

BottomLine



THE VOICE OF INDEPENDENT RETAILERS // VOL. 29, NO. 8 // AUGUST 2018

MIRA MIDWEST INDEPENDENT RETAILERS ASSOCIATION



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Membership

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BottomLine



THE VOICE OF INDEPENDENT RETAILERS
VOL. 29, NO. 8 // AUGUST 2018

features



COVER STORY //

THE BENEFITS OF MEMBERSHIP

In 2014, writers penned a series on the AFPD's Seven Pillars of Service. Today, there are eight pillars and it's time for an update and reminder to the members the benefits of being part of the association officially known now as the Michigan Independent Retailers Association (MIRA).



VENTURING OFF: FROM GROCERY TO RESTAURANTS

Having taken an active role in his family's business from the early age of 15, the grocery business is not one that John Denha takes for granted. With his father and brothers, Denha has owned several grocery stores – currently the family owns four stores. Among them are 8 Mile Foodland and Huron Foods.



MICHIGAN'S NEWEST LOTTERY COMMISSIONER

Appointed by Governor Rick Snyder on March 25th of this year after former commissioner Aric Nesbitt resigned, Brian O. Neill is the tenth Michigan Lottery Commissioner. Having served in several leadership roles at the Lottery since 2013, the promotion of Neill to oversee the agency's operations, strategy, and policies made sense.



chairman's message

PHIL KASSA // AFPD CHAIRMAN

Consolidation of our Business

As this summer comes to an end, I reflect on summers past and ask where did competition go? While driving on nice summer days, I look and notice all these stores that have been forced out of business. I go to malls, only to find out that a lot of stores have closed. Then I ask myself, "what is going on?" Our world is changing ever so fast and we need to make some adjustments.

Today, we have fewer suppliers competing for our business because of consolidation. It makes it harder for us to cut deals, and get the quality we are looking for.

In this ever changing climate, independents are being challenged with technology, cost cutting self-service and on-line shopping. Some say we need to specialize and offer more services, while others say we need to compete with them.

While there is no cheap way of maintaining or growing our business, I think specializing and offering more services makes more sense because the of deep pockets of these mega retailers. They won't destroy us directly, but we become the collateral damage while they compete with each other. We need to give the customer a reason to leave their home and come and shop at our stores. We need to somehow show the customer picking out their own strawberries or getting their deli sliced fresh to their order as better than someone else picking them out for them.

While in years past, we looked to our suppliers for ideas and ways to compete with the chain retailers. Today we need to be our own innovators, because the one size fits all just doesn't work for independent retailers. With all the consolidation with wholesalers, we simply don't have choices anymore. Which is why we need organizations like AFPD, soon to be known as the Midwest Independent Retailers Association (MIRA), on our side. Associations like AFPD (MIRA) help protect and fight for independents through legislative actions, as well as vendor programs that help us compete in the ever-so-changing marketplace. AFPD (MIRA) is one of the few organizations that is growing. While other organizations have gotten weaker or have been taken over. We, at AFPD (MIRA) have gotten stronger because our president and board of directors were able to adapt to the changes in our industry. We all need to support this organization to help with our future. We hope you like the new name and new logo, which is on the cover of this magazine. One other note I wanted to pass on is that we are taking a small dues increase in 2019 in all categories. It has been over five years since our last dues increases and the board of directors feels taking smaller dues increases every five years is easier on everyone versus one large dues increase every ten years or so. The association is doing such much for all the independent retailers out there! Whether you own a supermarket, liquor store, gas station, pharmacy, bar or restaurant, what brings us together today more than ever is that we are INDEPENDENT entrepreneurs and we need to stick together! ■

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Phil Kassa	Chairman, Heartland Marketplace/ Saturn Food Center, Food & Beverage
Rishi Makkar	Supermarket Vice Chair, Rishi International Beverage, Food & Beverage
Jerry Crete	Convenience/Liquor Store Vice Chair, Ideal Party Stores, MI Region #2
Michael Mitchell	Petroleum/Auto Retail Vice Chair, Markham Oil, Petroleum
Al Chittaro	Supplier Vice Chair, Faygo Beverages, Inc., Supplier
Paul Elhindi	Treasurer, Corner Market, Petroleum
Clifton Denha	Secretary, Wine Palace, Food & Beverage
Bobby Hesano	Vice Chair of Membership, D&B Grocers Wholesale, Supplier
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Jacob Garmo	Village Food Market/ Fresh Food Depot
Al Jonna	Picnic Basket/Wine Merchants
Phil Kassa	Heartland Marketplace/ Saturn Food Center
Brian Yaldoo	Hills Fine Wine & Spirits

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Tony Franchi	Lipari Foods
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Bobby Hesano	D&B Grocers Wholesale
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Dave Orlando	Prairie Farms Dairy Co.
Brian Pizzuti	RNDC of Michigan

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Jerry Crete	Ideal Party Store, Region #2
Rishi Makkar	International Beverage, Region #3
Brad Miller	SUPERVALU Midwest Region, Region #7

EMERITUS DIRECTOR

John Denha	8 Mile Foodland/Huron Foods
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UHY-MI	Certified Public Accountant
Karla Atchoo	Accounting Consultant, Karla Atchoo & Associates, Inc.

What Do You Think of Non-Members Calling AFD for Help?



"Help is for the members. It is such a shame when people call and say, 'I will become a member, but I need help now.' Or, 'I will become a member, if you help.' That is not how it works. It is just not right. If they are members and they need help, we should get behind them 100 percent but if they are not members, why should anyone work for them. It's not fair to the members."

– SAAD ABBO // US ICE



"We cannot help people we do not represent. It defeats the purpose of having a membership. Every non-member call should be a sales call. That non-member should become a member, otherwise, their issue is not our problem. If you walk into Costco, can you shop without your membership card? No! I realize these people have issues and some make mistakes, but they can't expect us to help them if they are not a member."

– PAUL ELHINDI // CORNER MARKET



"I don't think the association should feel obligated to help people randomly. The staff needs to tell these callers that they are welcome to join but otherwise, they cannot help them. It is not fair. They should not expect it. Why are they even asking?"

– ISAAC ABBO // US ICE



"It is a two-way street. The people who pay for the membership should get the help. It is a sales lead when a non-member calls. If you call AAA for help and you don't have a card or membership, are they going to help you? No, they are not. Become a member. Obviously, they call because they know we can help."

– TONY FRANCHI // LIPARI FOODS



"Don't do anything. It's not fair. If they are not members, they don't get help."

– FRED HATTY //
BENCHMARK BEVERAGE COMPANY



"What is the benefit of the membership if AFD helps non-members. Use the call to get them to join. Make them members otherwise, don't help them."

– PAUL JABORO //
GREAT NORTHERN INSURANCE



"We do not get the credit we deserve and we do a lot with the little we have. All the nonmembers benefit from what we do and they still talk. I've been a member for 14 – 15 years, I've been on the board and I'm a past chairman and I see everything that goes on and people still talk."

– JOHN DENHA // 8 MILE FOODLAND &
HURON FOODS



"Attorneys ask for retainers for future work. It's not that different. Those who answer the phone need to explain that the membership is not that expensive but it's worth its weight in gold."

– PETER NAJOR // GRAND VALUE DRUGS



DETROIT //

A Spotlight on Crime

They started about six months ago and now they are a daily occurrences -smash and grabs at stores in Detroit.

These robbers have been terrorizing local businesses since January and police believe they are responsible for more than 30 smash and grabs in the city.

One smash and grab took place on the city's west side on June 6th. That victim was Randy Wadie's store State Liquor on Puritan and he told media that he wants to get out of the city.

That incident happened around the same time another store was hit.

"We're working hard to make an honest living and someone just cleans you up," party store owner Steve Bahora said.

Bahora's store is one of many in Detroit that were broken into in recent weeks. Detroit police said Markel Xavier Allen, Decharles West, Ivan Dayshared Austin, Tamas Cummings and Deshawn Marquan Perry are the five men behind the string of smash-and-grabs.

Bahora told the media he is tired of repairing the exterior wall of his store off of Van Dyke and I-94 on the city's east side.

During the robberies, the men used a vehicle to break down store walls, according to police. Once they get inside, they snatch everything they can, often thousands of dollars in merchandise, according to authorities.

In three months, Bahora's store has been hit twice, and the repairs keep adding up.

"About \$1,500 for the wall, but the problem is they come, they clear you out of beer, liquor and wine," Bahora said.

Even having barriers around the store wasn't enough to keep the men out.

As of June 22nd, the Detroit Police

Department posted an update on Facebook. "Police Seeking Assistance: Because of your tips, we have been able to apprehend 4 of the 5 suspects wanted in connection to a string of Breaking and Entering/smash-and-grab incidents. We still need your help with locating the last suspect. So, keep those tips coming in." If you recognize him or have information regarding any of the incidents, please contact Detroit Police Department Crime Intel at (313) 596-2250 or remain anonymous by dialing (800) SPEAK-UP.

WHY ARE THE CRIMES AGAINST STORE OWNERS ESCALATING?

"Even though we are approaching the lowest unemployment rate in Detroit's history for African Americans, people are still not making enough money so they are preying on other people," said Steve Hood, political consultant. "People may be fully employed but they are not making enough to pay their bills. They cannot afford basic services."

Hood also believes the escalation is partly due to the fact that police are not responding to calls quick enough. "Police need to respond on an equal level between greenlight partners and non-greenlight partners," said Hood. "They need to ward off these criminals."

The City of Detroit implemented Project Green Light, which they explained is the first public-private-community partnership of its kind, blending a mix of real-time crime-fighting and community policing aimed at improving neighborhood safety, promoting the revitalization and growth of local businesses, and strengthening DPD's efforts to deter, identify, and solve crime.

Auday Arabo, President & CEO doesn't

believe it's the answer. "I'd like to see more cops and more fire fighters on the streets. If they can connect the dots between surveillance and response times, we're all for it. However, that's still a question mark. We're not going to be opposed to it because they are trying and because the stores already have the equipment in place, but it is not the answer to all crimes. Look at what is happening in recent months."

Unlike past issues among retailers and residents, Hood said this particular crime spree is not racial "This is a cry for help," said Hood. "AFPD has done a tremendous job with their relationship with the city. This is not about AFPD retailers. The gas stations are another issue. There is racial tension among gas station owners and customers."

Hood attributes that to a few logistical issues. "Racial tension at the gas stations are because of the platforms clerks are standing on so they are looking down at customers," said Hood. "They are not at eye level and it is offensive and a superiority complex. It is just as offensive as having plexy glass or bullet proof glass at the counters between the retailer and customer"

Over the decades, AFPD members have been known for their community involvement and strong customers relations. "When crimes occur, we cannot fight fire with fire," said Arabo. "We don't want clerks to retaliate if their life is not threatened. We need police to respond. Our members are deeply involved in the communities in which they serve. They know customers by name and every one of their family members. Unfortunately, crime in the city against retailers has been a reality since the inception of our association more than 100 years ago." ■

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In 1984, Foad Abbo and his son Saad opened the U.S. Ice Company with a mission to manufacture high-quality cubed, block, dry ice products and carved ice sculptures. Today, Saad and his sons Jacob, Isaac and Marcus carry on that successful legacy into the future in a larger, high-tech facility. Give our family a call at 313-862-3344 or visit us at usicecorp.com for all your ice needs.



petroleum news & views

EDWARD WEGLARZ // AFPD DIRECTOR, PETROLEUM

Beware of Fuel Thieves

As the price of product increases, the need to guard against theft increases also. We have heard of several fuel thefts lately. We are seeing reports of cyber thieves with ever more sophisticated tactics for over-riding safeguards. A recent report said that 600 gallons of gasoline was stolen from a dispenser without the sale being recorded on the pump nor the pump-controller!

It seems that older dispensers are the primary target of the thieves. These pumps have fewer built-in safeguards, therefore making a better target.

Want to employ some “action steps” to help protect you from thieves:

CHANGE THE LOCKS ON YOUR DISPENSERS

A secure barrel-type lock with its own unique key will fend off the “bad guys”, since the universal key that most all service companies carry will not work, thereby discouraging access through the access panels.

REPROGRAM THE KEYPAD

Most dispensers have an internal keypad behind the CRINDS access door. The correct code can put the pump into “standalone” mode, thereby bypassing card authorization. At least change the access code, since the universal code is known by all the service contractors. And for good measure, change the external key lock also.

HANDHELD REMOTE SETTINGS NEED TO BE CHANGED

Some of the dispensers use hand-held remote controllers to access the programming function. Change the access code from the factory installed standard setting. Use a unique number for each of your sites. Just maybe you’ll want to deactivate the remote.

KEEP YOUR PUMP CONTROLLER SOFTWARE UPDATED

Updates to your pump controller are vital to stay one step ahead of the “bad guys”. Be sure you respond to action items from your supplier.

While some of these tasks seem time-consuming and “over-the-top”, the effort can be well worth it. Consult your owner’s manual or go online to get info about your dispensers. ■





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michigan lottery report

BRIAN O. NEILL // MICHIGAN LOTTERY COMMISSIONER

Super Raffle Expected to Generate Strong Sales

A frequent question from players is: “When will the Lottery have another raffle?” Since 2006, the Lottery has offered 25 different raffle games. These games have featured different designs and top prize amounts ranging from \$40,000 Tax Free to nearly \$2.5 million.

To meet the demand from players, the Lottery again will offer a raffle game. The Super Raffle will feature the richest payouts of any raffle game offered by the Lottery. It will feature a top prize of \$4 million and two \$2 million prizes. We expect player excitement for this raffle to reach unprecedented levels and help boost store traffic and sales for retailers.

Tickets for the Super Raffle go on sale August 12th. Each Super Raffle ticket costs \$50, giving retailers a \$3 sales commission on every ticket sold. Each Easy Pick play will feature a unique seven-digit raffle number, making sales quick and easy for retail staff, since players won't have to use play slips.

In addition to a \$4 million top prize and two \$2 million prizes, other prizes are: \$100,000 (10), \$500 (3,300), and \$100 (12,000). The Super Raffle drawing will take place on or after September 19th.

With the unique raffle structure and multi-million prizes available, we expect interest in this game to be strong for avid and casual Lottery players and to boost sales for retailers.

RED BALL DOUBLE DRAW COMING IN AUGUST

The Lottery will bring back one of the most popular Daily 3 promotions this summer: the Red Ball Double Draw. The promotion is scheduled to start on August 1st, and will offer Daily 3 evening players extra chances to win during the promotion.

Beginning August 1st, five white balls and one red ball will be loaded into a drum and a special “Double Draw” will be shown after the regular Daily 3 evening drawing. If a white ball is drawn, it will be removed from the drum, set aside, and another “Double Draw” will occur the next day. When the red ball is drawn, the Lottery will conduct a second Daily 3 evening drawing. Once the red ball has been drawn, all balls are loaded back into the drum for the next Daily 3 evening drawing. The Red Ball Double Draw promotion applies to Daily 3 evening drawings Monday through Saturday. The promotion will run for a limited time in August.

During the Red Ball Double Draw promotion, the Lottery will conduct at least eight Daily 3 evening drawings each week rather than seven. With an extra drawing each week during the promotion, players will have more chances to win and more incentive to buy Daily 3 tickets. We expect this promotion to bring additional store traffic to retailers, boost sales, and also provide more opportunities for retailers to earn more in commissions by cashing winning tickets for players.

Best of all, the promotion is easy for retailers because no additional action or cost is required for a player to take part in the Red Ball Double Draw promotion.

Historically, Daily 3 and Daily 4 promotions have been very successful. They have boosted player awareness and interest in daily games, leading to increased sales and commissions for retailers. ■

INSTANT TICKETS // PULL TAB TICKETS

NEW INSTANT TICKETS:

On Sale August 7th:

- IG 262 – Poker Multiplier – \$5
- IG 265 – \$2,000,000 Jackpot – \$20

INSTANT GAMES SET TO EXPIRE:

Expiring August 6th:

- IG 741 – Hot Spicy Cash – \$2
- IG 770 – Cashword – \$2

Expiring September 10th:

- IG 778 Collecting Cash – \$1

NEW PULL TAB TICKETS:

On sale August 7th:

- MI 510 – Cash Flow – 50¢
- MI 518 – Third and Won – \$1
- MI 527 – \$2,000,000 Cash Roll – \$5

PULL TABS SET TO EXPIRE:

Expiring August 7th:

- MI 576 – Reel Time – 50¢
- MI 587 – \$2,000,000 VIP – \$5

Expiring August 28th:

- MI 578 – Mega Bucks Multiplier – \$1
- IT 870 – Brewin Bucks – \$1

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



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

Drawings are held twice a day, seven days a week, giving players lots of chances to win \$500 top prizes playing Daily 3 and \$5,000 playing Daily 4.

**Mon-Sat
Evening
Drawings**

Daily 3TM
Red Ball
Double Draw

2nd Chance to Win!

**When the Red Ball Falls,
You're Back in the Game!**

For a limited time in August



Daily 3 odds: 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: 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 Legislation Stumbles Along in the Summer

The saga of Payday Lending legislation continued in the Ohio General Assembly. This has been going on since former Speaker of the House Rosenberger resigned due to an FBI investigation into his travel and spending; much of which was done with a lobbyist from a Payday Lending company. The bill had been dead until that point and then after a very contentious election for a new Speaker, the bill was revised and passed as introduced much to the chagrin of the over 40 lobbyists representing payday lending. The Ohio Senate quickly took up the bill and made it even stronger in opposition to the payday lending people. The bill passed the Senate and is now back to the House for concurrence. The House could return for one day either in July, August or September or

they could wait until after the November elections; however, I think the House will want to move this prior to elections so Democrats can't use it against an overwhelming Republican legislature.

The drama of the payday lending bill has pretty much stalled all other legislation including SB86, an omnibus bill that contains numerous road naming's, day and month naming's, including our bill designating the month of September as "We Card" month, with the main purpose of the bill being to honor John Glenn. The Senate had the bill on the calendar but informally passed it because the Senate President didn't like a portion of the bill that named a barn in Westerville, Ohio an Historical Site. You can see how sad things have gotten when a bill honoring John Glenn gets held up. A bill that would address minimum mark-up at the wholesale level for cigarettes had a sponsor hearing before they left for the summer and while the wholesale tobacco people hope to move this bill in a lame duck session after November elections, it's unlikely.

Lots of uncertainty regarding statewide elections in November, originally it was thought Democrats would make huge gains, then the Trump tax cut bill was passed, the economy is booming, unemployment was at historic lows and all of the sudden it looked like another Republican year and then Trump met with Putin in Helsinki and the Democrats now think they have momentum again. Still too early to see where the elections are at this point, but we will keep you updated.

Lastly the Associated Food and Petroleum Dealers is about to fade into the sunset as the name has been changed to Midwest Independent Retailers Association. The leadership of this association has been relentless in growing the membership and is one of the most influential groups in the Midwest. Come on Ohio get on board, if you're a member, recruit new members take an active role and let's get the Buckeye state to the top of the heap. ■





Ohio Division of Liquor Control Inventory Management

You may not be aware that the Division of Liquor Control manages more than a billion dollars in liquor sales each year. Part of that task includes managing the products Agencies receive to make sure consumers are getting the products they want in the places they want it, as well as increase sales.

We want to ensure both retail and wholesale needs are met, and that Agencies are getting products that sell well for their demographics and limit the ones that don't. Therefore, it's necessary for our team to manage allocations to Agencies, and there's typically three reasons that may happen.

First are store resets. The Agency Optimization Initiative gives us the opportunity to implement marketing and category optimization to improve customer experience and improve sales. One of the first things we look at during a reset is sales data, which drives our decisions on product placement. What may work well for one Agency may not for another, so it's important we don't take a one-size-fits-all approach. It's a no brainer to make more room for items that consistently fly off the shelves and limit the ones that have a harder time selling. That's why Agents will see products that sell less than one bottle per month on average be removed, freeing up space for new items and top sellers.

Vendors/Brokers are also managing the allocation of their products. The division has set criteria for delisting products in Ohio that is based on sales. By effectively managing the number of Agencies that have their product, and working to push it where it sells best, they can help protect items from being delisted. They also work with Wholesale accounts on products



they specifically need that may not otherwise be available in the state, and many Vendor/Brokers also manage very limited-quantity items.

High-demand, limited-supply products require special management as well. Due to the limited supply, our team works to distribute the product across the state in the most efficient manner. We've been fortunate to have these rare products assigned to the state because we are a great market, and part of the draw for vendors is we strategically place these items in the Agencies that make sense based on sales and other factors.

I tell you all of this because we don't take these decisions lightly. The team is analyzing data and making the best decision for the Liquor Enterprise as a whole. With that said, restrictions are not permanent, and Agencies may submit a removal request to the Liquor Enterprise Service Center (LESC). When submitting the request, Agencies must provide the brand code and name of the item being requested. The division will review applicable sales data and Vendor/Broker requests for restrictions before releasing an item to an Agency. The LESC can be reached at 1-877-812-0013 or liquoragencyhelp@com.state.oh.us.

Wholesale accounts should talk with their assigned Agencies if there's a product they'd like that the Agency doesn't have. The Agency will then follow the restriction removal request process detailed above.

As always, thank you for your cooperation and understanding as we continuously work to improve the Liquor Enterprise. ■



Formerly known as AFPD "The Voice of Independent Retailers", AFPD rolls out new name and logo



The Benefits of Membership

■ BY DENHA MEDIA GROUP WRITERS

In 2014, writers penned a series on the AFPD's Seven Pillars of Service. Today, there are eight pillars and it's time for an update and reminder to the members the benefits of being part of the association officially known now as the Michigan Independent Retailers Association (MIRA).

"We have lamented for years over the name," said Auday Arabo, president and CEO. "Timing is everything and we know this is the right time to launch our new name."

PILLAR 1 // GOVERNMENT RELATIONS

The name has changed, but the mission has not and MIRA is the voice for independent retailers. "The association really started more than a hundred years ago to allow meat cutters to organize within the industry, so they can have a voice. So, it makes sense that Government Relations is our first pillar," said Arabo. "That service has expanded across state lines and state issues. We have faced many federal issues that have impacted our industry over the years."

As laws and policies change, MIRA must be prepared. "We saw this with the Half-Mile Rule and we fought it," said Arabo. "Although we lost at the Michigan Liquor Control level, in terms of the rule being eliminated, we are not stopping there."

MIRA is now focused on making the rule a law and a bill has been introduced.

On January 24th, Judge Stephen Borrello issued an order staying rescission of Michigan's longstanding "half-mile" rule pending any future court order.

The request came through a Court of Claims filed by MIRA, who argued the Michigan Liquor Control Commission's (MLCC) September vote to lift the 40-year rule despite pending legislation, (SB 501) because MLCC

reasoning "is the very epitome of capriciousness."

MIRA staff works on many issues on a daily basis keeping the best interest of the members in sight. They monitor legislative action and changes in the law including the Bottle Bill, elimination of the Ohio Community Activity Tax (CAT) and Michigan SBT, as well as obtaining larger commissions for retailers on jackpot winners.

Members are provided with up-to-date information on new laws and regulations. More importantly, MIRA maintains a comprehensive government affairs program which constantly seeks to influence legislative and regulatory policies on the federal, state and local level affecting retailers.


"There are many initiatives that MIRA representatives are fighting for to ensure you remain competitive in the market," said Arabo. "Our team approach also gives members an opportunity to take an active and direct role in communicating with their state and federal legislatures on issues of concern."

PILLAR 2 // COMPLIANCE

There are rules and regulations in various industries including within the association. Owners are expected to be compliant with local, state and federal laws. The rules are both internal and external.

MIRA hosts many training days and seminars for members. In addition, members have access to MIRA's professional staff and materials including attorneys, training resources, workplace wellness, kits, workers' compensation plans and mandatory postings.

"We have offered free legal services," said Arabo. "Most recently, we had attorneys consult with members being sued for selling male enhancement drugs that are prohibited by the FDA. These types of services are invaluable."



Training resources include UST Owner/Operator training Class “A” and “B” certification, Serve Safe Training, TIPS (alcohol) training, PCI compliance (through their credit card program), Meat Room Sanitation Video and pamphlet and OSHA, and GHS labeling of chemicals.

PILLAR 3 // COMMUNITY OUTREACH

While the primary purpose of MIRA is to help its members, the association is also involved in community outreach and has been for years. “This is not something that we believe we can do,” said Arabo. “It is something we should do and that is why it is a pillar of our organization.”

All aspects of membership reach out to their community often through their own customers. One program is the High Five Turkey drive. For nearly 40 years now, MIRA has donated more than 75,000 turkeys to families in need, primarily in Detroit, Lansing and Ohio.

This past year, MIRA partnered with The Youth Connection on the charity event Chiefs Cooking for Kids, where local fire and police chiefs donated their time and recipes to prepare dishes and raise money for youth programs. This ties right into MIRA’s annual college scholarship program.

Although these are two notable causes, MIRA and its members contribute to the community at large throughout the year in a number of ways. Often when there is a need and MIRA can meet it, they will.

PILLAR 4 // PUBLICATIONS

MIRA works diligently to communicate on a regular basis with its members. “It is a priority to keep everyone abreast and up to date on industry news and changes,” said Arabo. “It is the reason we continue to publish this magazine, and why we issue a weekly newsletter and update content on our website. People need to be informed.”

As the official publication of MIRA, members look to the *MIRA Bottom Line* to help them get ahead of the curve.

Monthly issues of the *MIRA Bottom Line* feature the latest business and marketing trends, legislative issues impacting the industry, plus updates on MIRA business, activities and member benefits.

In Short, the *MIRA Bottom Line* is the voice of the

food, beverage and fuel industries in Michigan, Ohio, Illinois and surrounding states.

PILLAR 5 // VENDOR PROGRAMS

Over the past 10 years, MIRA has developed programs to help independent retailers better compete with big box stores. Through their rebate programs, MIRA negotiates deals on products using accumulated volume of members and leveraging the numbers for rebates and discounts. “Ultimately, when you become an MIRA member, you become part of our chain store,” said Arabo. “These rebates span across an array of products including food, beverage and insurance.”

MIRA staff are available to discuss these programs with members and potential members.

PILLAR 6 // EVENTS

For several years MIRA has hosted signature events including the annual Trade Show and Ball. It is typically held early in the year. Motown was the theme of the 102nd Annual MIRA Trade Dinner and Ball, which featured music from the 1960s era and Detroit Production House. As the Simone Vitale Band belted out the notable tunes, nearly 800 people partied the night away at Penna’s of Sterling Heights. Musician and vocalist Steve Acho was the evenings Piano Bar host.

Like in past years, on display were various booths for the event-goer’s entertainment. Both Tap Snap and Shutterbooth took photos of guests with different backgrounds. After dining on soup, salad and filet, guests noshed at the Donut Bar, Prairie Farms Ice Cream Stand, National Coney Island, Little Caesars, Frito Lays Snacks and Party Café while enjoying Michigan Casino Events.

Many vendors donated products for the evening’s festivities. Pepsi Beverages, Coca Cola, Absopure, Monster Energy, Faygo, Diageo, Heaven Hill, Beam Suntory, Tito’s, Remy Cointreau, Proximo Spirits, Lipari, Frito Lay, and Prairie Farms all had products on display and for consumption.

Sprint/Alpha Connection raffled off a TV and other prizes and MIRA gave away about 10 door prizes, all jewelry and Shinola watches.

A Dbusiness Journal photographer was there to capture the event and so was MIRA’s photographer David Reed.

After 102 galas in Michigan, MIRA decided to host



one in Chicago. “We wanted to showcase the Chicago area and really put the spotlight on those retailers,” said Arabo. “We wanted to acknowledge our presence in Chicago and build a stronger relationship with the Chicago members.”

The gala was designed to celebrate the accomplishments of the Chicago retailers and celebrate the industry as a whole. The first Chicago event was deemed a success. “I was very impressed and pleased with the turnout of our first gala,” said Arabo. “We had more than 400 people attend.”

After 34 years of hosting a spring trade show, which has been MIRA’s showcase show, the association is considering integrating it into the fall Holiday Show. However, they are giving the Spring Show one more opportunity to prove itself. In the Spring of 2019, it will be held at the Regency Manor on Twelve Mile Road.

MIRA’s 42nd Annual Michigan Golf Open was held last month at Fox Hills Golf & Banquet Center in Plymouth. This is a social event where retailers, wholesalers, manufacturers and service providers all came together to have a little competitive fun. A day on the course includes breakfast, lunch, 18 holes of golf and product samples at every hole.

On September 6, 2018 from 2 to 9 p.m., MIRA is hosting the Michigan’s holiday show. This premiere holiday show attracts retailers and both on- and off-premise licensees come from miles away to see, sample and buy. Only members are allowed to exhibit in this show. MIRA buying shows offer companies the opportunity to meet and sell to thousands of buyers in 7 hours.

“We attract more retailers than any other holiday show in the State of Michigan and they will be coming to your booth,” said Arabo.

MIRA buying shows are attended by industry leaders, buyers and retailers from: convenience stores, grocery stores, liquor stores, drug stores, gas/service stations and sars/restaurants.

MIRA’s Annual “High Five” Turkey Drive is on November 15 and 16 this year.

Every year, the MIRA Turkey Drive Committee pledges to put a turkey on the Thanksgiving table of more than 6,000 families throughout Michigan and Ohio that may not otherwise enjoy this special meal.

Since 1980, MIRA and its members have provided Thanksgiving turkeys to needy families and each year the list of charitable groups asking for turkeys grows. There are more requests than they could ever help, requiring the help of their members.

Thanksgiving is a time to reflect, give thanks, and help those who are less fortunate. The association asks for help in aiding those less fortunate. A \$300 donation to MIRA’s High Five Turkey Drive will provide turkeys for 20 families. Considering each turkey serves about 12 people, that equals Thanksgiving turkeys for 240 people. Food items can also be donated (canned, boxed or bottled) or other products such as clothing or household items, above and beyond – or in lieu of – a monetary donation.

PILLAR 7 // MIR FOUNDATION

Formerly the AFPD Foundation, the MIR Foundation was established in 1999 as the philanthropic arm of AFPD “The Voice of Independent Retailers” and is dedicated to providing scholarships and promoting education through the food and petroleum industry. The MIR Foundation also participates in industry research and other projects to better the food, beverage, and petroleum retail industry. The community outreach efforts are sometimes part of the actual foundation.

So, the Turkey Drive and the Chiefs Cooking for Kids were both part of the MIR Foundation. There are a list of programs that the foundation participated in that can be found on the website.

PILLAR 8 // BENCHMARK BEVERAGE

Brand does matter and that is why MIRA created the for-profit company Benchmark. This features a wide-variety of smaller liquor manufacturers.

Benchmark Beverage Company is an MIRA Company that was created on the idea that every brand matters and needs representation. Benchmark specializes in Michigan made, craft, hand crafted and boutique spirits which have the capability to grow and prosper within their categories.

There is a great value in membership. Our own members speak to that in the ATM section this month. You can find out detailed information on the website at www.MIRAmw.org or feel free to call the office anytime at (800) 666-6233 to ask about membership. ■

Venturing Off: From Grocery to Restaurants

■ BY ASHOURINA SLEWO // DENHA MEDIA GROUP

Having taken an active role in his family's business from the early age of 15, the grocery business is not one that John Denha takes for granted. With his father and brothers, Denha has owned several grocery stores – currently the family owns four stores. Among them are 8 Mile Foodland and Huron Foods.

Unlike some retailers in the grocery business, Denha does not see himself moving out of the industry any time soon. While Denha plans on staying put, he does not expect his children to. In fact, he has given them the opportunity to venture out into other areas of the industry.

“My kids did not want the business – they didn’t like the business, they wanted to do something different,” explained Denha. “I also wanted my kids to venture off into different businesses and see what they like because I grew up liking the business, but I wanted them to have a choice and to see what they liked and enjoyed.”

While he still enjoys the grocery business, Denha admits that it is not what it used to be and likely plays a huge role in why his children chose to pursue other areas of the industry.

“When we grew up, the stores were fun, I mean it wasn’t what it is today,” he said. “It was a little bit easier, now things are a little bit tougher. Everybody is carrying groceries now so we’re all taking a piece of the same pie.”

When the time came for his children to explore options outside of grocery stores, Denha’s children decided they wanted to stick with food, but that restaurants would be a more viable option.

They began looking into franchises.

“We were trying to get into the food business and franchises were easier because of the fact that the companies had already done all the work as far as marketing, the name, the advertising, the whole system was in place,” said Denha. “So, we started looking into franchises. We looked at quite a few, but ultimately, we chose Little Caesars.”

Starting off with two, the Denhas currently own four Little Caesars.

According to Denha, the transition from grocery stores to restaurants was a lateral one. While the two ventures differ greatly, Denha and his children were able to take what they learned from years in the grocery business and apply it to their restaurants.

Specifically, they draw on the management skills they have refined through the years.

“Knowing how to deal with the employees and knowing how to deal with the public is what we’ve always known how to do, so that was just pretty much a lateral move from the customer service standpoint,” said Denha. “We already know how to cater to our customers and to the community. The venture of selling pizza – prepping the dough and the sauce and making pizza – was the difficult part that we had to get used to.”

Today, Denha remains active in his role at his family’s grocery stores, while his children see to the day-to-day operations at Little Caesars.

In addition to the Little Caesars restaurants, Denha also owns the fast-casual restaurant Sweet Lorraine’s Mac and Brewz – which takes residence on Wayne State University’s campus in Midtown.

While the restaurant business may not always require much involvement from AFPD, Denha still recognizes how the association has lent itself to his many business endeavors.

“The restaurant is not a big factor in why I’m a member, but I’m a member because without AFPD, who will lobby for laws that affect our industry such as the Bottle Bill, all the license taxing,” he said. “From A to Z, it is AFPD who handles the lobbying.”

Denha believes AFPD does not receive nearly enough credit for the work they have put in and continue to put in for each and every one of their members.

“Without AFPD, the industry would not be where it is today. People do not realize what AFPD does for them,” he said. “They do not realize the hard work we put into it. They don’t realize the board members are volunteers and they take time out of their own schedules to help better the industry.”

One meeting, says Denha, will change everyone’s tune.

“I challenge any retailer to come to our meetings and see what we do for our industry – one meeting and they will be convinced of what we do, that’s all it takes,” he explained. “We do not get the credit we deserve and we do a lot with the little we have.” ■



RETAILER: JOHN DENHA

Location: Various locations in Detroit, Michigan

Founded: 1984

Employees: 90 restaurant employees / 120 grocery employees

AFPD Member Since: 2003

Slogan: “If you won’t serve it to your family, don’t serve it to your customers!”



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Michigan's Newest Lottery Commissioner

■ BY ASHOURINA SLEWO // DENHA MEDIA GROUP

Appointed by Governor Rick Snyder on March 25th of this year after former commissioner Aric Nesbitt resigned, Brian O. Neill is the tenth Michigan Lottery Commissioner. Having served in several leadership roles at the Lottery since 2013, the promotion of Neill to oversee the agency's operations, strategy, and policies made sense.

The legally blind commissioner previously served as the Lottery's Chief Deputy Commissioner, Deputy Commissioner for Administration, and Deputy Commissioner for Compliance and Legal Affairs.

According to the Michigan Lottery's website, prior to working for the Michigan Lottery, "Neill served as an Assistant Attorney General with the Michigan Department of Attorney General where he provided legal counsel to Michigan agencies and helped keep hundreds of violent offenders in prison."

In his capacity as Lottery Commissioner, Neill must stay abreast of all the new research and trends in the industry to refine and develop new instant and draw games. The Michigan Lottery typically releases 40 to 45 new instant games each year.

"We extensively use player research, including focus groups and online surveys, to help select the themes, designs, and prize structures that most appeal to players," explained Neill.

In addition to game research, the Lottery offers tips to help retailers to boost sales at their businesses. "For example, we encourage our retail partners to increase the number of tickets on display at their establishments as research shows a clear link to displays and increased sales," said Neill. "In fact, our instant program is a national leader in sales growth with double-digit increases for the last four consecutive fiscal years."

Consumers frequently want to know when the Lottery will offer a new raffle game. According to Neill, the Lottery will be releasing a new raffle, dubbed the Super Raffle, in mid-August. Each ticket will cost \$50, giving retailers a \$3 sales commission on every ticket sold.

"The Super Raffle will feature a top prize of \$4 million, two \$2 million prizes, and 10 \$100,000 prizes," explained Neill. "The Super Raffle offers some of the best odds ever to win big a big prize, and we expect player excitement for this raffle to help boost store traffic and sales for retailers."

The Lottery encourages meeting player preferences for payment



options. "As consumer preference for debit card and credit card acceptance continues to grow, it's increasingly important for retailers to consider accepting cashless payment methods for Lottery purchases," said Neill.

In an effort to encourage cashless transactions and maximize sales, the Lottery is offering an incentive program for retailers. "We currently offer an incentive for retailers that accept debit cards and credit cards for Lottery purchases," said Neill. "Over the last 12 months, cashless incentive payments to retailers total more than \$6 million."

Keeping up with the latest trends, wants, and needs, coupled with programs designed to cater to consumers and retailers alike, the Michigan Lottery continues to see great success. Under Neill, the Lottery is on track for another record-breaking year.

"Since 1972, retailers have sold nearly \$65 billion in tickets and earned more than \$4.3 billion in commissions. That includes a record setting \$249 million in commissions last fiscal year, and we're on track to set a new record for commissions this year."

"The Lottery's strong relationships with retailers are the foundation of our success," explained Neill. "Since the Lottery's inception, the hard work of retailers has helped the Lottery contribute more than \$21 billion to the School Aid Fund, including a record contribution of \$924 million last year. This simply would not be possible without the customer service and ongoing support retailers provide the Lottery and its players.

"We appreciate and value the relationship that we have with the AFPD. That relationship fosters communication and helps us work together to expand our businesses and reach our financial goals." ■



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Anthony Kalogeridis

Anthony had been an AFPD employee having worked for the association selling ads in the magazine for both Jane Shallal and Auday Arabo. He was always smiling and was great human being and he had will be missed.

Anthony Kalogeridis passed away suddenly on Wednesday, July 18, 2018. A long-time resident of Grosse Pointe Park, Anthony and his wife, Carla, had moved to St. Clair, Michigan, in 2017. Anthony had a multitude of family, friends, and colleagues who loved him dearly. He was known for his generous spirit, warm smile, and joy-filled approach to everything he did.

Anthony was born in Ioannina, Greece, on July 27, 1963. Inspired by his paternal grandfather, a successful businessman, from a young boy Anthony longed to live a life of opportunity in America. At age 18, he left Greece to attend the University of Reading in Reading, England, where he met Carla, who was attending the same university on a year abroad. Their inspiring love story, which spanned the next 34 years, included a life of great happiness, mutual admiration, and obvious affection. Anthony and Carla built a successful publishing business and worked side-by-side for 28 years, but their highest sense of accomplishment and joy came from their two children, Weston and Angelica.

Anthony was an active member of the Grosse Pointe Sunrise Rotary, and recently completed a term as President and received the Paul Harris Award. He loved planning Rotary fundraising activities, volunteering in the St. Charles Church soup kitchen, and awarding Rotary scholarships. Anthony was also a long-time member of the Detroit Athletic Club (DAC), where he was active in bowling and squash leagues and a regular participant in professional activities. Anthony considered his fellow Rotarians and DAC members to be among his closest friends. In fact, in hearing of his passing, numerous individuals described Anthony as their "best friend."

Left to honor Anthony and remember his love are his wife, Carla, and his children, Weston and Angelica; mother, Gita Kalogeridis; sister, Ilia (Iraklis) Prokopaki and nephew Achilleas; Carla's parents Tom and Betty Lou Detscher, who considered him their son; Carla's three siblings, Melissa (Tom) McAfee, Chuck Detscher, and Greg Detscher, and their children; and numerous nieces, nephews, cousins, aunts, and uncles in the United States and Greece. Anthony was preceded in death by his beloved father, Achilleas Kalogeridis. A private family service will be held in Greece, to be followed by a Celebration of Life Memorial Service in the Grosse Pointe area in September. Details will be posted on Facebook, but Anthony's friends and colleagues are welcome to contact Carla for additional information. The Anthony Kalogeridis Memorial Scholarship has been established to help local students further their education. Those wishing to honor their memory of Anthony can donate with checks payable to Grosse Pointe Sunrise Rotary Foundation, P.O. Box 36964, Grosse Pointe Farms, Michigan 48236. ■





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The Life of Forest Bryson

Forest Lindsay Bryson was born on February 11, 1951 to Charles Alexander and Marie Lilyan Bryson in Detroit, Michigan. He was the middle child of three boys. Forest attended Kettering High School and was the captain of the baseball team and the quarterback of the football team. After graduating, Forest began his career at Faygo Beverages on December 23, 1969. On July 10, 1976, Forest married his friend and longtime love Delthea Kinney Bryson. From their union, they were blessed with three children: DeNaya, Kristyn and Marcellus. After 32 years of marriage, Delthea made her transition into heaven's gate in 2008.

After the profound loss of Delthea, Forest embedded his time and energy into his professional career. Forest's long career afforded him the opportunity to create many lasting friendships throughout The Metro Detroit Community. Forest mentored youth in collaboration with the local police with the Detroit Police Athletic League (PAL) program and with BUOY 7 for the 7th Precinct in Detroit, Michigan. Forest continued to excel in his illustrious career at Faygo Beverages, which spanned 45 years.

First starting as a truck driver, he moved up to sales manager, and ultimately, earned the position of Vice President of Direct Store Delivery, the position he held until his retirement in 2015. He was honored by the

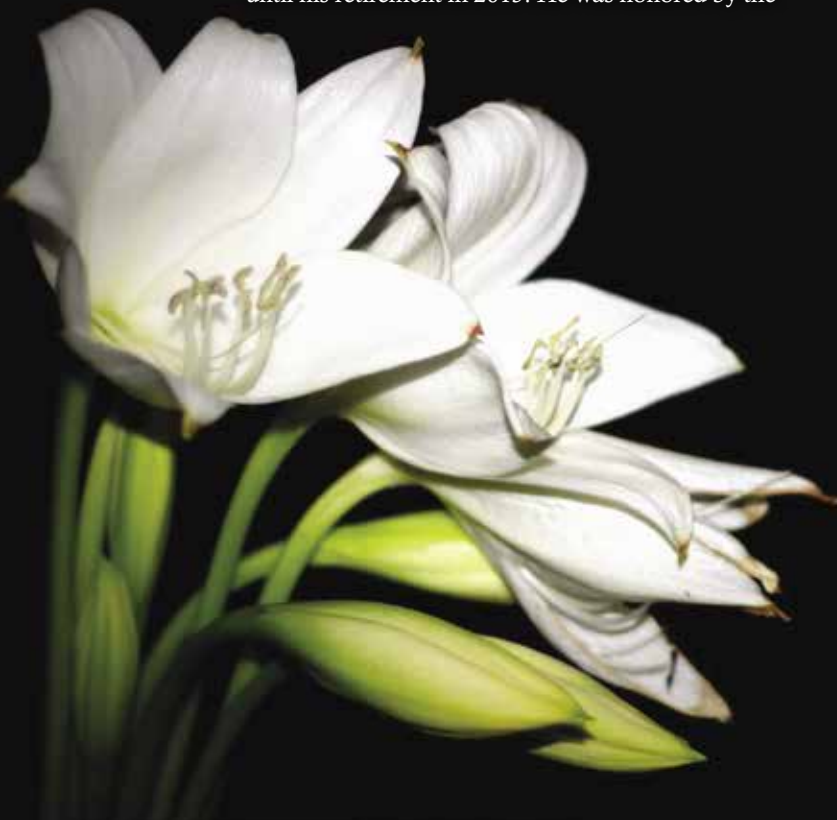


Michigan Chronicle with the "Men of Excellence" award. He was the treasurer and member of the Motor City Eagles Golf Club. In honor of his retirement, Forest was selected to throw the first pitch at the Detroit Tigers vs. New York Yankees baseball game at Comerica Park. He also received acknowledgements from the sitting United States President,

Barack Obama; United States Senator, Debbie Stabenow of Michigan; and Michigan State Representative, Alberta Tinsley Talabi.

While accomplishing all these great career achievements, he was able to find love again with Tisha Gillam. And after a five-year courtship they married on February 25, 2015 in Las Vegas, Nevada. Together they both enjoyed travel, movies and time together. Upon retirement, with the encouragement of his cousins Gerald and Naomi Bryson, he and Tisha relocated to Arizona to escape the harsh Detroit winters and frustrating Detroit Lions. As an avid golfer, he enjoyed the beautiful weather and landscapes. Forest was also an avid sports fan, especially his beloved Michigan Wolverines. He also loved spending more time with his family.

Forest made his transition on June 28, 2018, his legacy and cherished memory will be carried on by his loving wife, Tisha Bryson; his children, DeNaya, Kristyn and Marcellus (Naquatta); his step-children, Joseph Gillam, Edward Anderson, Zsa Anderson, DiAngelo Anderson, Naudia Anderson, and LaQuita Anderson; grandchildren, Donnell Jones, Daniel Jones and Madison Bryson (Marcellus & Naquatta), Coleman Whi e (DeNaya & Jeff), Jovon and Jowon Gillam Goseph), Quartez Anderson and Heaven Wilson (Zsa Zsa), Kamaya Campbell and Alaysia Jackson (DiAngelo); two brothers, Charles Anthony Bryson and Vincent Maurice Bryson; his father-in-law, Johnnie Gillam and mother-in-law, Irene Gillam; along with a host of nieces, nephews, cousins, in-laws, family members and friends who loved him. ■





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What C-Stores Can Learn from Toys R Us

Did now-defunct retailers fail to provide a compelling experience at a time when it mattered?

■ BY FRANK BEARD // NACS ONLINE

Toys R Us closed down on June 29. Social media was abuzz as people shared a mixture of nostalgic memories and sadness, and a photo of Geoffrey the Giraffe leaving an empty store quickly went viral. But it seems there was one question underlying much of the discussion: How did this happen?

Similar stories have played out across our cities and neighborhoods as once-iconic retailers exit the marketplace. In my hometown of Des Moines, Iowa, Younkens—a brand of department stores that installed the state’s first “electric stairway” in 1939—is being liquidated after the demise of parent company Bon-Ton. This too, has generated much interest since Younkens anchors each of the area’s four malls.

There are many reasons for what happened in both situations, and it’s certainly more nuanced than simplistic rhetoric about a so-called “retail apocalypse”. But there’s one lesson worth unpacking, because of its ramifications for convenience retailers. Simply put, they failed to provide a compelling experience at a time when it mattered.

Take Younkens, for example. Although I have fond memories of early shopping trips with my family, I stopped seeking out their stores years ago. To step inside Younkens was like stepping back in time ten or fifteen years. Many of the styles were outdated or boring, the selection of others was simply lacking, and the entire model felt like a holdover from a different era. The few things I did want were easily obtainable from other competitors both in-store and online. The Des Moines Register pointed out as much in a recent article, aptly-titled From Younkens to 'Junkens'.

The experience at Toys R Us had declined as well, as mentioned in a recent expose by Retail Dive. Cost-saving measures reduced floor care, parking lot cleaning, painting, and general maintenance. Staff reductions led to inventory shortages, customer service issues, and other problems since a 40,000 square-foot store might operate with only two or three employees.

"They normally high-dusted every other year," said Rick McGee, a former district manager. "That means dusting off the tops of fans and girders across stores, the lights. If you don't wipe that off, that dust starts falling. In later years, they started canceling high dusting."

These things matter. I visited my local Toys R Us before it closed, and it looked almost exactly as I remembered as a kid—only now with a few decades of wear and tear. I can’t confirm this for sure, but I think the registers sat on the same countertops that were there in the early to mid-90s. They were in dire need of replacement.

It used to be that Toys R Us was like a trip to a theme park. When I was a kid, it was simply the place to get the latest toys and video games. But things have changed since the rise of Amazon and e-commerce, and they didn’t respond accordingly. Writing for Inc, Dustin McKissen explains as much:

"Amazon might have put the final nail in the giraffe-colored coffin that contains the corpse of what once was Toys "R" Us, but Amazon didn't build the coffin."

"In other words," he continues, "Toys "R" Us managed to make shopping for toys an experience wholly devoid of anything resembling, well, an actual experience. It was merely a giant, dirty box."

He’s right, and nobody has to visit a dirty, boring, or unexceptional store when the same products are available with free

two-day shipping from Amazon—often at lower prices—or available with same-day pickup at a handful of other retailers around town.

But this lesson applies to convenience retailing as well. Sometimes the nearest competing fuel canopy is across the street, and customers have many options for meals, snacks, and other daily needs. This is why it’s essential consider your retail proposition from the perspective of your customers—especially since data indicates that they do prioritize high-quality stores.

And let’s not forget about challenges coming from outside the channel. GoPuff delivers thousands of products in 30 minutes or less and continues to expand. Services such as UberEats make it easier to order lunch or dinner, and grocery delivery makes it less-likely that anyone will stop by the gas station because they forgot to purchase orange juice or eggs. Paired with the expansion of Dollar Stores and competition from QSRs, it’s clear that yesterday’s playbook may not be sufficient for tomorrow.

But I’ll leave you with one more thing to consider. A recent report from Deloitte suggests that many of today’s retail challenges are due to a growing bifurcation in income distribution. The result being that balanced retailers who target the middle class have experienced only 2% growth in revenue in the past five years, as compared to premium brands at 81% and price-based brands at 37%. Indeed. A recent article from The Outline ponders whether the rise of on-demand fuel will result in upper-income customers avoiding gas stations.

Who are your customers, and how do they perceive the experience at your stores? These are questions that increasingly demand answers. ■

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Cashier-less C-Stores Continue to Grow in Pacific Rim

No-clerk, no-cash stores created to increase convenience and reduce labor

■ BY NACS ONLINE

While no-cashier convenience stores are being introduced slowly to U.S. consumers, staff-less stores keep popping up in Asia.

In July, a 7-Eleven in Taiwan opened its second unstaffed store, following the January launch of its first staff-less “X-Store” located inside the headquarters of President Chain Store Corp., which operates 7-Eleven stores in Taiwan.

The store uses facial recognition technology to let customers enter the store, check out and pay for merchandise. In addition, store technology provides “icash” services, smart voice interactivity, self-service POS systems, robot greeters, robot sweepers and more. The staff-free location is an experiment, according to Taiwan News.

A 7-Eleven Signature store opened in Seoul, South Korea, last May, according to Inside Retail Asia. It identifies customers not by the face, but by biometric technology that registers the size, color and shape of the veins in an individual’s hand.

Last July, NTUC FairPrice, a cooperative with more than 160 c-stores, converted its outlet on the campus of Nanyang Polytechnic in Singapore into a no-clerk, no-cash operation.

In order to shop there, customers must download and register on the “Shop It Yourself” mobile app, which generates a unique code permitting entry into the store. Inside, shoppers can select food and beverages from vending machines.

In China, BingoBox launched in 2016 and has already been installed in more than 300 locations in 30 cities, according to Kiosk Marketplace. Described as a cross

between a convenience store and a vending machine, BingoBox uses image recognition and “machine learning” to calculate each customer’s purchase.

Three years ago, F5 Future Store was founded in Guangdong, China, as a 24-hour, no-clerk outlet featuring fresh food, canned beverages and hot coffee served from separate vending machines, reports Caixin.

Shoppers order from a computer screen of product photos, then click and pay for the purchase. Goods are delivered by a robotic arm, which also cleans the store’s dining table when customers leave.

One benefit of clerk-less stores is that employees are free up to focus on ensuring optimal stock and supply. But industry experts say two factors will determine whether they succeed: if shoppers are well-behaved and if the cost of store technology can be reduced. ■

Bottled Water Keeps Growing

New products continue adding excitement to the category for healthy hydration options

■ BY NACS ONLINE

Consumers’ concern over healthy hydration continues to boost the bottled water category, according to the 2018 water market report from Mintel.

Bottled water has long been a healthier choice for consumers, the report noted, but it’s no longer boring. Producers are adding infusions, caffeine and flavors to their waters and working to create environmentally friendly containers, such as recycled paper cartons and reusable aluminum bottles.

One brand enjoying major growth is LaCroix, the seltzer that comes in 20 flavors, according to Prime World News. LaCroix reported net sales of \$826.9 million for its 2017 fiscal year, up from

\$662 million in 2013. The entire sparkling water category saw a 16.2% increase from 2015-2016. But LaCroix blew other brands out of the water with 72.7% growth.

It may seem like an overnight success, but LaCroix has actually been around since the ‘80s as a regional brand. In recent years, the company, which is based in Fort Lauderdale, successfully tapped into Millennial-driven trends, such as replacing soda for water and posting photos of favorite products on Instagram. LaCroix also has been mentioned in HBO’s “Girls” and by Jimmy Fallon on the “The Tonight Show.” And it didn’t hurt when rapper Big Dipper’s comical R&B-inspired single “LaCroix Boi” was uploaded to YouTube last summer.

In other bottled water news, Fiji

announced it will begin delivering its own product to retailers, according to Beverage Industry. The company is ending its distribution partnership with Keurig Dr. Pepper in order to focus on providing a “superior experience” for retailers and consumers, management said. The transition is set to be completed by October 1st.

Free digital assets for cooler doors or floors can be downloaded and used to help promote water consumption/sales at your stores. NACS worked with the Partnership for a Healthier America to develop industry-specific “Drink Up” artwork that can be downloaded at www.convenience.org/YourBusiness/Refresh/Partnerships/Pages/Hydrate-Your-Sales-with-Drink-Up-Materials.aspx. ■



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At-Home Cooks Rely on Prepared Food

U.S. consumers are eating at home more, but often what they are eating comes from a restaurant, drive-thru or other foodservice operation

■ BY NACS ONLINE

Consumers are increasingly eating at home, with more than 80% of all meals consumed at home in 2017, according to a report from research organization The NPD Group. However, busy consumers often rely on foodservice for a shortcut to at-home meal preparation.

Although foodservice spending has been increasing—up 2% in May compared to 2017—foodservice visits were flat in that same period compared to year ago. Actual restaurant visits, whether onsite, picked up or ordered and delivered, reveal more about foodservice growth than spending does, said NPD, adding that foodservice spending is up because the cost of a restaurant meal is increasing faster than the cost of meal prepared at home.

NPD found that nearly half of the dinners purchased from a restaurant are consumed at home, and a growing number of in-home meals are a combination of prepared foods and ready-to-eat items from a foodservice provider.

Analysts predict that this type of “blended meal” will continue to grow in popularity over the next five years as consumers rely more on the modern conveniences of grocery delivery, meal kits, “grocerants” (supermarkets that offer restaurant-quality foods), online ordering and technology-enabled kitchen appliances and tools. ■

Starbucks Will Ditch Plastic Straws

By 2020, the company will replace plastic straws with straw-free lids or alternative-material straws as part of its initiative to lower waste worldwide

■ BY NACS ONLINE

Starbucks Coffee Co. will eliminate plastic straws from its stores within two years as part of its initiative to slash its waste across the world, the Wall Street Journal reports. The coffee chain will move to a strawless lid or straws made out of materials other than plastic to replace plastic straws. The company already has a strawless lid for iced coffee, espresso and tea drinks in more than 8,000 U.S. and Canadian stores. The lid is being tested with Starbucks Draft Nitro beverages in Vietnam, Singapore, Japan, China and Thailand.

This is a “significant milestone” for its goal of delivering beverages and food “in more sustainable

ways,” said Kevin Johnson, Starbucks CEO. The change will eliminate more than 1 billion plastic straws a year.

Hyatt Hotels Corp. also said this week it would only hand out plastic straws and picks upon request at its properties starting September 1st, and provide “eco-friendly alternatives” when possible. On July 1st, Seattle became the first U.S. city to ban plastic straws and the anti-plastic straw movement appears to be gaining ground, as more businesses are indicating they will stop using plastic straws. Last month, McDonald’s announced it would be eliminating plastic straws from its Irish and U.K. locations, and has begun testing plastic straw alternatives at U.S. stores. ■

Michigan ATM Users Scammed by Hackers

Victims worry more about stolen personal financial information than losing \$500

■ BY NACS ONLINE

More than 60 Michigan residents are out \$500 each after using an ATM located in front of a Credit Union One Bank in St. Clair Shores, according to FOX News.

Investigators believe that someone placed a device on the ATM that gave them access to the users’ personal information and allowed them to remove \$500 from each user’s account when using the ATM. Security camera footage recorded at the ATM one night in June shows a man covering up the camera, and officials believe he is the guilty party.

The \$500 thefts occurred on July 13th. While victims have been reimbursed, they remain concerned about the personal information that the thief probably took along with the money. ■



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