

# BottomLine



THE VOICE OF MIDWEST INDEPENDENT RETAILERS // VOL. 34, NO. 4 // APRIL 2023



Looking at What's  
Driving the Price  
Increases

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■ Creating an Online Presence to Brand  
Your Business // PAGE 18



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# BottomLine



THE VOICE OF MIDWEST INDEPENDENT RETAILERS  
VOL. 34, NO. 4 // APRIL 2023

## features



### THE CHAIRMAN'S DINNER RETURNS

For the first time since 2012, MIRA is hosting the Chairman's Dinner. Bobby Hesano is serving his first term as Chairman and is proud to announce the return of this traditional annual event.



### COVER STORY //

### LOOKING AT WHAT'S DRIVING THE PRICE INCREASES

Frank Ayar, owner of Walters Shopping Place in Hamtramck, Michigan is closely looking at his invoices these days as prices are increasing at a rapid rate and more frequently. "We're not even getting warnings," said Ayar. "We are getting page after page of prices increases without any heads up."



### CREATING AN ONLINE PRESENCE TO BRAND YOUR BUSINESS

Cliff Denha's store, Wine Palace, in Livonia, Michigan is 9,000 square feet but his presence has a global reach via his website and social media platforms. Recently, they've been promoting a brand-new beer cave and humidor. Today, they have one of the largest selections of wine, liquor, and beer in Michigan!



# president's message

**BILL WILD** // MIRA PRESIDENT & CEO

## Gearing up for an exciting 2023

**A**s I sit in my office at MIRA's headquarters in West Bloomfield, I can see through the windows that spring is trying to get a footing after another long winter here in Michigan. Like spring, I too am starting to get a footing taking over the helm of the historic Midwest Independent Retailers Association.

I'm well into my third month as your new President and CEO and have smoothly been transitioning into the role with the help of retiring CEO and President, Ed Weglarz. Ed has moved into a consulting position for the next couple of months and I have been working with the MIRA employees and Board of Directors on lining up an exciting and productive 2023.

The MIRA events team is currently working on bringing back an exciting annual event, the Chairman's Dinner, which will be hosted by the Chairman of the MIRA Board of Directors, Bobby Hesano. The event will be on May 9th at the amazing Shenandoah Country Club and will be an elegant evening consisting of a strolling dinner, cocktails and music, while offering the opportunity of rubbing elbows with previous chairman, current and past board members and local dignitaries. The event is very limited and tickets are selling fast. Please see pages 4 & 5 to learn more.

The MIR Foundation's 15th Annual Scholarship Luncheon is right around the corner and sponsorships are still needed. The event will take place on June 13th at the Detroit Athletic Club and we are proud to announce that the Chairman of Huntington Bank, Gary Torgow, will join us and is set to deliver an inspiring keynote address.

Summer will soon be upon us and that means it's time to reserve a spot in MIRA's Annual Michigan and Ohio Golf Outings. These outings sell out every year and are a great place to build relationships with other members, interact with MIRA's suppliers and vendors or connect with staff. The 47th Annual Michigan Golf Open will be on July 19th at Fox Hills, in Plymouth. The 18th Annual Ohio Golf Open will be on August 8th at Shale Creek, in Medina. Please consider joining us as a golfer and a sponsor, as these are major fundraisers for the association.

The MIRA government relations team is currently working on a fun filled Detroit Tigers game later this summer to help raise much needed PAC funds to help push our legislative agenda.

We will close out the year with MIRA's 24th Annual Holiday Food & Beverage Show on September 26th at the Suburban Collection Showplace, in Novi, Michigan. This show connects Industry leaders, buyers and retailers from the world of food, beverage and petroleum. No other event in Michigan attracts more retailers, so please consider joining as an exhibitor or an attendee.

In my previous role as the Mayor of the City of Westland, one of my major focuses was on delivering exceptional customer service and it will be my goal is to deliver the same exceptional customer service to the members of MIRA. We are a membership driven organization and we will continue to deliver and add value to your membership.

If you have any questions or concerns please don't hesitate to contact me at (800) 666-6233 or email me at [bwild@miramw.org](mailto:bwild@miramw.org). ■

### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

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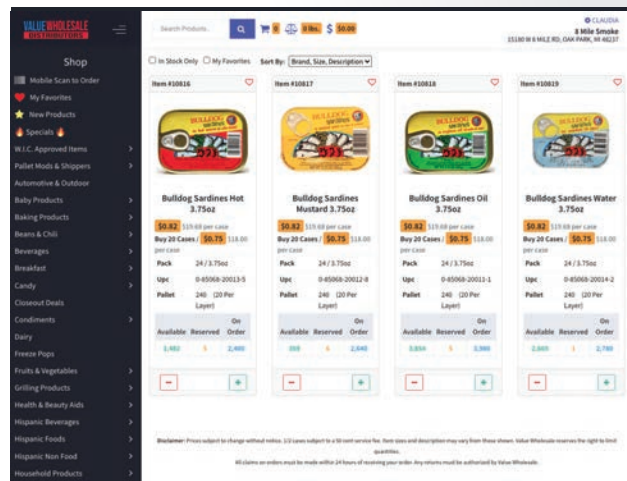
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## The Chairman's Dinner Returns

■ BY EPIPHANY COMMUNICATIONS AND COACHING\*

For the first time since 2012, MIRA is hosting the Chairman's Dinner. Bobby Hesano is serving his first term as Chairman and is proud to announce the return of this traditional annual event.

"I want to focus on unifying our association," said Hesano. "I want to elevate our influence in the industry through our chairman's position and through the board of directors. This dinner is part of that goal. We have a vast array of talent that dates back to the inception of this association. We can learn from our past chairmen. We have a deep-rooted history, and the chairmanship is a fraternity of a true brotherhood."

Nabby Yono who served as chairman from 1994 to 1995 is pleased to see MIRA bringing back the dinner. "It's a great way to reconnect with old friends and meet new people," said Yono. "So much has changed in so many lives. People have new businesses, growing families, are retired and in some cases, members have unfortunately passed on."

The event is taking place at Shenandoah Country Club in West Bloomfield, Michigan on May 9th from 6 to 9 pm. Popular Detroit

Newscaster Jason Carr will serve as Master of Ceremonies for the evening. Individual tickets are available for \$175 in addition to sponsorship opportunities.

"This event is a great way to keep everyone together and exchange ideas, to talk about the past, the current issues and look to the future," said Yono. "We have gone from an industry where grocery stores were 10,000 square-feet and now we have 100 to 200,000 square-feet stores. These events allow us to talk about the changes in the industry and to keep people informed."

Yono hopes reigniting the Chairman's Dinner will prompt past chairmen to stay involved in the association and prompt more engagement. "I like to see the association get back to holding more events, lunches and meetings with different offices such as the Liquor Control Commission and members of the legislature," he said. "Some chairmen serve a term and don't stay connected. We need all board members, past and present, to continue to stay active with the association."

Longtime member and past Chairman Ronnie Jamil agrees. "This chairman's dinner is a great idea," he said. "We have success stories, best practices that we can share and learn from one another. The industry has changed over the years, but there are things we used to do that still could be done today and help retailers thrive."

Jamil served as chairman for two terms. "My son Brent runs the day-to-day operations, but we are both still members of MIRA and involved in the association in some capacity. I am very happy to see Bobby serve as the Chairman. As a former retailer and as successful supplier today, he understands the needs of the members."

Paul Elhindi, who served as chairman from 2019-2020, sees value in hosting a Chairman's dinner. "Every organization should look to past leaders for advice

and guidance," said Elhindi. "MIRA has a 100 year plus history and the leadership matters. It's important that we keep in touch with past and present leaders and to honor the people who have served this organization over the years."

He continued, "There have been so many successful businessmen who have chaired the board. Both Bill Wild and Bobby Hesano have great vision for this organization and we, as members, will support them."

Meanwhile, Yono has spent decades cultivating relationships within the industry and knows the connections are imperative for the success of the association. "If our members have issues related to WIC or EBT or other licensing issues for instance, our relationships enable us to address issues immediately with the appropriate person. Events like the Chairman's Dinner, strengthens relationships within the associations and within the industry."

Jerry Yono who is celebrating his 83rd birthday this month, spent 37 years on the board of MIRA and served as Chairman for three terms. He started to work in the grocery business at 9-years-old. He bought his first business before he his 16th birthday and almost dropped out of high school to run it, until the nuns at his Catholic school found a way to accommodate his working schedule. "I am looking forward to the Chairman's Dinner and reconnecting with old friends," he said. "I sold my retail businesses a few years after I bought a funeral home in Southfield. I miss the industry and the association."

When Jerry Yono retired, he was recognized at one of MIRA's Trade Dinner galas. "I just love the association. I felt so humbled and honored to be acknowledged in that way and to receive an award from then Governor Jennifer Granholm. Recognizing the chairmen of an association that has had longevity and great success, it so important." ■

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



**2012 CHAIRMAN'S DINNER**

FRONT ROW: TOM SEMAN, JERRY YONO, RONNIE JAMIL, CHRIS ZEBARI, MARK KARMO AND EDDIE ACHO

BACK ROW: NABBY YONO, TONY MUNACO, AMIR AL NAIMI, FRED DELLY, TERRY FARIDA, SAM DALLO, BILL VIVIANO, LOU VESCIO AND PHIL SAVARNIO  
NOT PICTURED SAM YONO AND THE LATE FRANK ARCORI.



# 2023 CHAIRMAN'S DINNER

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## c-store news & views

JIM GREEN // MIRA VICE PRESIDENT, PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

### Maximizing MIRA Foodservice Programs

I recently read an article about foodservice and the various dayparts. As I was reading that article, I was thinking how some of the MIRA rebate programs can be an amazing solution for MIRA retailers to help across all dayparts. By stacking the distributor rebates and manufacturer rebates, it creates a tremendous value equation for MIRA members. You can offer a high-quality product with name brand recognition and significantly reduce your cost of goods at the same time. If a MIRA member uses S. Abraham and Sons or Team Sledd as their wholesale distributor, they can earn a 2% or 3% rebate on all food service items purchased. In addition, MIRA has rebate programs with manufacturers like Tyson, Deli-Express, Home Market Foods, Bellarico's Pizza, and many other manufacturers. These manufacturers are industry leaders that have the products that consumers desire and can be used across all the dayparts and increase a retailer's food service sales. Also, given the shortage of labor and retailers looking for low labor programs, these products can work perfectly for the independent convenience retailer looking to boost their food service sales.

Data shows that the breakfast daypart has not recovered to pre-pandemic levels but the Midwest has done much better than many other parts of the country. For many convenience store retailers the breakfast and morning snack dayparts are still the best and represent over 50% of their foodservice sales. Tyson makes a line of Jimmy Dean Breakfast Sandwiches that can work very well and are low labor. They can be made available either a cold or hot grab and go. There is a \$2.50 per 12 count case MIRA rebate on these products. In addition,

a MIRA member can earn another 2% or 3% when purchasing these items through S. Abraham and Sons or Team Sledd. By offering Jimmy Dean Breakfast Sandwiches vs. another brand, collectively these MIRA programs can reduce a MIRA retailer's cost over 10% on their breakfast sandwich offering. MIRA members can also offer Bellarico's Breakfast Pizza, which is premade and holds up for several hours extremely well in a hot case. A MIRA retailer can get into a turnkey pizza program for less than \$1,500.

There are also solutions for lunch and dinner. Chicken sells and Tyson has launched some great new chicken sandwiches. They also offer the Big AZ Burger products, that combined with the chicken sandwiches, meet consumer demands. Both items can be made available in a hot or cold grab and go. The chicken products have a \$2 per case rebate and the burgers have a \$2.50 per case rebate. These products also qualify for the S. Abraham and Sons and Team Sledd rebates. By combining these programs a retailer can earn over 10% back! For your average independent convenience store retailer, it does not look better than that. There are additional grab and go items available like Deli-Express sandwiches that have anywhere from 21 to 30 days shelf-life in a grab and go. If you offer roller grill and want to bring brand recognition to it, Ball Park Hot Dogs can be used. They are not the lowest cost hot dog on the market, but consumers know the name and buy them! They have a \$2.50 per case rebate as well. Any retailer can be proud to offer these items in their stores.

I am a firm believer in that quality sells. Especially when it comes to foodservice. All the products I referenced this month are high quality and great tasting. Consumers will not be disappointed in their purchase and will continue to buy these items. I recommend that all MIRA members look at these programs to see if these programs could be beneficial to them. If a MIRA member would like to learn more about the manufacturer rebates and distributor rebates available, I would encourage them to contact MIRA to learn more about them. ■



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# government relations report

ANOOSHA VEMULAPATI // MIRA DIRECTOR, GOVERNMENT RELATIONS

## Proposed Flavored Tobacco Ban in Cleveland, Ohio

Introduced in February, emergency ordinance #184-2023 threatens to prohibit the sale of flavored tobacco within the city of Cleveland. This regulation follows the footsteps of Toledo and Columbus, which subsequently passed the flavored tobacco ban in 2019 and 2022, respectively. The ban includes menthol cigarettes, vapes, cigars, hookah, and more, which is absolutely detrimental to our members and their businesses. Flavored tobacco products are popular items that consumers expect to be available at one-stop shops like gas stations. Also, limited time offers (LTO's) increase customer traffic and boost category sales. As a pivotal component of the retail experience, tobacco-related products can comprise as high as 40-50% of sales. Therefore, restricting the sale of flavored tobacco products to legal-age adults is counterproductive and only results in harming both the retailers and consumers.

The fallout from this regulation expands to consumers as well. Banning such a popular item will only create a black market for the product. This is occurring in Massachusetts right now. The Massachusetts Department of Revenue reported that officials are seizing so many illicit products that they are even running out of room to store them. Furthermore, the state tobacco tax revenue has decreased by approximately 22.6% from 2020 to 2023 - which is partially due to the smuggling of untaxed flavored tobacco products. In addition to this, sales data published in *Reason* found that declining cigarette sales

in Massachusetts coincided with increased cigarette sales in counties bordering the state.

Our association has been pulling out all the stops to combat this regulation. On March 2nd, MIRA collaborated with RJ Reynolds, Altria, and Ohio wholesalers to host a panel event in Cleveland for retailers to learn about an action plan to preserve their business. Following short speeches by the panel was a Q&A session for the retailers. It was a very well attended event. Among the topics discussed by the speakers included a demonstration of cash-flow loss to the retailer, providing background information for the flavored tobacco ban in Columbus, and empowering the retailers to reach out to their city council member in opposition of the ordinance.

MIRA has continued to monitor the progress of the proposed ordinance. As it stands now, the regulation must undergo a process of 3 hearings by the Cleveland City Council before it is officially passed. The first hearing already occurred in February, and it is currently under review by the Finance Committee. Since a considerable amount of excise tax received from the sale of tobacco is distributed to the infrastructure of city, there is a good chance that the ordinance might be overruled in the finance committee.

We thank everyone that reached out to their city council members by either calling, emailing, or by sending a letter. The Cleveland city council was overwhelmed by messages of opposition towards the ordinance. While MIRA is working hard to oppose this and other similar bans, our influence is only as strong as the support of our members. Please consider making a contribution to the MIRA Ohio PAC today by calling me at (800) 666-6233 or emailing me at [avemulapati@miramw.org](mailto:avemulapati@miramw.org) ■







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# ohio lobbyist report

TERRY FLEMING // TC FLEMING & ASSOCIATES

## Civil War Between Two House Republican Factions Still an Issue in Ohio

Two groups of Republicans still maintain that they each rule the House, you have Speaker of the House Stephens and would-be Speaker of the House Merrin, both claiming to rule the Republican majority. The Merrin faction after last November's election had unanimous support of the Republican Caucus and were sure they'd be running the House in the 135th General Assembly. They even named the leadership team and key committee chairpersons and issued a press release but they forgot one important fact: Democrat members also vote for Speaker. Prior to last November's election Representative Stephens was assured he'd be the next speaker so he was very surprised when two groups deserted him and voted for Merrin but the surprise wasn't over. When it came time to vote on the House Floor for Speaker, 33 Democrats joined 24 Republicans and elected Representative Stephens as Speaker of the House. As you might expect the Merrin faction was in shock and quickly announced they'd be dealing with the Senate President and Governor, which Speaker Stephens immediately said was not true. It does appear that the Senate President, Matt Huffman, prefers Merrin, but he has been meeting with Stephens on legislative issues.

Ironically this is the second time in the last 6 years a Republican Speaker was elected with Democrat support, the previous being Larry Householder. Larry is currently in a federal court accused of bribery and was voted out of the Ohio House after he resigned his Speakership.

The first test of who controls the House was when the Ohio House Rules Package was brought up for a vote. Over the objections of the Merrin group, the Rules Package was approved with 9 legislators deserting Merrin, giving Stephens 34 votes and 25 Republicans more than enough to pass the rules.

The Ohio House Republican Caucus is the fundraising arm for Republican members and both warring sides claim control of the money, except four members of the ruling party were responsible for raising 80% of the money. This is an ongoing battle.

When Governor DeWine appointed a Republican House member to be Director of Agriculture, it created an open seat and the Speaker put together an 8 man committee to interview applicants, three of whom were from the Merrin group. They selected a member and it went to floor for a Republican only vote, but it was withdrawn because the Merrin Group indicated they didn't support the selectee. The Speaker then pulled the nomination because he wanted a unanimous vote. This is just another indication of how things will come in the future and could have negative impacts on legislation.

Speaking of legislation, there have been no bills introduced as of yet that would greatly impact MIRA members with exception of HB 23, the two year operating budget for Ohio. The Governor included language that would ban flavored tobacco products in Ohio. MIRA had several conversations with the House Finance Chair, hearing HB 23, and told us that he intended to remove that language from the budget. This is good news but we still have to deal with local governments, many of which are proposing banning flavored tobacco products. MIRA is part of a coalition that is working on the issue city by city. The association held a very successful meeting in Cleveland with over fifty retailers to discuss how we address city councils on defeating any ban. We will continue to work on this issue and we ask that all members be aware of their City Councils and any attempt to ban flavored tobacco products.

The two warring House Republican groups did come together and pass a two year \$12.5 Billion Transportation budget bill. Since most of this money goes back to local governments it passed easily.

Sheetz Oil, which already has 8 sites in the Mahoning Valley, announced they are opening number 9 in North Jackson, near Youngstown. The site covers 15.4 acres at a cost of \$2.4 million. ■

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Publication Date 02/23





# michigan lobbyist report

MATT MINER // CAPITOL STRATEGIES GROUP

## Michigan Legislature's Top Priorities

**T**he Democrats have wasted no time in tackling their top priorities since taking full control of the legislature in January.

Despite being early in the term, sessions have already ran late into the evening and committees have been packed to the brim as the Michigan Legislature is swiftly working to repeal Right to Work, reinstate prevailing wage, expand the Elliot-Larsen Civil Rights Act, and crack down on gun reform.

### RIGHT TO WORK

Michigan's Right to Work was put into place back in 2012 and has been in the Democrats' crosshairs ever since. Each chamber put forth similar bills to turn back the clock on this policy, and they have since traded their versions with one another in hopes of eventually picking the ones that best suit their goals. As Democrats and unions celebrate the bills' momentum, Republicans and business owners worry that this will weaken Michigan's economic potential.

### PREVAILING WAGE

Likewise, the resurrection of prevailing wage falls into the same trajectory. Each chamber introduced their bills on the matter, sped them through committee, and passed them within a week of one another. It's almost certain that the Governor will sign the version she eventually receives, thus requiring contractors to pay their employees a certain regional rate for construction projects.

### ELLIOTT-LARSEN CIVIL RIGHTS ACT

Passed in the 1970s, the Elliott-Larsen Civil Rights Act prohibits discriminatory practices, policies, and customs based upon religion, race, color, national origin, age, sex, height, weight, familial status, or marital status. The most current push for a protected class would also cover sexual orientation and gender identification and is currently sitting on the Governor's desk.

### GUN REFORM

After the Oxford High School shooting in 2021, a school safety task force was assembled to gather research and offer recommendations to mitigate or, hopefully, eliminate such tragedies from occurring in our state. The given recommendations were thrust into immediacy following this year's shooting at Michigan

State University, leading to two separate packages of eleven bills each being introduced in each chamber. This legislation has been working its way through the process and will likely be in the hands of the Governor soon.

In the wake of these massive issues, lie many pieces of legislation awaiting their day in the spotlight, and they'll likely be waiting until after their upcoming break to be addressed. ■



GOV. GRETCHEN WHITMER ALONGSIDE FORMER U.S. REP. GABBY GIFFORDS AT A GUN VIOLENCE RALLY IN LANSING LAST MONTH. PHOTO: CHRIS DUMOND/GETTY



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# michigan liquor report

PAT GAGLIARDI // CHAIR, MICHIGAN LIQUOR CONTROL COMMISSION

## Alcohol Use Awareness

**T**he Michigan Liquor Control Commission (MLCC) recently provided more than \$2.6 million to the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services (MDHHS) in annual revenue sharing for substance abuse treatment programs for alcoholism. In the last three years alone, the MLCC has provided more than \$7.5 million to the MDHHS to support resources that are available at [www.michigan.gov/mdhhs/keep-mi-healthy/mentalhealth/drugcontrol/treatment](http://www.michigan.gov/mdhhs/keep-mi-healthy/mentalhealth/drugcontrol/treatment).

April is Alcohol Awareness Month, designated in 1987 by the National Council on Alcoholism and Drug Dependence to increase awareness about alcohol use disorder and dependency and the effective treatments available. The goal is to make people aware that recovery is very possible, and to end the stigma associated with alcohol abuse.

“It is impossible for studies to determine what level of alcohol is safe because genetics, age and overall health is unique to each person.”

The health effects of alcohol consumption — pros and cons — are debated more today than ever before. We are reading more articles on research findings that cite wide-ranging harms of alcohol to our physical well-being, while other articles support the health benefits of light to moderate drinking. It is impossible for studies to determine what level of alcohol is safe because genetics, age and overall health is unique to each person. However, there is no question that drinking too much alcohol is unhealthy.

Despite the ongoing debate and health warnings, liquor sales are breaking records. There are more product choices than ever in beverage alcohol and more potency in many favorites of alcoholic beverages, making it easy to underestimate how much alcohol is being consumed.



It is imperative for those who choose to imbibe to make informed decisions when it comes to alcohol. The general recommendation is moderation; men consume no more than two drinks a day and women no more than one. Warnings on the dangers of binge drinking abound. For women, it is those who drink more than four drinks in an outing and men who drink more than five.

Studies also show that parents are the leading influencers of their children's decisions on whether to drink alcohol. Talk to your kids about the dangers of underage drinking, drinking and driving, and health issues attributable to excessive drinking. These important lessons can save lives and last a lifetime.

April is a good time to look at alcohol use awareness. ■

*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.*



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# Looking at What's Driving the Price Increases

■ BY EPIPHANY COMMUNICATIONS AND COACHING\*

**F**rank Ayar, owner of Walters Shopping Place in Hamtramck, Michigan is closely looking at his invoices these days as prices are increasing at a rapid rate and more frequently. “We’re not even getting warnings,” said Ayar. “We are getting page after page of prices increases without any heads up.”

The cost of grocery is up by 13.5% in the past year, the largest increase in 43 years, according to recent reports.

Speaking on PBS News Hour late last year, David Ortega, associate professor, and agricultural economist from Michigan State University pointed out the supply chain disruptions from COVID-19 are still lingering. “Those lead to rising energy prices, rising transportation costs, rising labor costs. On average, 16¢ out of every dollar spent on food can be tied back to the farm,” he said. “Everything else, the vast majority, has to do with things like processing cost, transportation, the wholesale, and the retail trade. And we have seen all those prices go up.”





Price increases are continuously working their way into the food chain. The industry and its customers are hit on all fronts including input costs, production costs, supply chain costs, and then operating costs of the retailers who sell the products. “On top of those pressures, we have the ever-present competitive forces that helped actually keep inflation from being worse last year,” said Dr. Russell J. Zwanka, Western Michigan University Food Marketing Director. “Yes, inflation was bad last year. Yes, it could have been even worse.”

Dr. Zwanka looks at input costs, a confluence of the feed for cows massively impacting the prices of butter and dairy, and of course red meat. “Those factors alone would cause a large ripple in the costs of multiple foods, since dairy products are a base ingredient in so many of the foods we enjoy,” he said. “Then we have had a terrible avian flu outbreak that has impacted egg pricing, as the “egg layers” have died at an alarming rate. And it keeps going, wheat prices for bread and cereal, feed prices for pigs, over-fishing for seafood, and even the chicken sandwich wars. Chickens raised for consumption only have two breasts, and the chicken sandwich wars from the major fast-food chains have made chicken breasts a hot commodity.”

As experts note, the increased production costs come from variables like fuel and energy usage, declining birth rates and workforce participation, and the regular cycle of weather events. Food is harvested, produced, picked, or killed but then there is a trucker and container shortage on top of fuel price increases. “Once everything makes it to the store, you still have labor shortages, workforce participation issues, and the increased expenses of running a people business like grocery. Healthcare costs, benefit costs, and increased wage demands or mandates, all impact operating costs,” said Dr. Zwanka. “All along the supply chain, different from portrayals in many media outlets, most manufacturers, consumer packaged goods companies, and retailers only passed on a portion of the cost increases to the costs and subsequent retail pricing did not truly reflect the massive amount of inflation we have seen in the supply chain. Competitive pricing pressures are not always linked to acquisition costs, and so many in the food chain swallowed a good portion of the increases.”

The ongoing inflation is now forcing many companies to pass on those costs to survive and Dr. Zwanka notes that this year retailers are going to be stretched. “When the costs of operating companies continue to increase, and costs of production continue to increase, the only release of pressure is through cost and retail increases,” he said.

Dr. Zwanka looks at the competitive forces. The same forces that caused a slow trickle of increases to then become a firehose of increases will also eventually work in the customer’s favor. “Customers change buying patterns, trade into store brands from national brands, cook at home more, and will move away from a commodity that has become too expensive,” said Dr. Zwanka. “They may love eggs, but the cost is so high they switch to oatmeal or even places like McDonald’s. Yes, McDonald’s is a super value alternative to eating eggs at home, and every customer can compute that value equation.”

The egg supply will start to build as demand decreases, which will decrease costs of perishable products, noted Dr. Zwanka. “As a double-edge to that sword, though, decreased selling costs will then lead to an increased focus on efficiency,” he said. “Efficiency can come in multiple ways: less labor, less assortment, lower wages, lower benefits, consolidation of suppliers, consolidation of retailers. Scale still works in this economy, and that will be a big push, as effectiveness through efficiency will be the next focus.”

The weather in the country also plays a role especially in the west like California where most places acquire produce. “And a lot of those crops are lower in yield because of heat stress, some failed crops, and that’s less food available in the market, all of which puts upward pressure on prices,” said Ortego on PBS News Hour.

The bird flu outbreak last year is a factor. “It’s the second largest outbreak we have seen in modern history,” Ortego continued. “It’s affected over 40 million birds, many in commercial operations. And that sent the price of poultry and eggs surging.”

In 2021, *The Economist* reported that high food prices are here to stay, noting that COVID-19 disruptions weren’t the only reason. In September of that same year,

the UN hosted a “people’s summit” on global food systems in an effort to tackle a very concrete problem: how to make the food supply chain fairer, greener and healthier. An index compiled by the Food and Agriculture Organization, a UN agency, shows that food prices were a third higher in August than a year before. They continued to rise over several months leading up to the summit.

“When prices go up, you rarely seem them come down in any significant way,” said Phil Kassa, co-owner of Heartland Marketplace while attending MIRA’s Annual Innovation Show at Andiamo’s. “We are seeing that with the gas prices as well.” ■

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





## Creating an Online Presence to Brand Your Business

■ BY EPIPHANY COMMUNICATIONS AND COACHING\*

Former MIRA Chairman, Cliff Denha's store, Wine Palace, in Livonia, Michigan is 9,000 square feet but his presence has a global reach via his website and social media platforms. Recently, they've been promoting a brand-new beer cave and humidor. Today, they have one of the largest selections of wine, liquor, and beer in Michigan!

The store also features a club where customers can earn points and they are also able to purchase products through their website. Customers can have products shipped or they can order online and pick up at the store.

"We showcase our bourbon, barrels of beer and wines on social media regularly," said Cliff Denha, co-owner. "Liquor companies often send us samples to review, and my son Louie does a great job posting descriptions of the products online. We have a following from customers in Michigan, Ohio, Illinois, and Canada."

Any business promoting products and services greatly benefits from having a website platform, and in the food retail business, one that's built around commerce and selling goods has proven to be profitable. "For that aspect of your digital connection, it's primarily a one-way street of information, assortment clarity, algorithms on suggested products to pair with the ones being chosen, making sure the site can serve as a shopping list, or delivery/pick-up enabler," said Dr. Russell Zwanka, Western Michigan University Food Marketing Director. "Easily navigable and food-oriented is the goal. Having an App and being mobile-friendly is a must."

Food retailers need to consider the strategy that includes, but not limited to, content, geographical targeting, and identifying your ideal client for their digital marketing plan as their first step before executing any efforts on social media. "A successful conversation starts with relevant content the end users can consume to be attracted to. So often, companies come to us wanting us to manage

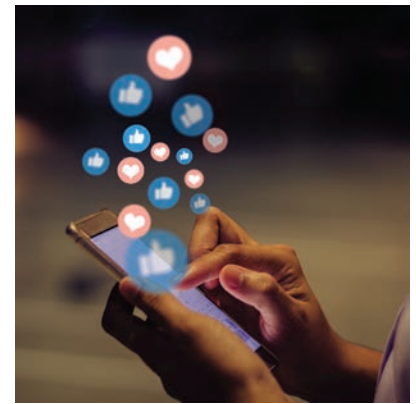
their social media but don't want to engage us in a content creation scope of work," said Al Zara, CEO of Geek Town USA. "We have learned that without a content strategy and execution, our efforts and success will be limited due to a lack of relevant content."

Personal social sites allow more of a two-way street of engagement with customers, including asking what they're cooking, providing recipe ideas or food products, posting about relevant and timely topics, and interacting at a more personal level. "Your goal is to increase interactivity and sharing. You're in food, so how does food help the customers' lives in a productive manner," said Dr. Zwanka. "Showing you know how they feel on Friday (pizza night!) versus how they feel on Sunday (how to prep for dinners for the week) goes a long way towards establishing a relationship with the customers."

It's not just enough to have a presence. What you say and how you say it, impacts engagement. "If you use social media for the 'hard sell', and only talk about what's on sale, you're just a billboard," said Dr. Zwanka. "That can be done on your website or e-commerce site. Social media is for providing solutions and encouraging dialogue. A conversation back and forth forms a connection between customers and their store. When customers shop in a certain store frequently, they think of it as 'their store'."

From an internet marketing perspective, ignoring local search engine optimization (SEO) and outreach efforts could be detrimental. "Social media, to many business owners, is a buzzword but they don't know or are not aware of the value of investing even a small amount into digital marketing and how it can help their businesses," said Zara.

Zara's company focuses on local search engine results and reputation management by sending review requests and manage reviews in one central platform called Reputation Arm ([www.reputationarm.com](http://www.reputationarm.com)). "It's a low entry point," said Zara. "I encourage businesses of all sizes to engage



in at least managing their local SEO efforts and reach out to digital marketing agencies or platforms."

Both Dr. Zwanka and Zara emphasize that *not* having a social media presence is *not* an option. "They should always start with the strategy and learn about who and where they should be targeting their efforts," Zara suggested. "Once that is established, the next thing is curating the right messaging through engaging content. To simplify digital marketing, it's very similar to physical socializing in the sense of how a conversation is started, which outfit and appearance are you portraying at that moment, and which topics are you discussing to engage and stay engaged in that conversation. If we can convert that mindset of physical socializing into digital socializing, I believe the process of digital marketing will be less complicated for many that are not in the space."

"Understanding the transactional side of your digital presence, and how it is different from your conversational side, is incredibly important," said Dr. Zwanka. "Once those guardrails are established, geofencing, enabling 'get it while it's hot', compelling reasons to visit, is an important part of your digital strategy."

Find a trusted person that knows the digital marketing space, even at a high level, and have that person consult you to explain the digital marketing space so the value for the investment is there and the right expectations are set early on. "The number one issue, in my opinion, with business owners and digital marketing companies or freelancers, is that there is not a clear expectation set early on that establishes aligned goals," said Zara. "How can you win a game if no one is taking score and there is no time limit?" ■

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## Events & Publications Coordinator Brings Expertise and Creativity to New Position

■ BY EPIPHANY COMMUNICATIONS AND COACHING\*



After graduating from Western Michigan University with a degree in Food and Consumer Package Goods Marketing with a minor in General Business, Kaelah O'Brien moved to Southern California to take a sales analytics job with Hormel Foods. She then moved to Arkansas with the company to sell Planters Brand products in Walmart. "This experience allowed me to gain great familiarity in the food industry early on in my career," she said. "When evaluating my next steps, I realized what was most important to me was being close to my family and I decided to move back home to Michigan."

She began to hunt for a job that would utilize the knowledge and skills that also enabled her to engage with people in her home state. "When I came across the job posting for MIRA's Events and Publications Coordinator, it knew it was a perfect fit," said O'Brien. She started working for MIRA in January of this year. "Working to support small businesses in the area I know and love by creating fun and exciting events and publications is something I take pride in. I am excited for the year ahead."

As MIRA's Events and Publications Coordinator, she works on the events team and committee to plan all MIRA events, at least nine per year, where she oversees event logistics. On the publications side, she works with advertisers. "Most recently, our President and CEO, Bill Wild, has charged me with managing all social media content creation and I'm looking forward to revamping MIRA's social media to be engaging and helpful to our members and beyond," said O'Brien.

On any given day, O'Brien plans the events and monthly publications advertising schedule. She works closely with Kelli Petty, MIRA's Events and Publications Promoter, and as well as with the President

and CEO. "COVID-19 created many challenges over the last three years as it pertains to the events," said O'Brien. "They have been modified and, in some cases, canceled but we are getting back to normal. We are ready to revamp past events and create new events that are meaningful, fun, and beneficial to our members and community."

The work at MIRA is more than just a job for O'Brien. "I love forming relationships with the staff and MIRA members. It is great when I can express my creativity through social media content and new event ideas," she said. "It is motivating to know that I am working to help the independently owned retailers and small businesses in my own community."

When she is not working, O'Brien enjoys spending quality time with family and friends and shares a close relationship with her parents and two younger brothers. She also loves spending time with her dogs, two Bichons named Ruby and Belle. "Cooking and baking for my loved ones is at the top of my list too," she said. "I also love to soak up the sun and I enjoy discussing movies and TV."

Along with her devotion to her job and family, Kaelah doesn't lose sight of her goals. "I would love to train, develop, and manage a team looking to do similar work in event planning," she said. "I am an analyst at heart, so to be able to drive more and more strategic events that create value for MIRA and beyond would be incredible. In my professional career I am striving to lead by example with a strong work ethic while maintaining work life balance. I also plan to become a mentor to women in business throughout my career and believe giving back and volunteering in my community is so important." ■

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## MIRA Board Member Ventures into the Restaurant Business

■ BY EPIPHANY COMMUNICATIONS AND COACHING\*

When working at his new restaurant, Marvin Jarbo is often seen walking around, table to table, greeting customers and asking them about their meal. “Customer service is at the core of my business philosophy,” said Jarbo. “It’s all about being kind to people. Whatever you give to others, you will get in return.”

It’s new, it’s local and it’s a great place to grab a drink and some comfort food. Marvin is a longtime MIRA member and is currently serving on the Board of Directors. He opened his first restaurant, *Local North Taphouse and Grill* in Canton, Michigan in June of 2022. The 3,600 square-foot restaurant seats 165 people comfortably and serves lunch and dinner, including appetizers, entrees, burgers and more. The popular eatery also offers a Sunday brunch from 9 a.m. until 1 p.m. for just \$13.99. “Customers are lined up outside the door every Sunday,” said Jarbo.



That’s not all. They tout their daily Happy Hour and special happenings like Bourbon Nights, Scotch Nights, as well as catering and banquets. They also take reservations.

“As the owner of Eastern Market, Canton, I have been promoting fresh, grass fed meat for years and I wanted a restaurant that served meals from scratch using fresh ingredients,” said Jarbo. “When the opportunity to purchase an existing restaurant just minutes away from my meat market opened, I bought the business and renovated it.”

His signature dish is a 16oz boneless ribeye, but they are also known for their stylishly plated broasted chicken and their Friday fish and chips, a cod battered in Guinness beer and deep fried. They serve specialty drinks from their club-style bar adorned with a white quartz countertop and grey bottom.

When he is not working, Jarbo enjoys spending time with his family and golfing but when he is working, he splits his time at the meat market, restaurant and managing eight shopping centers he owns with 126 tenants. He and his wife Noora have three boys and have been married for 17 years. Jarbo has been training his three boys, Antonio (15), Angelo (13), and Luciano (11), to work the business. “My eldest son has been working in the store since he was 7-years-old,” said Jarbo. “I want to teach my boys the business, the importance of having a hard work ethic and to be kind to others.”

More information, including a menu, can be found at [www.localnorthtaphousegrill.com](http://www.localnorthtaphousegrill.com). ■

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 Success Systems/Smokin' Rebates	1-800-653-3345
BMC-Business Machines Company	(517) 485-1732


## PRINTING, PUBLISHING & SIGNAGE

 Saxon, Inc. 	(248) 398-2000
Ahearn Signs, Inc.	(734) 699-3777
Pace Custom Printing	(248) 563-7702


## PRODUCE DISTRIBUTORS

Anthony Marano Company	(773) 321-7500
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## PROPANE

 Tank Traders Midwest	(877) 429-5797
Planet Propane	(248) 647-0000

## REAL ESTATE

 Sell Your Business Program	1-800-666-6233
Global Petro Advisors LLC / Elevate Next Home	(614) 332-8762

## REFRIGERATION SOLUTIONS (COMMERCIAL)

 American Refrigeration Manufacturer	(248) 747-2045
Raves Cooler Doors	(248) 887-0648

## RETAIL FIXTURES, DISPLAYS & FLOORING

 Display Max	(810) 494-0400
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## RESTAURANT EQUIPMENT & SUPPLIES

All American Restaurant Equipment	(313) 368-5331
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## REVERSE VENDING MACHINES & SERVICE

UBCR, LLC	(248) 529-2605
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## ROOFING: COMMERCIAL & INDUSTRIAL

Technique Roofing Systems	1-800-653-1631
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## SECURITY, SURVEILLANCE & MORE

 DensityUSA	(314) 798-8747
Clearview	(855) 903-7233
Netco Services	(248) 850-2228

## SODA POP, WATER, JUICES & OTHER BEVERAGES

 Faygo Beverages, Inc. 	(313) 925-1600
 Reyes Coca-Cola <i>(Metro Detroit program)</i>	
..... Metro Detroit 	(313) 868-2008
..... Belleville 	(734) 397-2700
..... Flint 	(810) 237-4000
..... Cleveland 	(216) 690-2653
Garden Food Distributors	(313) 584-2800
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
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## TOBACCO ALTERNATIVES

JUUL Labs	(810) 632-9900
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## 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 <i>(Cardboard recycling buyers)</i>	
.....	(219) 663-5678

## WEB DEVELOPMENT

KreativMedia	(248) 721-9919
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## 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) 853-7800
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





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**MAY 9, 2023**

## ANNUAL CHAIRMAN'S DINNER

An elegant evening of friendship, camaraderie and live entertainment while we recognize and honor MIRA's past chairmen. An opportunity to network and reconnect with your colleagues in the food, beverage and petroleum industries.

*Shenandoah Country Club // West Bloomfield, MI*



**JUNE 13, 2023**

## MIDWEST INDEPENDENT RETAILERS FOUNDATION'S 15TH ANNUAL SCHOLARSHIP LUNCHEON

Every year, the Midwest Independent Retailers Foundation awards academic scholarships in the amount of \$1,500 each to extraordinary and deserving students in Michigan, Ohio and Illinois. Help the MIR Foundation invest in the leaders of tomorrow. Tickets and sponsorship opportunities available.

*Detroit Athletic Club// Detroit, MI*



**JULY 19, 2023**

## MIRA'S 47TH ANNUAL MICHIGAN GOLF OPEN

A day on the course includes breakfast, lunch, 18 holes of golf and samples at every hole! Last year we sold out! Sponsorship opportunities are available.

*Fox Hills Golf & Banquet Center // Plymouth, MI*



**AUGUST 8, 2023**

## MIRA'S 18TH ANNUAL OHIO GOLF OUTING

This outing is a social event where retailers, wholesalers, manufacturers and service providers all come together to have a little competitive fun. A day on the course includes breakfast, dinner and 18 holes of golf!

*Shale Creek Golf Club // Medina, OH*

## publishers statement

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### CONTACT:

T: (800) 666-6233

F: (866) 601-9610

E: [info@MIRAmw.org](mailto:info@MIRAmw.org)

Periodicals postage prices paid at Pontiac, MI and additional mailing offices.

The opinions expressed in this magazine are not necessarily those of MIRA, its board of directors, staff members, or consultants. Bylined articles reflect the opinions of the writer.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to MIRA Bottom Line, 5779 West Maple Road, West Bloomfield, MI 48322.

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**Mary Brush** (1-989-798-2148) [mary.brush@spartannash.com](mailto:mary.brush@spartannash.com) for more information.