

BottomLine



THE VOICE OF INDEPENDENT RETAILERS // VOL. 29, NO. 3 // MARCH 2018

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THE VOICE OF INDEPENDENT RETAILERS
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features



COVER STORY //

FOOD MARKETS WITH ETHNIC FLARE

While some grocery stores have specialty sections, other stores specifically cater to an ethnic clientele. Many AFPD members have found their niche with global foods. They have clients interested in a variety of ethnic foods such as Middle Eastern, Latino, Italian, African American, and Asian.



\$1,500 SCHOLARSHIPS – LAST CHANCE TO APPLY!

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SAVE THE DATE!

AFPD's 34th Annual Michigan Innovations Buying Show is known for its high-quality attendees, attendee satisfaction, special show-only deals & discounts and non-stop interaction. This show continues to be the best and most important trade show in this region for our industry and for your company's success.



president's message

AUDAY P. ARABO, ESQ. // AFPD PRESIDENT & CEO

Happy St. Patrick's Day

In celebrating St. Patrick's Day on March 17th, it seems to be the one day that everyone is or believes they are actually Irish. It really made me think about all the amazing diverse cultures and ethnicities that make up the United States of America, especially the food and beverage industry we represent. This month's cover article really gives you a nice overview of how specializing to a specific ethnicity gives you an advantage over the big box stores. With all the consolidation out there at all levels of the industry, it is easy to get discouraged or overwhelmed, but the successful operators have found a special niche just for themselves and continue to work on perfecting their trade.

As independent operators, we know bigger is not better. As an association, we continue to adapt to our surroundings and continue to listen to your needs as we game-plan for the future. The AFPD Executive Board just completed a 2-day retreat in the Chicago Metro area which was very fruitful. We also attended the AFPD Chicago Metro Inaugural Grocers Gala, which was a success.

Election years are always interesting. In some states, things seem quiet like Ohio, but no action from government is a good thing most of the time. In other states like Illinois, we never know what Springfield will do as well as Cook County and the City of Chicago. On the other hand, in Michigan this year we continue to battle folks like Meijer and 7-11 who do not want the half mile rule to stay in existence. AFPD filed another lawsuit against the Michigan Liquor Control Commission and the State of Michigan and simultaneously are working hard to move Senate Bill 501 out of the House and onto the Governor's desk. This is David versus Goliath all over again, but when our membership need it most, AFPD is there to fight for their interests.

On another note, there have been some rumblings regarding expansion of the bottle bill in Michigan. We will do what we can to ensure that does not happen and people see the bottle bill is a failure and that comprehensive curbside recycling is the best approach. The AFPD staff continues to work hard to bring you valuable programs and tools to make your life easier. We hope to continue to expand the Double Up Food Bucks programs throughout the Midwest and continue our partnerships with Michigan State University for meat cutting training and other programs that can help make our members lives easier.

A number of unique challenges exist in today's marketplace, but you need to keep focused on proving quality products at good prices with exceptional customer service. Don't buy into the Amazon hype and what others may be doing. Focus on what you can by doing better and to control your destiny. As everything else in this world, this time shall pass as well. We really want to encourage you to attend as many tradeshow as you can in the coming months. You will learn about new trends, new products, and you will get to network with suppliers and your colleagues. Please mark your calendar for the AFPD Innovations show on May 8th which will be held at Burton Manor in Livonia. The AFPD show will also include liquor. Please stay tuned for all the new ideas that are evolved from the AFPD Executive Board retreat, as we execute them in the coming months and years. Hope to see you around! God Bless. ■

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petroleum news & views

EDWARD WEGLARZ // AFPD DIRECTOR, PETROLEUM

Satisfying That “Morning” Customer

Recent figures from the Energy Information Administration indicate that overall U.S. petroleum demand is “flat”. The surge in new car sales has resulted in the “fleet” getting better fuel mileage. If the motorist drives the same number of miles with the new car that he drove with the old car he’s buying less fuel. So, you need to concentrate on the customers you have, encourage them to come in more often, and visit the other profit centers you offer.

Coffee, hot and cold, can be a money maker and result in companion sales that will boost the amount of the per customer sales ticket, other than gasoline. Ask your customer what they want. Often times you can offer a quality product at a competitive price, but the customer just wants a change. While other customers enjoy the stability and consistency of the “same old thing”.

Decide whether you want to offer actual flavored blends of coffee, or the flavored creamers that can be added to regular and decaffeinated coffee. Try offering a new flavor each month. If it sells, keep it, or at least keep it in a “rotation” that you might decide to employ.

Keep it simple; try pricing the flavored at the same price level as regular unflavored coffee.

A coffee-drinking customer is a great prospect for “companion” sales. Have available and suggest, muffins, bagels, and appropriate sweet treats to go along with the coffee.

Take into consideration the seasonable weather, with more cold offerings in the summer and flavors that reflect the season in the fall and winter. Perhaps peppermint flavored specials in December and pumpkin flavor during the Halloween/Thanksgiving holiday period.

Shop your competition. You might not be able to



afford to be the lowest priced coffee, but you need to be competitive. The speed and convenience factor can command a slightly higher price point.

Consider neatly labeled “air pots” rather than the glass “beaker” pot. The coffee will stay hot and fresh longer, and the labels can promote the product.

Many customers will respond to “combination specials”. Think about coffee and newspaper combinations. Or, team up a sweet treat with a coffee combo.

When a flavor doesn’t sell, you can always abandon the flavor and substitute another.

Also, don’t forget about teas. Single-serve tea bags should also be made part of your coffeabar display. Many customers enjoy the change of pace that tea offers. The flavor selections can be varied as much as the coffee flavors.

Use signage and your reader board to inform the customer and promote the product.

The statistic documented in the opening of this article should be enough motivation for you to seriously consider additional and more wide-ranging offerings for the customer. ■



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THE VOICE OF INDEPENDENT RETAILERS
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michigan lobbyist report

MATT MINER // CAPITOL STRATEGIES GROUP

Michigan Legislature Off to a Quick Start

2018 is off to a quick start with legislators returning to Lansing with a long list of agenda items to complete before the summer break in June. The fight to retain the Half Mile Rule is at the forefront of that list. Late last year, AFPD and its team fought diligently to advance Senate Bill 501 through the Senate 27-9, with two legislators absent on the day of the vote. In January, the Court of Claims, led by Judge Stephen Borrello, issued an order staying rescission of Michigan's long-standing Half Mile Rule by the Michigan Liquor Control Commission. This stay retained the Half Mile Rule, while the legislature deliberates formal codification of the rule. At this time, Senate Bill 501 resides in the House Regulatory Reform Committee. Negotiations between previously disinterested parties have begun to take place and through the leadership of House President Pro Tempore, Lee Chatfield. All sides are taking serious interest in this legislation and working towards a resolution. Stay tuned to your bulletins from AFPD, as this issue advances towards the finish line.

Aside from the Half Mile Rule, here is a brief list of issues AFPD is working on in the legislative arena:

SB 632 & 633

Senate Bills 632 & 633 were introduced to shift the liability of data breaches to the entity that incurred the breach. Unless you meet "to be determined" cyber security guidelines set out by a "to be determined" appointed commission, a financial institution would be able to sue you for the costs they incur due to a breach under SB 632 & 633. AFPD strongly opposes these bills and has joined a large coalition of business interests to fight this harmful attack on businesses.

HB 4207

House Bill 4207 was signed into law on December 28th and was lauded by the AFPD for its passage. After

months of work, this act will now require at least 5% of community revitalization incentives to be awarded to neighborhood and commercial corridor food initiatives. It will also extend eligibility for community revitalization incentives to property used for a neighborhood and commercial corridor food initiative, through September 30, 2022.

HB 4507

House Bill 4507 amends the Michigan Liquor Control Code to require, based on the approval date of the application, that the fees for the various types of licenses be prorated on a quarterly basis for a portion of the effective period of the license. If the application is for a license that will be effective for less than 9 months, the applicant or licensee would be required to pay a prorated license fee and to submit the prorated fee after the application is approved and on issuance of the license. A transfer license fee would have to be paid on issuance of the license. AFPD strongly supports this bill.

SB 5127

Senate Bill 5127 was introduced last year and seeks to diminish the square foot requirement for the SDM quota. AFPD is fighting to keep the current law in place and not water it down any further.

HB 4583

House Bill 4583 was signed into law late last year. This bill created the Legacy Release Program, which would, under certain conditions, reimburse owners and operators for the costs of corrective actions for releases from refined petroleum underground storage tank systems that occurred before December 30, 2014. The bill also allowed money in the Refined Petroleum Fund to be spent, upon appropriation, for the Legacy Release Program; grants and loans to facilitate brownfield development at property with leaking USTs; the permanent closure of USTs; and reimbursement to local units of government and county road commissions for costs of corrective action in situations where regulated substances were left in place within a public highway. ■



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michigan lottery report

ARIC NESBITT // MICHIGAN LOTTERY COMMISSIONER

Popular Straight Back Bonus Promotion Returns to Daily 4 Game; Expands to Daily 3 Game

The popular Straight Back Bonus promotion is returning to the Daily 4 game in March and for the first time, it also will include the Daily 3 game. The promotion is popular with Daily 4 players, because it gives them a chance to win more cash with no additional cost. We expect it to be a hit with Daily 3 players as well.

The Straight Back Bonus promotion doubles

the chances to win for all straight bet wagers and at no extra cost to players. The Straight Back Bonus promotion is a favorite among Lottery players and is designed to attract players and offer them more chances to win.

Beginning March 19th, Daily 3 and Daily 4 players whose numbers match the drawn numbers in reverse order – “straight back” – will win a bonus prize. Daily 3 players will win \$100 on a \$1 Straight wager and \$50 on a 50¢ Straight wager. Daily 4 players will win \$1,000 on a Straight wager. For example, if a Daily 3 player picks 1-2-3 and the numbers drawn are 3-2-1, the player wins \$100. If a Daily 4 player picks 1-2-3-4 and the numbers drawn are 4-3-2-1, the player wins \$1,000! Boxed bets, 1-Off, and 2-Way bets aren’t eligible for the bonus prize, and Wheel-Bet winners will be paid only the straight prize. Players will be paid only for the largest prize won on a ticket.

Best of all, the Straight Back Bonus automatically is applied to all Daily 3 and Daily 4 straight bets so retailer staff members don’t have to take any extra steps. Straight Back Bonus will run for a limited time in March.

This exciting promotion gives players more chances to win prizes in two of our most popular games, without adding any cost to their wagers. We expect Straight Back Bonus to generate player excitement and help boost sales for retailers. ■

“The Michigan Lottery. All across the state, good things happen.”

About 98 cents of every dollar spent on Lottery tickets benefits the state in the form of contributions to the state School Aid Fund, prizes to players and commissions to retailers and vendors. In 2016, the Lottery provided a record \$888.9 million to help support Michigan’s public schools. Since it began in 1972, the Lottery has contributed more than \$20.5 billion to support public education. For additional information, follow the Michigan Lottery on Facebook, Instagram, Twitter and online at www.michiganlottery.com.

INSTANT TICKETS // PULL TAB TICKETS

NEW INSTANT TICKETS:

On sale March 6th:

- IG 217 – \$50,000 Triple Diamonds – \$2
- IG 235 – Loaded – \$5
- IG 253 – Casino Millions – \$10
- IG 232 – Classic Black – \$20

INSTANT GAMES SET TO EXPIRE:

Expiring March 5th:

- IG 743 – Emerald Green 7’s – \$2
- IG 760 – Bonus Ball Bingo – \$3
- IG 761 – \$2,000,000 Bonus – \$20

Expiring April 2nd:

- IG 725 – \$500 A Week For Life \$1
- IG 726 – \$1,000 A Week For Life – \$2
- IG 727 – \$2,500 A Week For Life – \$5
- IG 728 – \$5,000 A Week For Life – \$10
- IG 750 – Triple Stars – \$3
- IG 758 – \$100 Grand Cashword – \$3
- IG 767 – Wheel of Fortune – \$2

NEW PULL TAB TICKETS:

On sale March 6th:

- MI 519 – Stampede Gold – \$1

PULL TABS SET TO EXPIRE:

Expiring March 13th:

- IT 867 – Lucky Spot – \$1
- MI 562 – Greenback Stash – \$1
- MI 570 – Slot Crazy – 50¢
- MI 572 – Wild Vegas – \$1

Expiring March 20th:

- MI 577 – Deer Hunter – \$.50
- MI 583 – Max Money – \$2
- MI 586 – Jackpot 777 – \$1

Expiring April 17th:

- IT 866 – Mega Money – \$5
- MI 552 – \$1,000,000 Casino – \$5

TICKET ACTIVATION: Retailers are reminded to activate all game tickets before putting them on sale to ensure winning tickets may be redeemed by players.



Daily 3 & 4™

There are special numbers your players always look forward to.
They pick them. They own them. They love them. They play them.

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Daily 3 & 4
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BACK BONUS™

STARTS MARCH 19 FOR A LIMITED TIME

MATCH YOUR STRAIGHT BET
IN REVERSE
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\$100 OR \$50
DAILY 3

\$1,000
DAILY 4



2-WAY, BOXED AND 1-OFF BETS NOT ELIGIBLE. WHEEL BET WINNERS WILL BE PAID THE STRAIGHT PRIZE ONLY AND ARE NOT ELIGIBLE FOR THE REVERSE PRIZE. Daily 3 odds: Straight Back Bonus: 1 in 1,010; Straight: 1 in 1,000; 3-Way Box: 1 in 333; 6-Way Box: 1 in 167. 1-Off Straight: 1 in 1,000; 1-Off One Digit: 1 in 167. Daily 4 odds: Straight Back Bonus: 1 in 10,101; Straight: 1 in 10,000; 4-Way Box: 1 in 2,500; 6-Way Box: 1 in 1,666; 12-Way Box: 1 in 833; 24-Way Box: 1 in 416; 1-Off Straight: 1 in 10,000; 1-Off One Digit: 1 in 1,250. Knowing your limits is always the best bet. Call the Michigan Problem Gambling Helpline for confidential help at 1-800-270-7117.





ohio lobbyist report

TERRY FLEMING // TC FLEMING & ASSOCIATES

Ohio Legislature “Spooling Up” For The Primaries

House Bill 307, declaring September “We Card” month had sponsor’s hearing this month before Senate Committee and hopefully will move prior to legislature breaking for May primary elections. Elections are still front and center in Ohio, as this is a statewide election year as I’ve told you in past. The closer we get to the May primary, the more tense the members running in contested primaries become. I’ll have a full election edition next month to keep Ohio AFPD members up to date.

In the meantime watching the Ohio General Assembly is like watching the nightly news. The terrible shooting in Florida has brought out many, including High School Students, demanding more gun control laws. As you might expect Democrats and Democrat Candidates are urging new laws banning certain weapons, while Republicans are stressing more extensive background checks and possibly banning rapid fire guns. The past year and two months have seen 512 bills introduced in the Ohio House of Representatives with only 25 becoming law to date. In the Ohio Senate 256 Bills have been introduced and only 14 have become law. To give you an idea of the diversity of the bills being heard, I’ve listed some below.

- HB 509 would allow beer sales at a Farmers Market.
- HB 459 would allow employers to self-insure for Workers Compensation.
- HB 382 would revise Ohio Unemployment Compensation laws.

- HB 380 prohibits unauthorized aliens from receiving Worker’s Compensation.
- HB 303 prohibits public places from excluding service animals
- HB 198 would not allow credit cards for lottery purchases.
- HB 113 would make Ohio a Right-to-Work state.
- HB 86 would increase the minimum wage
- HB 180 would require parity in pay for women and men.
- HB 502 & HB 503 would require private business and government to train employee’s in suicide prevention.
- HB 384 would require only one certified letter to owners of cars that have been towed, instead of three.
- HB 258 would prohibit abortions when there is a heartbeat.
- HB 214 would prohibit abortions based solely on child having Down’s Syndrome.
- HB 481 would have license plates that say “stop bullying”.
- HB 466 secures statewide elections.
- HB 387 would abolish the Death Penalty.
- HB 167 would address opioid prescribing and addiction.
- HB 135 would establish “Superman Day” since the comic was originated in Cleveland.

These are just some of the House Bills, the Senate Bills are very similar. Your government at work.

On the regulatory side, it’s been a very quiet year as Ohio EPA has not suggested any regulations that would be harmful to AFPD members. The Ohio Liquor Control office has adopted many of the suggestions that AFPD made early last year, which has resulted in more permits being issued. The Ohio Lottery Commission continues to work with AFPD.

So buckle up, in an election year, anything can and will happen. ■



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ohio liquor report

JIM V. CANEPA // OHIO DIVISION OF LIQUOR CONTROL

Ohio Liquor Store Optimization Results

A few months ago, I told you about the Agency Optimization initiative. Since that time, we've wrapped up the testing period and our team has been hard at work analyzing sales data and feedback from the Agencies involved to determine our future efforts.

To refresh your memory, the Spirits Innovation Project (SIP) team, a partnership between the Division of Liquor Control, spirits brokers/suppliers and Ohio's Contract Liquor Agencies, worked to test marketing and category management techniques, with the goal of improving customer experience and increasing sales.

Six test Agencies across the state were chosen and are representative of the different store layouts, sizes and locations, allowing the SIP team to analyze what works in different Agencies. These stores were reset with product placed by category, flavor and size. Slow moving inventory was replaced with those best sellers based on demographics and sales data in each area.

The resets encouraged exploration of new products, Ohio-made products and more. The SIP team also worked with Agency staff on product knowledge to better educate customers about the purchases they were making.

Here's what we found:

We found sales increases on average of 8.63 percent and up to 14.4 percent overall. That's compared to an average of 6.3 percent growth statewide for the same time period. The What's New, Last Call and Single

Malt sections also had growth. These numbers are important, because they're objective data that shows consumers are responding to the changes.

The Agency resets, consistent shelf talkers, and category navigational and educational signage were also well received by both Agencies and customers. This project also brought a new level of awareness to out of stock products, which allowed auditors to work closely with the Agencies to avoid those situations.

Based on these findings, the SIP team has suggested implementing some of the techniques at 125 Agencies. The category navigational signage will be incorporated at Agencies to help consumers easily find the products they want. The educational signage will inform customers on how the products are made, how they're best served, or even how they're distilled. Consistent shelf talkers across Agencies will help shoppers quickly identify new, sale and last call products.

There will also be Agency resets to optimize flow, and sections will be dedicated to New Items, Last Call or Value-Added Pack (VAP) products. The resets of the 125 Agencies will begin on April 1st and run through the end of October. Finally, we will be providing training materials to aid all Agencies in understanding top selling SKUs, category sales and trends, and category educational materials.

As I've said before, I tell you all of this because this initiative is important to me and my team, and want it to be for you, too. After testing these changes, I believe the information speaks for itself and hope you're as excited about these upgrades as we are. I know staff at the six test Agencies will echo the same sentiments, and I want to thank them again for their willingness to participate. Without their cooperation, we wouldn't be able to continue enhancing the Liquor Enterprise. ■



CATEGORY NAVIGATIONAL SIGNAGE



EDUCATIONAL SIGNAGE



LAST CALL AND WHAT'S NEW SECTIONS

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**Business idling? Stuck in low gear?
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Looking for some extra mileage in your Lottery Sales? Let us help you get back in the driver's seat. This \$10 ticket will rev up your sales, with a higher commission-per-transaction ratio and an overall prize payout of 73 percent.

Our petroleum and convenience store partners account for more than 57 percent of all lottery ticket sales. Last year alone, our petroleum and convenience store partners earned more than \$104 million in Ohio Lottery selling bonuses and commissions.

Put your sales into overdrive. Get a personal solution from one of our highly-trained sales consultants, regardless of the size of your store.

**For a free consultation,
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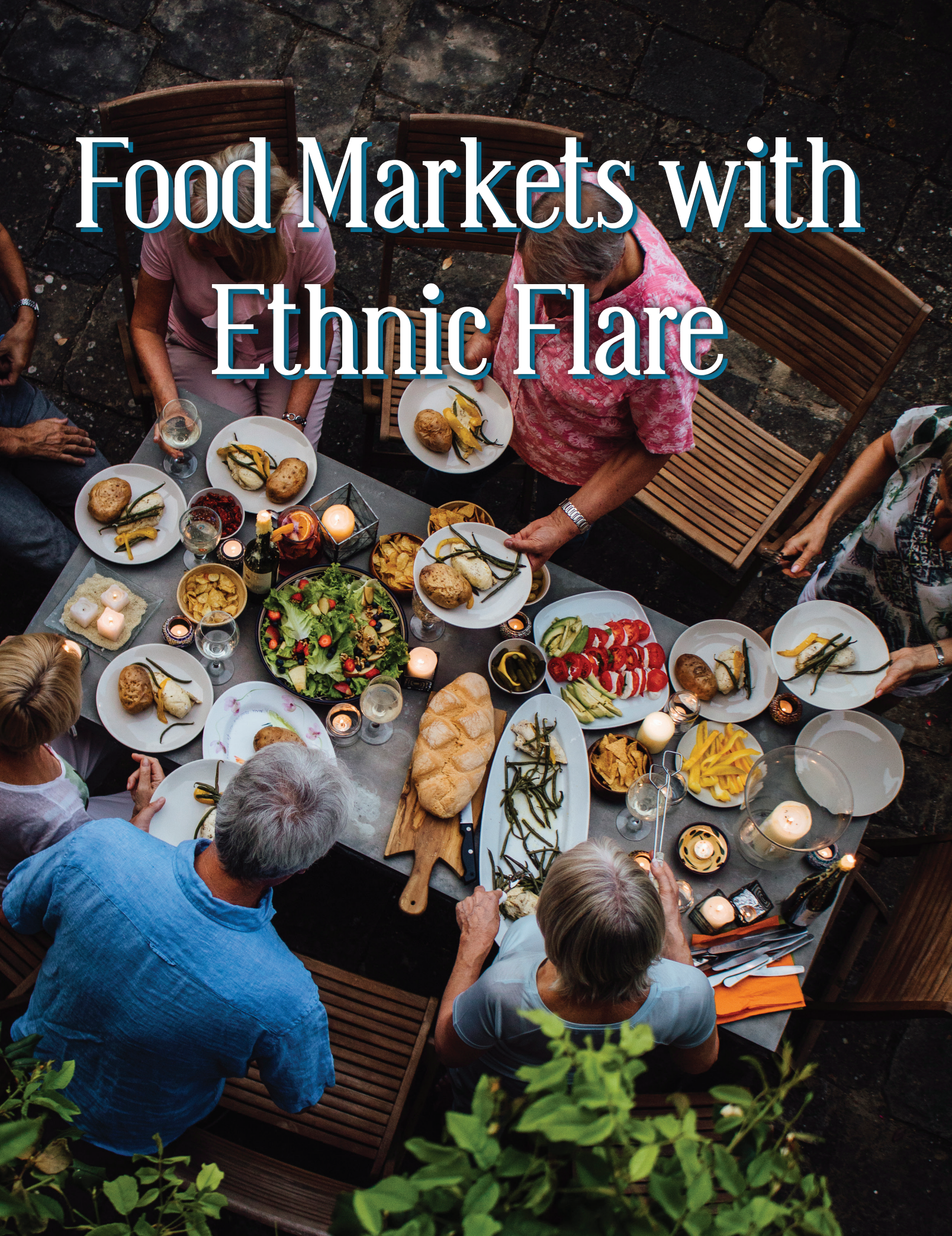


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Lottery players are subject to Ohio laws and Commission regulations. Please play responsibly.



Food Markets with Ethnic Flare



While some grocery stores have specialty sections, other stores specifically cater to an ethnic clientele. Many AFPD members have found their niche with global foods. They have clients interested in a variety of ethnic foods such as Middle Eastern, Latino, Italian, African American, and Asian.

Johnny Karmo has a large Jewish clientele and a customer base that loves a variety of ethnic foods including Middle Eastern, Asian, Mexican, Italian and Greek. His prepared food section includes a variety of dishes such as tabbouleh, hummus, fattoush salad, meat and cheese pies, Greek chicken dishes and lentil soups. "We really focus on making high-quality homemade dishes," said Karmo. "Our customers request a variety of dishes but most popular are tabbouleh, hummus as well as tuna and chicken salads."

He credits his success at his stores, Market Square of Bloomfield, Market Square of Birmingham and Market Fresh of Beverly Hills to selling American-made products, while maintaining a consistency with a tasty variety of only the best quality foods.

Catering to customers who come from just across the border, Joe Gappy has found his niche in the Latino market. "Most of our customers come from Mexico," said Gappy, owner of Prince Valley in Detroit. "The second largest group of the Hispanic population that visits our website is made up of people from Central America, to be a little more specific, people from Honduras and El Salvador."

One of their marketing tactics for the Hispanic public is to make all publications in English and Spanish, either within the store or on any of their digital platforms. "Hispanic people love fresh food and cooking daily, so they mainly buy vegetables such as tomatillos, tomatoes, peppers, cilantro, etc.," said Gappy. "If we talk about products that are not related to vegetables, we sell many packages of tortillas on a daily basis, as well as condiments. And of course, we cannot miss the bread. Hispanic people consume a large amount of bread every day, so we always keep a huge variety of Hispanic bread and sweets in our bakery department."

They have a section specialized in Hispanic products, several of them are products that can be bought here in the United States, but they also have products that are imported from other countries.

"Our mission is to serve our community regardless of its origin, race, or religion," said Gappy. "Here at Prince Valley Market, we strive every day to give good service to our customers, we strive to always give them good quality products and make their experience in our store always sweet and pleasant. We are always grateful to our

customers for choosing us and giving us the confidence to enter their homes through our products."

Although nestled in a large Middle Eastern community, Dearborn Fresh Supermarket caters to diverse clientele and is a full-line grocery store with a prominent Middle Eastern section and several organic items. "We get items from all over the Middle East in our specialty food section and we carry a variety of spices from India," said Kamal Turfah, owner.

Customers travel from the entire Tri-County area including from Flint, Port Huron and Ann Arbor for their fresh meats which are hand slaughtered weekly by a local butcher and are labeled halal. "The fresh meats bring in customers from all over," he noted. "We also cure our deli meats and hot dogs. We have fresh deli products that we make ourselves in house."

The 60,000 square-foot store on Schaefer Road just north of Michigan Avenue has been in business for more than seven years. "We also have a large millennial clientele," he said. "We have a full-line of frozen, dairy and grocery products."

The produce they carry include tropical items that are not available in most other stores, including chain stores. "We have our produce flown in and we carry the freshest of items; our pistachios are green inside and we have sour plums that I used to have in Lebanon. We are known for having the freshest and [most] unique items."

Their prepared food section is growing in size and popularity. They make meat pies and cheese pies, as well as hummus and grape leaves among many other dishes.

Turfah decided to open the market out of convenience. "We were in the wholesale business and my wife and I would spend so much time after working driving to different markets buying the specialty items we wanted, so we decided to open our own business that carries all of the items that we would want."

Today, they even package and send meat products to customers around the country. "Visitors come in our store from out-of-town and they just love our fresh meats," said Turfah. "They call and order items from us and we have them shipped to them."

He credits his loyal customer base to his product line, cleanliness, and customer service.

Najib Atisha has been operating stores in Detroit for more than four decades. He has owned and operated Indian Village Market in Indian Village for the last 15 years. "You really have to know the community in which you serve, in order to be successful," he said. "We carry items specific to the African American community."

His produce section features many greens and sweet potatoes as they are staple items in the urban diet. "We also sell a lot smoked meat used to flavor those greens," noted Atisha.



Pork products have been very common in the Detroit community with pork chitterlings and hog items being popular holiday meals, as well as Jiffy Corn Mix.

“The younger generation in our area is becoming more health conscience and want more organic and healthier foods,” said Atisha. “We carry more of those items today than we did years ago.”

His customer base today is more diverse and younger than it was just a few years ago. “The ethnic markets in suburban areas are becoming more popular,” said Atisha. “The customers shopping in them are diverse. I walk into Middle Eastern markets and I see all kinds of people shopping in them not just people from the Middle East. At the end of the day, you really need to listen to what the client wants.”

That is exactly what owners of Dream Market did when they opened their business inside the building that once housed a Kroger. Next to their own Dream Dollar store, the owners cater to customers interested

in Middle Eastern and Mediterranean cuisine. They have a specialty in prepared foods, such as shawarma sandwiches, with a full-line deli and fresh baked bread.

Their clientele is heavily Middle Eastern, who also shop for their fresh fruit and fresh packaged meats. They butcher Halal meats and poultry for the Muslim community.

They also have an entire aisle dedicated to Indian products.

If you want a little of Italy or a lot of it, then head to Cantoro Italian Market & Trattoria, a store and restaurant inspired by the famous Italian markets in Rome, Venice, and Palermo. “We are the largest Italian market in Michigan – a 55,000 square foot Italian culinary mecca with an award-winning restaurant attached,” the owners noted on the Website.

Throughout the year, owners Michael and John Fallone travel to their father Mario’s Italian birthplace in search of the best food and wines to bring back to

SPECIALTY STORES ARE FINDING THEIR NICHE SPECIFIC PRODUCTS

PRIME CUTS

While many grocers are specializing in ethnic foods, other markets have narrowed down their brand to a product line.

Walt McGaskey has been at the center of premium quality meat. He has operated successful businesses for many years with his wife, Starlet McGaskey and together they have made Prime Cuts the jewel of Jackson. “We are committed to our customers, offering the best quality meats in Jackson and always keeping food and a healthy diet foremost when offering products to our greatest asset, our customers,” the couple touts on their website.

Prime Cuts, which celebrated 10 years in business last month, is a specialty food market on the southwest side of Jackson, Michigan with a 68-foot European-style product display case in the center of the store. Specializing in non-Nitrite smoked products, beef, pork, chicken, fish, and seafood are all featured. “We try to keep things as natural as possible,” said the McGaskeys. “We also have a lot of products made in Michigan by small companies that you will not find in major chain stores.”

After 22 years of owning A&A Market, the McGaskeys saw a trend. “There wasn’t a high-quality meat market in Jackson. Most people traveled to Ann Arbor or Lansing to get quality meat,” the couple said. “We felt Jackson deserved exceptional quality without paying big city prices.”

Now customers travel from all over to shop at the 3,800 square-foot meat store with more than 5,000 products for sale. Most customers shop on a daily basis, but some are coming from as far as 40-miles away.

The lighting and presentation allow the customer to view the finest display selection in the area. Adjacent is the “Meals to Go” counter with a broad selection of prepared food. Next comes their deli. Salads, sandwiches, pies, and bread, which are always featured. Surrounding the store is a vast selection of specialty groceries.

Customers can find grains, oils, gluten free products, rubs, teas, spices & ingredients from all over the world. “We have more than 250 items made in Michigan and more than 180 items made in our store,” noted the McGaskeys.

Along with the staff, the family-owned business touts more than 175 years of food knowledge. The McGaskey’s with more than 39 years of retail experience know what the people of Jackson want and need in service, products, quality, and price from a specialty food market.

“People are realizing how important it is to eat local,” they noted “They want to know where the meat comes from and are asking if the meat has been injected with hormones or antibiotics. We



Cantoro, items found nowhere else in the U.S.

“Our cheese department features varieties from every region in Italy,” they said. “At our bakery, focaccia, ciabatta and other breads are baked daily alongside cakes, cannoli and pastries; our pasta counter offers more than a dozen daily pastas.”

If you visit the bustling colorful fresh meat, produce, and grocery departments customers will choose from a variety of fresh products. “Our prepared foods section features more than 50 delicious Italian dishes for home or office meals; Superb Italian wines from every region line our unmatched selection,” owners commented. “Gifts, wedding favors plus onsite and offsite catering make Cantoro Market a must-see in Michigan.”

The Detroit region is not the only place where ethnic food markets are thriving. Chicago is home to Pete’s Market, a family owned business that started in the 1970’s with several locations throughout the windy city. “We have a very neighborhood centric business

model, where we create a destination one stop shop for the community we are in,” said Stephanie Dremonas. “We tailor each store for a specific neighborhood. We are not tied to one demographic. Pete’s has served and been successful in a range of ethnic and income levels.”

They specialize in various departments with products from around the globe. They have grocery, produce, meat, poultry, fish, cheese, deli, bakery, coffees, juice bars, liquor and flowers. “It’s what separates you from the big corporate giants that are not in tune with the community they service,” said Dremonas. With a focus on produce, Dremonas said, “Fresh is the future. Groceries will be accessible (in a limited degree) online, fresh food will keep the brick and mortar alive and relevant.”

She stresses that customers want service, quality, experience, and value, which they strive to deliver despite the changes in the food industry. “Cost of labor impacts pricing. It will continue to put pressure on retailers to be efficient and cost effective.” ■

have highly educated customers and they want hormone, steroid and antibiotic free products.”

Prime Cuts has brought together people of various aspects of the food industry to establish a first-class specialty store. “Our staff is friendly, knowledgeable and dedicated to making your visit to Prime Cuts a great one,” they noted. “Understanding the products and how they are developed and processed is key for people interested in good healthy eating. Visit with our knowledgeable staff and let them help show you why Prime Cuts is a cut above.”

Their specialty store has enabled the owners to build trust with their customers. “The friendships we have established have been truly remarkable,” they said. “We have loved getting to know our customers – most would not have crossed our paths if we didn’t have this store. Being smaller allow us to offer more ‘personalized cuts.’ We keep records of our customers’ orders from Thanksgiving and Christmas dinners – right down to the size of turkey or prime rib. This is a service larger chains are not able to do.”

“We are blessed by the gracious people of Jackson who have supported us for more than 10 years,” said the McGaskeys. “Building friendships while building a business have been both extremely rewarding.”

WESTERN MARKET

Marketed as selling “real food”, Western Market is a small, independently-owned green grocer serving Ferndale, North Detroit and the surrounding areas. The Selvaggio family opened their doors in 1983 and “have been striving to become the best neighborhood market in Metro Detroit ever since,” said owners.

They are independent grocers committed to serving and educating the community by providing a curated set of foods including fresh produce and other goods. “We seek products that are ethically sourced and authentically produced to support local food systems and culinary traditions,” the Selvaggio’s noted. “We aim for sustainable growth and profitability in a way which supports our family of employees, customers and community partners.”

Known for their produce, Western Market offers a catering service of fresh salads, fruit trays, vegetable trays and a variety of other platters. Their own produce and other fresh products are used to prepare a variety of dishes including soups which they feature daily.

So, whether it’s meat or produce, many markets are finding success in specialty foods and attracting customers in their surrounding area. ■

A Love That Bred a Kingdom

■ BY ASHOURINA SLEWO // DENHA MEDIA GROUP

The real true loves of Eddie Denha's life are his wife, two sons and his daughter. However, when Denha walked into a dollar store in the early 1990s, it was love at first sight. Immediately, he started thinking about a concept that would work for him. That is how Dollar Castle was born in 1992.

At the beginning, Denha's Dollar Castle stores were in the 3,000 to 5,000 square foot range. Now, when walking into any of the several Dollar Castle locations, customers can enjoy an incredibly diverse amount of merchandise in stores up to 21,000 square feet in size.

Every Dollar Castle store is now company owned. Denha tried the franchise model, but franchisees often refused to maintain loyalty to the concept of value, quality, and variety in the product line.

Today's Dollar Castle stores are a drastic change from when they first debuted more than 25 years ago. Products are available at virtually all price points. These products include, but are not limited to, food items, kitchen accessories, luggage, clothing and everything in between.

According to Denha, "Shipping costs played a major role in the need to gravitate away from everything being a dollar or less. In fact, we have some items, which cost up to \$200, items that would likely be 50 percent higher at any of our competitors."

Things changed for the dollar store industry and Dollar Castle specifically, when the economy took a



turn for the worst in 2008. Items that Dollar Castle was able to purchase for 40 to 50 cents were suddenly costing up to 75 cents.

Through it all, however, Denha and his family who are involved in day-to-day operations have had one main mantra: Provide good quality, expansive variety at a fair price. This commitment has caused Dollar Castle stores throughout Metro Detroit to thrive.

Denha prides himself on being able to incorporate his family in much of the work that he does. From the mundane day-to-day tasks to the imminent expansions, Denha knows he can count on his sons, Julian and Tristan. "Julian and Tristan have been great help."

RETAILER SPOTLIGHT
continued on page 32.

RETAILER: DOLLAR CASTLE

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Founded: 1992

Employees: 50+

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Slogan: "Provide good quality, expansive variety at a fair price."



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Millennials Choose Dairy

Whether you're a C-Store or a traditional retailer, Dairy is one of the most important parts of your business. From a gallon of milk to a quick string cheese snack, your customers are looking for fast, quality solutions. Millennials are out shopping for both weekly groceries and convenient stock ups and snacks. These customers are focused on fresh, nutritious, and natural foods. Dairy checks all those boxes and more. Make sure they know you are a trusted source for their favorite products.

At Dutch Farms, we know a winning product mix leads to success, and we know you need to have the right product stocked to keep all your customers satisfied. What are the dairy essentials you need to offer? Here's a quick look at what your shoppers are looking for:

MILK

The original grocery staple. Non-dairy varieties don't pack the same nutrition or have the simple ingredient list millennials are looking for. Don't let your customers go thirsty for this essential item.

STRING CHEESE

The perfect solution for parents on-the-go, school lunches and health conscious consumers. A Dutch Farms mozzarella string cheese has 8 grams of sought-after protein. String cheese is the universal snack.

SHREDS AND SINGLES

A cheeseburger never goes out of style and no hamburger is complete without a slice of melty cheese on top. Customers will run to their closest store to pick up their necessary shreds and singles.

SOUR CREAM AND DIP

Don't let your customer's Taco Tuesday go without sour cream! Squeeze bottle sour cream is the perfect addition to your dairy case. Sour cream-based dips are a quick and delicious snack for a game day snack or a treat for the kids.

BUTTER

For this universal dairy product, customers shop with



quality and taste in mind. From frying eggs in the morning to making perfect baked goods, butter is a staple in your customer's household.

BACON & OJ

These products are essential to round out your dairy offerings, and essential to any breakfast with the family.

These dairy products are terrific grocery and fill-in items for millions of consumers, particularly millennials. Whether you're a full service grocer or a convenience store, you need a trusted dairy supplier. Dutch Farms offers a full line of Milk gallons and half gallons, String Cheese, dozens of varieties of Shreds and Singles, an assortment of Sour Cream and sour cream based Premium Dips, as well as high quality Butter, Bacon and OJ. Contact a Dutch Farms Sales Representative for more information on all that Dutch Farms has to offer at jwondrasek@dutchfarms.com. ■



Personal Scanners Change the Shopping Experience



Technology has long been an essential tool for food retailing. There was a time when barcodes, also known as UPC codes, and barcode scanners were considered future technology. It wasn't until 1952 when the first bar code patent was issued. Barcodes were eventually implemented at supermarkets, as were scanners that are now used at checkout in all sorts of retail outlets.

These technologies saved labor, lowered costs, and allowed for large improvements in inventory control, supply chain management, and with pricing. Food retailers know exactly what is on the shelves, what's on the way, and can adjust prices without having to relabel every box, can, or bottle. All this information is available at

the store level and at headquarters.

The self-serve checkout has been out for a while, with many wholesale stores utilizing staff at the door to check the receipts before customers walk out to prevent theft.

Kroger is in the race to give shoppers a cashier-free shopping experience that also eliminates the need for self-check at a counter.

With Kroger's new, wider rollout of personal scanners shoppers will be able to scan items as they place them in their shopping cart, either with their own scanner – provided by Kroger – or with a smartphone app.

Kroger's new "Scan, Bag, Go" technology allows customers to scan and pay for goods as they shop. "Kroger will expand Scan, Bag, Go to 400 stores across the country in 2018 as part of our Restock Kroger strategy to redefine the grocery customer experience and expand partnerships to create customer value," said Rachel Hurst, corporate affairs manager. "We will share more information soon about this expansion, including which markets will be included."

With the technology, the customer will have to go through U-Scan, scan a barcode and the unit will upload their entire order to the system. They will then pay.

Smartphone apps that turn your shopping list into the most efficient map through the store, directing and alerting you to each item on your list utilizing the GPS in your phone exist and

have been tested by a number of supermarket chains.

Meanwhile, Amazon revealed plans in December to introduce a similar technology to its own brick-and-mortar grocery concept, called Amazon Go, which is still in the planning phases.

Walmart is also testing its own cashier-less technology in more than a dozen stores in Texas, Florida, South Dakota, Arkansas, Georgia, and Kentucky.

Kroger will be the first to offer the technology to a mass market, however, when it expands the "Scan, Bag, Go" program to 400 of its more than 2,700 stores in 2018.

Meanwhile, technology is being advanced on a daily basis. "We have the technology for Mobile Scanners," said Jason Baylis from Great Lakes Data Systems. "We can put gift cards on mobile devices, as well as capture the clip coupon feature used with online shopping using 2D image scanning. This is being used at various businesses and at airport terminals."

Coupon clipping at grocery stores and other retail outlets through an APP have been around for a while now. Now establishments will be able to scan driver licenses. "This technology of scanning U.S. Driver's License Bar Codes will enable staff to read a driver's license for validity without having to really look at the license."

Advancements in technology are all part of making the consumer experience easier. ■

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Opioid Crisis: Why Small Business Should Take Note



Like abuse of alcohol or illicit drugs, the nation's growing opioid epidemic is presenting workplace challenges.

The current opioid epidemic has been called the worst drug crisis in American history, reaching every corner of society, including workplaces both large and small. This epidemic involves the use of prescription opioid pain medications and illicit drugs, including heroin and fentanyl.

A survey recently released by the National Safety Council reveals that more than 70% of workplaces are feeling the negative effects of opioid abuse. Nearly 40% of employers said employees are missing work due to abuse of painkillers, with roughly the same percent reporting employee abuse of these drugs while on the job.

Despite the prevalence of substance use and addiction in businesses across the country, only a small percentage of those with opioid or other substance use disorders ask for help or receive it. And that's costing employers around \$10 billion annually from absenteeism, according to the American Society of Addiction Medicine.

Here's how you can take action and address opioid dependence and substance addiction in your workplace:

CREATE A NON-STIGMATIZING WORKPLACE

One way to influence more people to seek help is to convince them that getting treatment is the smartest thing to do. By talking about addiction like any other disease, you silence the stigma and allow people to realize it's okay to ask for help. It's equally critical for owners and managers to send a messaging emphasizing the workplace is a safe place, and you're here to help.

EQUIP STAFF TO RECOGNIZE THE SIGNS OF ADDICTION

It's important management and staff be trained on the early signs of opioid and substance addiction—irritability, poor concentration and declining performance—so they can intervene before the situation deteriorates. Train managers to address performance issues in a way that encourages an open and honest dialog to talk about sensitive matters. By showing genuine concern, you gain the trust of your employees, which allows you to guide them to the care they need.

OFFER SUPPORT TO EMPLOYEES AND FAMILY MEMBERS

Just as you would with an employee who has a medical condition, such as cancer or heart disease, offer non-judgmental support to employees with a substance use disorder. Remember, employees who have family members struggling with substance addiction suffer at work too. Those who are affected by a loved one's addiction can have increased absenteeism, lack of focus and health problems related to stress.

HELP EMPLOYEES ACCESS TREATMENT

Ensure that your employees have access to quality treatment for substance addiction. Consult with your health plan provider about a comprehensive option that covers inpatient and outpatient services. Employees with opioid addiction can often benefit from medication-assisted treatment (MAT), which reduces the cravings for opioids and allows employees to work while in treatment.

If you don't already have one, consider providing an Employee Assistance Program for your employees. These services can be an effective first step for employees and their dependents to initiate support for nonmedical prescription drug problems, and offer counseling and referral services; conduct substance abuse evaluations or connect an employee to a qualified substance abuse professional. The best thing about an EAP is that it's free of cost for the employee and completely confidential.

Finally, it's important to remember that employees struggling with opioid misuse or substance addiction are not weak or morally corrupt. Drug addiction is a disease and needs to be treated and talked about like any other disease—with compassion and quality care. Opioid misuse impacts much more than workplace performance: Overdoses killed more than 64,000 Americans in 2016, up 21% over 2015, according to federal officials. By taking action and implementing these strategies, you create a safe work environment in which employees feel supported and can do their best work. There's nothing more important than sending a message to your employees that you care about their health and well-being. ■



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GREAT LAKES WINE & SPIRITS //

C.V.N.E.: Vina Real 'Crianza'



So if you've been reading our monthly wine recommendations, you'll have noticed that the word value comes up again and again. And again. The reason for this is that with very few exceptions, it's the first consideration when your customers are looking for a wine: red, white, pink, sparkling. Inexpensive wines, baller wines, regardless of what the wine is, 'value' is in play. Though one might think value means inexpensive, again value comes in many forms---and price points: even for those customers that purchase \$200 bottles of wine, they too want the best \$200 bottle of wine available. Of course, it's likely that most of your customers don't drink \$200 bottles for dinner

every night (unfortunately)... for most of you, \$15 to \$20 is the sweet spot, so today we will point out a really cool red wine from Spain that WAY over delivers.

C.V.N.E stands for Compañía Vinícola del Norte de España and is typically pronounced 'Q-Nay'. They are undisputedly one of the most prestigious producers in all of Spain, and their Rioja wines under the brand names of CUNE, Imperial, and Vina Real are legendary. Today, we are discussing the Vina Real Rioja 'Crianza'. Though the region---soils & climate---is special, and the main grape used in this area---Tempranillo---is world class, the 'secret sauce' here is oak-ageing. The pronounced, seductive

aromas & flavors from extended ageing in (usually American) oak barrels makes these wines singular. Though there are some wines produced sans wood (typically referred to as joven), the range goes from Crianza, to Reserva, to Gran Reserva---each level requiring longer wood ageing by law, with the Gran Reservas never younger than five years old, but typically released at around ten years of age. Though these well-aged wines are unique and classy, there are some who find them a bit austere and borderline oxidized...a bit of an acquired taste. Not to mention that the longer they are aged, the more they cost---think of it as a ten-year long taxi ride...the meter was running the entire time! But the Crianza's are required to be aged in cask only one year (though many go beyond). What they have in common is a freshness, richness, fruitiness that makes them universally appealing. Our bet is neither you, nor most of your customers have had an example of one of the modern, Crianza level Riojas lately (if ever). Time you did!

Vina Real Rioja 'Crianza': 90% Tempranillo, with the balance made of Graciano, Garnacha & Manzuela; showing gobs of bright blackberry fruit and vanilla spice on the nose; a lush, sexy palate that is medium-rich but very light on its feet---with a dash of vanilla spice from the kiss of oak; long, soft, pretty. Yummy wine! Your customers will buy this by the case.

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Liquor Sector to See More Consolidation in 2018

The Patrón and Avión tequila purchases likely will not be the last deals this year for producers of tequila, whiskey and gin

■ BY CATHALEEN CHEN // THE STREET

So far this year, there have been two major deals in the spirits industry: Bacardi Ltd.'s acquisition of Patrón Spirits International AG, and Pernod Ricard SA's purchase of the remainder of Avión Spirits LLC, both hip hop-approved tequila brands.

Thanks to heightened consumer demand and the fragmentation of liquor brands now offered on the market, the industry can expect to see even more mergers ahead, industry sources said, especially among whiskey, tequila, and gin producers.

"Being acquired by a major player is the dream for people who build these smaller brands," said Ken Austin, founder of Avión. "Typically, what happens for them is they get to second base and to bring it home, they try to get acquired."

Part of the obstacle to scaling up for growing brands is the issue of distribution, as U.S. regulatory measures largely prohibit direct-to-consumer outreach from distillers. Instead, in a three-tier system, wineries and distilleries must go through distributors, or wholesalers, to reach retailers -- stores, bars and so on -- which only then access the consumer.

"It's a really challenging space for smaller brands to build architecture, because there are so many channels of distribution you must populate," said Derek Benham, founder of Graton

Distilling Co. as well as multiple wine brands. Graton, based in namesake Graton, Calif., produces D. George Benham's Sonoma Dry Gin, Redwood Empire American Whiskey and D. George Benham's Vodka Vodka, the latter not a typo but a "vodka-flavored vodka."

"Each of these distribution channels requires a different type of investment and expertise and it's always a battle because when you get to this second tier, you're battling the huge brands with [deep pockets] for market share," he said. The solution, then, is to be acquired by a large player, such as Pernod or Constellation Brands Inc.

The spirits industry, across the board, is in a sweet spot, and the stock charts say it all. Jack Daniel's, Herradura and Finlandia producer Brown-Forman Corp., for instance, has seen shares skyrocket more than 52% in the past year. Stock in Constellation, home of Casa Noble tequila and High West whiskey, not to mention Corona, Modelo and Pacifico beer, is up more than 46%, and shares in Pernod (Jameson whiskey, Beefeater gin, Absolut vodka) have jumped more than 16%.

The reason for investors' love of spirits producers is that alcohol consumption in the U.S. is higher than ever. According to an August study published in medical journal JAMA Psychiatry, alcohol use rose from 65% of the adult population to 73% in a 12-month period.

Not every drinker, of course, toasts with the same drink -- and

the strongest consumer segment, according to Austin, is millennials.

"The younger consumers are looking for better products. They want to know the story behind a brand, they want to understand the taste profiles, and they don't want alcohol with artificial ingredients," he said. That's why, he added, small, local distilleries are on the rise.

According to bar analytics firm BevSpot Inc., the three most ordered spirits are whiskey, vodka and tequila. Whiskey and tequila in particular are seeing a number of deals, said Jim Cassel, co-founder of investment banking firm Cassel Salpeter & Co., but gin is the up-and-comer.

"One space that hasn't seen a lot of M&A is gin, but there are a lot of smaller gin brands out there now," he said, pointing to The Botanist, made by Scotland's Bruichladdich Distillery Co. Ltd., as an example of a brand that's gaining traction. Bruichladdich, however, is owned by Rémy Cointreau Group, the French entity behind Rémy Martin cognac and Cointreau liqueur.

As for future acquisition targets, Benham pointed to the Michter's whiskey brand of Louisville, Ky., and Sonoma, Calif.'s 3 Badge Beverage Corp., which produces a range of spirits and wines, as two of the few distilleries that remain private.

LIQUOR CONSOLIDATION
continued on page 32.

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KEG TAG LAW REPEAL TOOK EFFECT SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 11, 2018

Thank you for House Representative Joe Bellino, Jr. (Past AFPD Chairman)

Public Act 166 of 2017 went into effect on February 11, 2018, repealing MCL 436.2030 which required a retailer licensee selling kegs to place a keg tag on a keg sold to a customer, required the customer to sign a receipt, and required the retailer to retain a keg deposit. Retailer licensees will no longer be required to order keg tags from the Commission's Executive Services Division and the Commission is no longer required to make keg tags available to retailers. If you have any questions or concerns, contact AFPD at (800) 666-6233 or info@AFPDonline.org. ■

House Passes ADA Lawsuit Reform

The legislation aims to curb frivolous lawsuits related to supposed violations of the Americans with Disabilities Act



■ BY NACS ONLINE

On February 15, 2018, the House of Representative passed bipartisan legislation aimed at curbing frivolous and abusive lawsuits claiming violations of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). The practice of sending vague demand letters or even filing frivolous lawsuits against businesses, such as convenience retailers, for the primary purpose of forcing a financial settlement, not actually

improving access, has become something of a cottage industry over the past number of years.

The original federal ADA envisioned this problem and forbade the payment of financial damages as part of these suits. However, many states do allow for damages to be paid, and it is primarily in those states that these suits are most prevalent.

As state after state moves to curb these abuses, unscrupulous actors simply moved on to other venues. This is the primary reason

the federal legislation passed recently by the House is necessary and why NACS supports it. NACS members sent more than 600 letters to members of Congress urging them to vote yes on the bill.

The debate in Congress was not without its own drama. On Tuesday evening during the House Rules committee discussion, where the rules of the floor debate are set, multiple disabilities rights activists were arrested for being disruptive in the United States Capitol building.

Emotions ran high then and during floor debate yesterday, as shouted protests from the gallery continued as the vote proceeded and U.S. Capitol Police had to remove multiple protestors then as well.

The House passed H.R. 620 by a vote of 225 to 192, and now faces an uncertain future in the Senate. NACS asks members to continue pressing Congress to approve this bill. ■



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RETAILER SPOTLIGHT

continued from page 18.

Looking to the future, Denha is in the process of expanding his stores. "We are expanding within the stores by adding new categories," he explained. "Once we finalize all that we'll work on the schematics for expansion."

There was a time when big supermarket chains like Kroger were competing with Dollar Castle, installing dollar or less merchandise in their spacious stores. Now, it is the other way around and Denha says it is Dollar Castle who is now competing with the "big boys".

What has been interesting over the years is how Dollar Castle customers have always been very diverse. On a typical day, you will see Chevy, Ford, and Mercedes Benz cars parked in front of the area stores.

According to Denha, it is because people at all economic levels want a bargain; he sees the future being more of the present.

Denha also sees the size and number of his stores growing as he looks to expand. This will be determined by market demand and trends, which Denha and his family study every day.

"What I love most about my Dollar Castle stores is seeing the happy and satisfied expressions on the faces of my customers, as everybody loves a good deal," said Denha. "Our customers will always be able to find the same types of merchandise they fell in love with when we opened the doors at the first Dollar Castle."

Walking into a Dollar Castle store, it is always clear that the shopping experience is very customer centric. In addition to the vast array of products, the satisfaction of Dollar Castle customers is always the top priority.

Denha is also a man who gives back to the neighborhoods where his Dollar Castle stores are located. "I hire local men and women to staff my operations,

because it is the right thing to do. I am also very involved in the charitable domain," Denha said. Dollar Castle currently has more than 50 employees.

In terms of suppliers, Denha likes to keep it local, "We so love our local suppliers as they are very important to us and at the right time, we will open more stores and continue to rely on these suppliers for much of our merchandise," he said. "The future is bright for our region and we are proud to be a part of the resurgence of our community."

Denha has been a member of the Associated Food and Petroleum Dealers (AFPD) for about 20 years and credits the organization for his ability to stay on top of industry news.

"It [AFPD] connects me to a lot of suppliers for one," he explained. "And most importantly, they keep me updated on a lot of information that goes on in the business world." ■

LIQUOR CONSOLIDATION

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"We are a dwindling species!" he said. "The ones that haven't been bought are tiny companies."

As for his own company, Benham said, "If something comes along that's a generous offer that makes sense, as a businessman I'll look at it." (He previously sold the Mark West wine brand to Constellation in July 2012 for \$159.3 million and the Blackstone and Codera brands in October 2001 to a Constellation joint venture for \$138.1 million.)

There also could be larger

consolidation deals down the line, such as Constellation swallowing Brown-Forman, Benham added. Other smaller liquor companies that remain private include Jose Cuervo, Bushmills and Hangar 1 maker Proximo Spirits Inc. and Heaven Hill Distilleries Inc., producer of Evan Williams bourbon and Christian Brothers brandy.

But there is another elephant in the room: Tito's Handmade Vodka, the Austin, Texas, distillery that makes what was recently billed as the world's fastest-growing vodka. Founded 20 years ago, Tito's went from producing 150,000 cases

in 2006 to 2.78 million in 2015, according to Impact Databank. Between 2016 and 2017, Tito's sales grew 44% to nearly \$190 million, becoming the top-selling spirits brand in the U.S., Wine & Spirits Daily reported last October.

The company has remained private under founder and sole owner Bert "Tito" Beveridge.

"I'm sure the guy gets calls multiple times a week. It's grown almost logarithmically," Benham said. "But what I've heard is that he's just not willing to sell."

Tito's could not immediately be reached for comment. ■



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MAY 8, 2018

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Date & Location TBA // Michigan

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