3424

WINE & SPIRITS DISTRIBUTORS

- Great Lakes Wine & Spirits 1-888-860-3805
- RNDC of Michigan 1-888-697-6424

FOOD RESCUE / FOOD BANKS

MICHIGAN

- Feeding America West Michigan Food Bank (616) 784-3250
- Feeding America West Michigan Food Bank - Benton Harbor (269) 926-2646
- Feeding America West Michigan Food Bank - Cadillac (231) 779-0056
- Food Bank of Eastern Michigan (810) 239-4441
- Food Bank of South Central Michigan .. (269) 964-3663
- Food Gatherers (734) 761-2796
- Forgotten Harvest (248) 967-1500
- Gleaners Community Food Bank (866) GLE-ANER
- Greater Lansing Food Bank (517) 908-3680
- Kalamazoo Loaves & Fishes (269) 343-3663
- The Manna Food Project (231) 347-8852
- Western Upper Peninsula Food Bank ... (906) 482-5528

OHIO

- Akron-Canton Regional Foodbank (330) 535-6900
- Cleveland Foodbank (216) 738-2265
- Freestore Foodbank (513) 482-3663
- Mid-Ohio Foodbank (614) 277-FOOD
- SE Ohio Foodbank & Kitchen (740) 767-4500
- Second Harvest Food Bank of Clark, Champaign and Logan Counties (937) 325-8715
- Second Harvest Food Bank of North Central Ohio (440) 960-2265
- Second Harvest Food Bank of the Mahoning Valley (330) 792-5522
- Shared Harvest Foodbank (513) 874-0114
- The Foodbank, Inc. (937) 461-0265
- Toledo Northwestern Ohio Food Bank ... (419) 242-5000
- West Ohio Food Bank (419) 222-7946

ILLINOIS

- Central Illinois Foodbank (217) 522-4022
- Eastern Illinois Foodbank (217) 328-3663
- Greater Chicago Food Depository (773) 247-3663
- Northern Illinois Foodbank (630) 443-6910
- Peoria Area Food Bank (309) 671-3906
- River Bend Foodbank (563) 345-6490
- St. Louis Area Foodbank (314) 292-6262
- Tri-State Foodbank (812) 425-0775



— REBATES —
Available in KY, MD, OH, PA, VA & WV

MIRA MEMBER EXCLUSIVE



INNOVATORS -- NOT -- IMITATORS

**Take Advantage Of MIRA'S Group Buying Power
With The Region's Top Retail Convenience Distributor**



Special **MIRA**
Program Available

Team Sledd
CONVENIENCE DISTRIBUTOR

Your **Retail** Partner!

www.TeamSledd.com



On time. Every time.
All the time.

Details:

New & current customers are eligible for the following rebates:

- 1% Non-Tobacco/Non-Cigarette
- Additional 2% on Energy Supplements (Total of 3%)
- Additional 2% on Foodservice products (Total of 3%)
- Additional 3% on Supplies (Total of 4%)

Requirements:

Customer must purchase the following categories:

- Cigarettes
- OTP
- Energy Supplements
- Supplies
- Coffee (If offered by retail operator)

Customer needs to average \$3,500 in total weekly purchases

Customer needs to purchase 12 out of the 13 weeks per quarter

Customer must maintain good credit standing & 7 day EFT

• TOTAL VALUE TO YOU •

\$1,350

Estimated Rebate*
(Annual Total Paid Quarterly)

\$2,000

**Est. MIRA Member
Program Savings**

\$3,350

**Total Member Benefits
PER LOCATION**

* Based on \$1,000 non-tobacco purchases weekly

**For more information on Team Sledd, call the office at 800.333.0374
or E-mail Sheila Reilly at SReilly@TeamSledd.com**



OCTOBER 8, 2022

MIRA'S 105TH ANNUAL TRADE DINNER & BALL

Join over 800 leaders in the food, beverage & petroleum industries at this one-and-only black tie gala. Delight in fine cuisine, dancing and entertainment and engage with colleagues and friends to celebrate the strength and vitality of MIRA and the members it serves.

Suburban Collection Showplace // Novi, MI



NOVEMBER 17 & 18, 2022

MIRF'S 42ND ANNUAL "HIGH FIVE" TURKEY DRIVE

As the holiday season approaches, the Midwest Independent Retailers Foundation turkey drive committee has pledged to put a turkey on the Thanksgiving table of over 6,000 needy families throughout Michigan, Ohio and Illinois that may not otherwise enjoy this special meal.

Michigan // Ohio

publishers statement

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Knowing your limits is always the best bet.
Call the Michigan Problem Gambling Helpline for confidential help at 1-800-270-7117.



**MICHIGAN
LOTTERY**
— 50TH ANNIVERSARY —

A close-up, profile view of a smiling woman with dark hair, looking towards the right. She is holding a black sign with the word 'OPEN' in white capital letters. In the background, a boxing ring with white ropes is visible, and the scene is dimly lit, suggesting an indoor arena at night. The DTE logo is in the top left corner, and the text 'POWERING POSSIBILITY' is in the middle right. A paragraph of text is in the bottom right.

DTE

POWERING POSSIBILITY

DTE Energy supports organizations that create opportunities for those in Detroit and throughout Michigan. We partner with local leaders to promote initiatives in communities where we live and serve.