

BottomLine

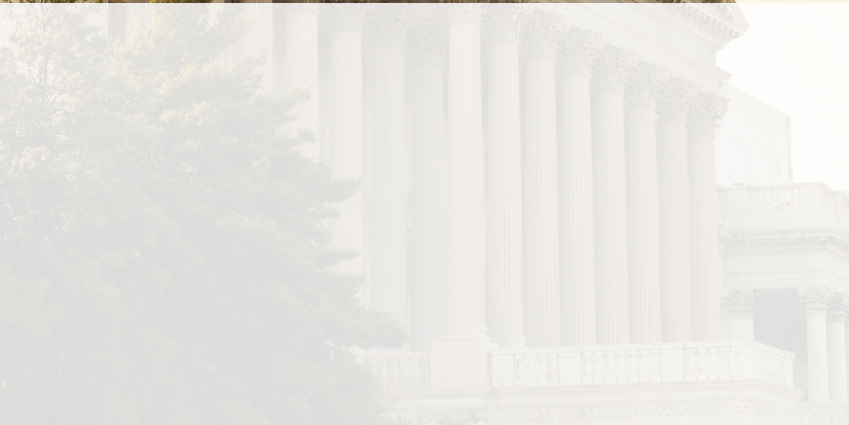


THE VOICE OF MIDWEST INDEPENDENT RETAILERS // VOL. 32, NO.3 // MARCH 2021



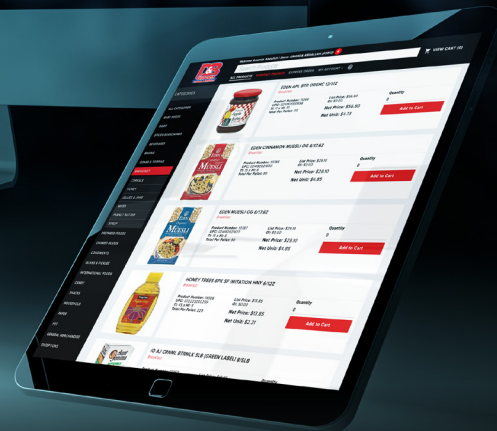
Taking a Look at Presidential Policies that Affect Our Industry

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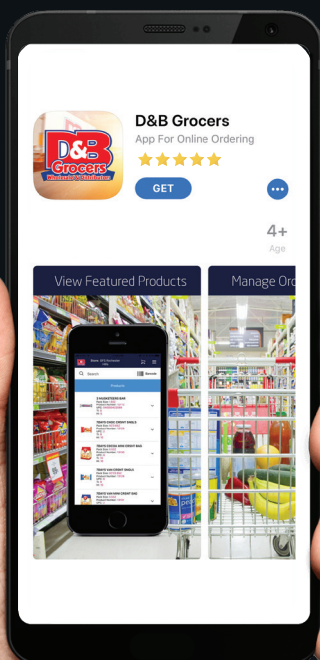


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BottomLine

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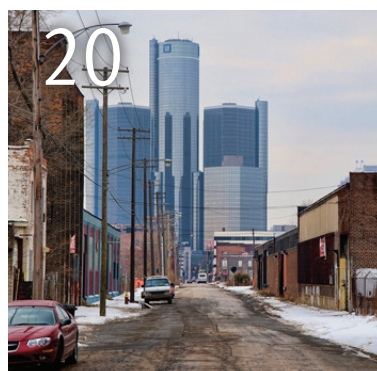
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COVER STORY //

TAKING A LOOK AT PRESIDENTIAL POLICIES THAT AFFECT OUR INDUSTRY

Not even a month into his presidency, Joe Biden was signing one executive order after another and issuing decrees and policies that will have wide impact on many organizations, associations, and Americans in general.



HOW COVID-19 IMPACTED URBAN COMMUNITIES

The first confirmed cases of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) were identified in late 2019 in Wuhan China in the Hubei Province. It soon turned into a fully-fledged pandemic rapidly sweeping through many countries including the United States.



GETTING READY FOR THE SPRING AND SUMMER SEASON

If you asked people a year ago if they would still be dealing with COVID-19, chances are they would have said no way!



chairman's message

CLIFTON DENHA // MIRA CHAIRMAN

Looking Forward to New Challenges

Many of you probably already know me. If not, my name is Cliff Denha, and I'm the newly elected Chairman of the Midwest Independent Retailers Association (MIRA) Board of Directors. I've been around the retail business my whole life and have served on the MIRA and AFPD boards. I was proud to be voted into the Chairman's position by my peers on the board and I am enthusiastically looking forward to providing leadership to MIRA during the coming year.

We all have experienced unprecedented changes in our plans and experiences over the last year. Who would have thought at the beginning of 2020 what a rocky road lied ahead of us? The COVID-19 pandemic altered the lives of all of those around us: our families, our employees, our suppliers, our customers, and even our competitors. Fortunately, most of the categories comprising the MIRA membership fared better than average during the pandemic; except for the gas station category, where gasoline volume was down as much as 50%, which badly effected inside sales. Party stores, convenience stores, and supermarkets were all considered "essential" businesses and were able to stay open during lockdowns for other businesses.

I know it wasn't a walk-in-the-park staying open to serve the public. Money spent on Personal Protective Equipment, short deliveries, sanitizing efforts, and employee challenges all contributed to a number of problems for those of us who were open. Bonuses and overtime pay ate into profitability big time.

Now that it looks like we are on the "downhill" segment of the pandemic curve it is time to look ahead and re-plan for the future. Look around your store; what procedures or processes were you forced to implement that you just might keep in place? Often times we get dragged kicking and screaming into situations we are not comfortable with only to later find out that it was a good idea!

We at MIRA are reviewing everyday new opportunities, procedures, and programs that we feel can help our members tackle the "new normal". I promise you that we intend to do our best legislatively, compliance-wise, and administratively to serve our members in this post-pandemic marketplace. We've got your back!

Be optimistic. Half the battle is having a positive attitude. Share your successes and challenges with us. We have wide shoulders. MIRA is always here to listen. In the meantime, stay safe! ■

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MIRA Board Members Share Plans for Moving Forward in 2021

MIRA members left 2020 behind, but not without taking new insights and lessons learned into 2021. “Last year illustrated the need for adaptability for an array of situations,” said MIRA Board Chairman, Cliff Denha. “Members across the board have found themselves in difficult positions during the preceding year, which has forced them to adapt to constantly changing rules and regulations.”

MIRA had to learn to meet member needs quickly and effectively. “We were forced to be proactive in keeping up with the changing government rules and regulations by utilizing our lobbyists to a much greater extent,” said Denha.

Having a flexible approach became imperative, “especially when dealing with the members as the changing environment has caused many to close or restrict their operations while needing different kinds of help from MIRA,” said Bobby Hesano, MIRA Board Secretary. “We can no longer look at our operating methods as one size fits all. With businesses downsizing or closing, we need to look at programs that service the diverse needs created by the pandemic.”

Hesano and other MIRA Board officers agree that there is a need to stay on top of the continually changing government policies and be prepared to address them quickly utilizing the lobbyist in each respective state.

“If there’s one lesson to be learned from 2020, it’s that nothing is guaranteed and you have to operate your business in a flexible manner,” said Denha. “I hope to see the organization service our members with programs, incentives and educational platforms that will not only help the bottom line of the retailer but help them run their business more efficiently.”

Business as usual is no longer because, “2020 has taught us all a new way of doing business for retailers and manufacturers,” said Orlando Woods, Supplier Vice Chair of the MIRA Board. “I

think the toughest has been recruitment, and retention of employees.”

The MIRA Board is focused on various goals for 2021 including, “understanding what MIRA members need to be successful,” said Woods.

And, “keeping the communication lines open with all the retailers and help them to utilize the association with their needs,” said Hesano. “We need to realize that different types of retailers may need different help from the association. Ed’s, availability along with board members, is even more crucial today than ever before. We also need to be quick to react to any and all changes that effect our members.”

Denha hopes more board members will become more involved in servicing MIRA. “We are dealing with not only a pandemic but constant changes in rules and regulations,” he said. “This can be very frustrating for a business owner who is already dealing with increased scrutiny. If we are truly supporting the independent retailer, then we have to do all that we can to help them navigate these challenging times. The board also has to be aware of the different struggles that our members are facing. Many have been forced to shut down, businesses that they have spent their entire lives building up being swept away within months.”

For 2021, Denha’s main goal as MIRA Board Chairman, is to educate the independent retailer on how to be more competitive with the big box stores. “The big box stores have the capability to adapt to the changing times much more readily than smaller retailers and it is my hope to provide guidance on how to bridge the gap,” he said.

There are particular approaches in the association that is important for membership and continue success. “Staff and board accessibility to the members is vital, especially with a new President in charge,” said Hesano. “We must continue to give the members confidence that we are working in a very expedient fashion to

address all their needs and questions.”

As the new MIRA Board Chairman, Denha agrees. “I have to mention the importance of working as a support system for our members,” he said. “Many are struggling and they need our help now more than ever. We need to be proactive in empowering our members to withstand all the changes that are coming their way.”

The MIRA Board Officers want members to better understand the association moving forward. “Regardless of the constant changes in rules and regulations, they can always count on us to support them and represent their interests before the government,” said Denha. “They are always our first priority.”

MIRA will continue to be the voice of the Independent Retailers, “especially when it comes to government issues and other regulators,” said Hesano. “We stand ready to listen to their needs and help them meet the new challenges current and post pandemic, even though things have drastically changed over the past year. MIRA will always be here to help.”

“We are hoping to extend trust to all members that MIRA is supportive to their needs,” said Woods.

COVID-19 is not dissipating in any speedy fashion and so the industry continues to pivot and adjust. “It is unlikely that COVID-19 will be gone as quickly as everyone hopes for, so we need some long-term thinking about how to help members maintain their business safely, efficiently and even assist in finding financing if needed,” said Hesano.

“As always hard workers find a way to succeed and we will be there right next to them, working hard for our industry and their business.”

“Our goal, as a board, is to make the organization stronger than ever,” said Denha. “This, in turn, will help us protect retailers and suppliers against adverse business or political landscapes.”

“I truly hope the members value their MIRA membership,” said Woods. ■

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Visit dteenergy.com/savenow.

A neon sign with the word "OPEN" in red, outlined letters, hanging from a chain in front of a glass storefront. The sign is illuminated, and the background shows a reflection of a building and trees.

DTE



government relations report

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

Legislative Updates

"All politics are local" – TIP O'NEAL

Everyone is paying attention to the rumblings in Washington D.C. about minimum wage increases, new stimulus packages, and potential new laws that will challenge retailers in new ways but I want to remind everyone that the fight is always local. We only need to look at the actions of our local legislators to see potential challenges or opportunities. It can be distracting and alluring to watch CNN or Fox News and think that the sky is falling upon us, but the real news can be found in your local newspaper.

Take, for example, Long Beach, California. It didn't take Congress or a sitting president to enact a wage increase on retailers and force grocers to close their doors because the mandated four dollars an hour wage increase was more than they could stomach for the bottom line. The decision to interfere in the business practices of retailers and their employees was not negotiated or based on market conditions, but the whims of a city council intent on forcing their ideals upon retailers.

The distractions of the policy movements in Washington D.C. can make us lose focus on the immediate and far more damaging politics at the state or municipal level. Yes, President Biden and Congress are going to extend unemployment benefits and yes, this will continue to make finding clerks to staff the registers hard. Yes, they will print off more checks that our future generations will have to pay for in higher taxes and diminished services. Yes, the National Labor Board will look different and may challenge large companies like Amazon. But the real damage will come from cities like Long Beach that will force their economic philosophy upon small retailers like yourself.

We only need to look at Chicago to see the damage local ordinance can have on retailers. In



Chicago, the City Council makes the rules on how you can schedule your employees, they have mandated a minimum wage that exceeds fifteen dollars an hour. The City of Chicago has made doing business harder with increased labor cost and all you need to do is open up across the street in another city and save millions.

We only need to look at the small towns in Ohio wanting to increase their tobacco taxes to pay for the arts. They will create an unlevelled tax system that will hurt consumers and drive business away from their cities.

We only need to look at Michigan and the talks of allowing local municipalities to raise their own gas tax to pay for services. This will make losers out of station owners on the wrong side of the road.

All politics are local, and that is why I urge you to get involved with MIRA and our legislative campaigns. We are on the defense against such laws as the Heroes Pay Ordinance of Long Beach, California. We want to have a level playing field for all retailers and don't want local government to decide who the loser is simply because their store sits on the border of another city that hasn't raised their wages or taxes. We want the fair market and your wits to determine the winner.

The most powerful voice against these forces has been your involvement. Your involvement helps legislators understand how their proposals can hurt small businesses. Your voice comes with experience in business that most legislators don't have. Your voice is amplified with MIRA and together we will continue to ensure the playing field is fair for everyone. ■



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michigan lobbyist report

MATT MINER // CAPITOL STRATEGIES GROUP

New Legislative Session Brings Hope and Old Problems

The new legislative session is underway and with it brings new House leadership with Representative Jason Wentworth (R-Clare) serving as the Speaker of the House and Representative Donna Lasinski (D-Scio Twp.) serving as the House Minority Leader. The Senate leadership has remained the same, as has our Governor.

The previous session ended with an unprecedented number of vetoed bills and raw feelings between the leaders of each branch of Government. While many had hoped that the holidays would wipe the slates clean, it seems old problems fade slowly. In just the first few weeks of legislative session, the Senate has rejected over a dozen Gubernatorial appointments and the squabbling over the mountain of federal funds allocated to the state for Covid relief has resumed in full force. Previously, the Governor was given carte blanche to spend federal dollars as she felt necessary. Legislative leaders were not happy with that process and pulled the reigns back on the second federal stimulus package opting to embrace the old adage *"While the Governor proposes how to spend funds, it is the Legislature that disposes the money."* This did not sit well with the Executive Branch and the battle over the money and where it's spent is taking shape.

The Governor has proposed the following spending plan for the nearly \$3 billion available:

- Increase K-12 funding \$82 to \$164 more per pupil
- \$300 million of General Fund money into roads and bridges
- \$500 million into the MI Clean Water Plan, to go toward clean drinking water and wastewater management projects.
- \$192.4 million for the Michigan Reconnect and Futures for Frontliners, two Whitmer-created education aid programs,
- \$19 million to back the Clean Slate initiative signed into law by the Governor
- A one-time, 2% increase for universities, with a tuition restraint set at 4.2%. Community colleges would also get a 2% one-time increase.
- \$50 million for the IT Investment Fund to help support projects that modernize legacy IT systems.

- \$20 million in one-time funds to deter, detect and defend state IT systems.
- \$5 million for a Green Revolving Fund to provide up-front financing for energy efficiency and renewable energy projects at state facilities.
- \$10.2 million for behavioral health crisis and domestic violence response training for police.
- \$200,000 to help people who are self-represented in legal matters.
- \$290 million in bonded money to target wastewater infrastructure projects, of which \$235 are for sewer overflow projects.
- \$80 million to pay off the Venture Michigan II Fund, which will save the state \$150 million over the long term.
- \$70 million to help cities cover the loss of income dollars from fewer employees coming into their cities.
- \$40 million for communities dealing with high water erosion issues, a \$15 million dam safety fund and \$20 million for contaminated site cleanup.
- \$20 million to beef up the state government's cybersecurity forces at a time when state government is seeing 10 times the number of phishing emails in January than it saw at the time same time in January 2020.
- \$5 million for new metal detectors and increased security at the state Capitol

As the House and Senate begin deliberating these proposals, they have outlined several priorities of their own. Tax relief, in-person K-12 schooling, stabilizing the unemployment trust fund, supporting teacher retirement and paying down debt are among the priorities listed by the Senate Republican caucus. The Senate would also like to see more mental health support services for students and money so seniors can "live healthy, independent lives." Increased testing capacity and availability is also a priority along with an increase in the location and times in which people can receive a COVID-19 shot.

The House and the Senate each want to move \$150 million from the General Fund to buttress the Unemployment Compensation Fund, which is traditionally funded through a tax on business. Both also want a \$300 million property tax relief program, \$22 million to reimburse businesses' local health department's food service fees and \$16.5 million to assist bars and restaurants with their liquor licenses.

This fight will play out throughout the spring, but time isn't on their side as Michiganders are still struggling with the impacts Covid has had on their health and the economy. ■



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michigan liquor report

PAT GAGLIARDI // CHAIR, MICHIGAN LIQUOR CONTROL COMMISSION

New Online Liquor Ordering System Offers Many Benefits

We are very excited that after years of development and a lot of hard work to announce the launch of our new Online Liquor Ordering System (OLO) for licensed retailers to place their spirits orders.

The end-goal of making it so much easier for our licensees to do business with the State of Michigan kept us focused on replacing the decades-old, antiquated system that long outlived its usefulness or practicality.

The new, modernized OLO system significantly expands functionality for licensees and offers many new online capabilities. Most notably, retailers can now:

- View and search orders placed on the new system; and search for liquor products
 - Copy previous orders (much easier if licensees order the same items each time)
 - Search by an “old” liquor code and if it’s been replaced, the system will bring up the new code
 - Add multiple users (e.g., owners, managers, etc.)
- The previous system only allowed one user, per licensee

These enhanced capabilities bring our liquor ordering system into the 21st century for retailers and will better meet their business needs. OLO also provides us with a platform to build on that will give us the ability to add other functions that will serve us well into the future.

Midwest Independent Retailers Association Retail Vice Chair (Markham Oil) Michael Mitchell was impressed with the MLCC implementing such a major change to a new system, especially now.

“In a non-COVID time this new system would be a massive undertaking. The fact that the MLCC pulled this off during COVID is remarkable,” said Mitchell. “We have many issues every time we change a system or upgrade a program. The MLCC has done a great job of listening to the wants and needs of all of us. Change

is never easy, but this was managed very well.”

For licensees who want to learn more about how to use the new OLO system, the MLCC prepared Frequently Asked Questions, a video of actual training sessions, and a new OLO System Training Manual that is available on the MLCC website: <https://www.michigan.gov/lara>.

Prior to the launch in early February 2021, the MLCC conducted extensive testing and training on the OLO system with MLCC staff, liquor licensees and the state’s authorized distribution agents’ (ADAs) technical and customer service teams, using multiple technologies (e.g., phone, iPad, etc.).

The MLCC provided advance notification to 11,000 licensees along with registration instructions prior to new system going live – which was key to the seamless transition to the greatly modernized system. We are extremely pleased to see that the vast majority of licensees are registered and using the new OLO system.

We appreciate licensees taking the time to learn the new system that will greatly benefit them in the long run. We encourage retailers to contact us with questions, comments or suggestions on any changes that they think could improve the system. In fact, we are already working on enhancements based on licensee recommendations that we hope to launch within the next few weeks.

Rishi Makkar, store manager at International Beverage in Grand Rapids has already offered his recommendations and commented, “it’s so wonderful to have an administration and a development team that truly cares about the end-user experience and is willing to take input to further improve on the already cemented improvements. It’s nice to know that we are truly treated as partners instead of just a license number.”

The MLCC wishes to thank the ADAs and the Michigan Department of Management & Budget IT Services Division staff for their support and assistance with the OLO system.

It is the mission of the MLCC to make alcoholic beverages available for consumption while protecting the consumer and the general public through the regulation of those involved in the importation, sale, consumption, distribution, and delivery of these alcohol products. ■

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ohio lobbyist report

TERRY FLEMING // TC FLEMING & ASSOCIATES

The New Year Begins in Earnest

After taking most of January to organize and put committee's together, the Ohio General Assembly has begun introducing a number of new bills, many of which are good for MIRA members. MIRA will support these bills on behalf of our membership. The following bills have been introduced that we believe will have a positive impact on our industry:

- HB 46 would delay, for one year, the need for liquor permit holders to renew their liquor license and it would also allow gift cards to be used to purchase drinks on premise.
- HB 47 and SB 32 would both require the Department of Transportation to establish a grant program for businesses that install electric vehicle charging.
- HB 74 is the state's two-year transportation budget that must be passed by the end of March. The transportation budget is usually where any gas tax increase might be included but so far, there has been no indication that the legislature is inclined to pass a new tax. The bill would increase all motor vehicle registrations such as title changes, license plates, temporary tags and other fees to help fund road and bridges upkeep and to increase the number of highway patrolman in Ohio. We will keep a very close watch on HB 74, and keep you informed of any attempt on gas tax increase.
- SB 13 would shorten the amount of time people have to file a lawsuit over COVID-19 complaints. This bill has passed the Senate and is pending in the House.
- SB 22 would create a Health Oversight and Advisory Committee that could make sure any health orders are really necessary such as closing non-essential businesses or imposing curfews.



If passed, the Governor is likely to veto but the legislature feels confident they have votes to overrule.

- SB 40 is a bill that got caught up in the lame duck session last year. The bill deals with a minimum mark-up of cigarette's between wholesaler and retailer. It is likely it will move quickly through the general assembly this year.
- SB 41 would require governments to make restitution to businesses damaged by riots, looting and protests when no protection was provided.
- SB 45 would require the state to provide tax inducements for businesses that make improvements to their locations.
- SB 51, is a Democrat sponsored bill that would allow Cities, Counties and Townships to raise minimum wage in their jurisdictions. As the Ohio Senate is controlled 25-8 by Republicans and the House 64-35 Republican, these types of bills stand little to no chance of passing.

Politics is never out of the news and in Ohio United States Senator Rob Portman, a Republican announced he would not seek reelection in 2022. This set off a flurry of activity by both R's and D's who are considering running for the seat, for Republicans former State Treasurer Josh Mandel and former Ohio Republican Party Chair Jane Timken seem to be favorites to run in primary, while former Health Director Amy Acton and Dayton Mayor Nan Whalen are the D along with possibly Democrat Congressman Tim Ryan, who's seat may be gone as Ohio will most likely lose one congressional seat in 2022. ■



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- Energy supplements
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c-store news & views

JIM GREEN // MIRA VICE PRESIDENT, PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

There is no Stopping Electric Vehicles

Electric vehicles (EVs) have been the topic of conversation in the convenience store industry for the last decade. The stars are aligning for us to see an explosion of new EVs on the road in the subsequent decade. We have a new administration in Washington D.C. pushing for change, a large social movement demanding change, and California requiring that by 2035, all new cars and passenger trucks sold in California be zero-emission vehicles. The financial equation for consumers has changed as well with the total cost of ownership becoming more economical for consumers to own an EV. I also think you will see a large tax credit for purchasing a new EV pass legislatively in the next two years, which will only further entice consumers to purchase a new EV. This shift is echoed by the car manufacturers as well. Ford announced on February 4th that it will double their investment into electric vehicles. They are planning to invest \$22 billion in the development of EVs thru 2025. General Motors announced it would only build vehicles with zero tailpipe emissions by 2035, phasing out gasoline-powered trucks and cars. That is part of their goal to become carbon-neutral by 2040. The company has earmarked \$27 billion between January 2020 and January 2026 to bring 30 EVs to market, including an electric Hummer pickup truck slated to be ready later this year. I think many people are starting to see this is very real and is going to change the landscape of convenience stores and gas stations in the next decade.

I have read and listened to industry experts try to predict with various models what the impact of EVs will have on liquid fuels (gasoline, diesel fuel

and E85). I think back to a *Future of Fuels 2013* report which said the volumes of liquid fuels sold will change as fuel efficiency will increase and overall gasoline demand will fall 18.4% by 2040. I think it's safe to say we need to rethink this model and start planning for a more significant decline in gasoline. Besides the momentum building behind EVs and more fuel-efficient vehicles, you now need to factor in the amount of people that will be permanently working from home that started due to COVID-19. I would recommend that every independent retailer start thinking and planning for 2030 right now! There are a lot of very smart people that have different opinions on the future of liquid fuels. Without getting into the weeds and debating the nuances of every prediction, I think every convenience store/gas station retailer needs to be planning for a 50% decline in liquid fuels by 2030 and what type of impact that will have on their business. If you are an independent retailer doing 80,000 gallons per month and making 20¢ per gallon, you are generating \$16,000 in gross profit per month. If fuel volumes drop 50% and you maintain a 20¢ profit per gallon, your gross profit for the year will decrease \$96,000! A reduction in fuel customers translates to a reduction of in-store foot traffic as well. That means you could easily see a gross profit reduction of well over \$100,000.

Although NACS is pushing for convenience stores to lead the way in charging stations, I do not believe the demand for charging and the revenue generated for convenience stores will be anything like it is for petroleum products. Battery efficiency and range will continue to increase which will lead to most people just charging their EVs at home. Even long-distance travelers will have more options. Just look at hotels currently offering charging stations for Tesla vehicles. Every convenience store owner needs to be planning on how they will be able to be successful with that type of loss in revenue. Start planning and implementing now so it gives you the time to build and perfect a revamped business model. ■

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TAKING A LOOK AT PRESIDENTIAL POLICIES THAT AFFECT OUR INDUSTRY

■ BY EIPHANY COMMUNICATIONS AND COACHING*

Not even a month into his presidency, Joe Biden was signing one executive order after another and issuing decrees and policies that will have wide impact on many organizations, associations, and Americans in general.

“It’s a little hard to tell exactly how the Biden administration will affect the industry because it’s still early,” said Matt Miner, Chief Executive Officer with Capitol Strategies Group. “He hasn’t made all his appointments and not everything has been approved by the Senate, so we are waiting to see what will happen. However, one thing that will be closely watched are his changes and appointments to the National Labor Relations Board. This will affect businesses significantly over the next four years,”

The National Labor Relations Board (NLRB) handles complaints and union activities among other things. “Over the last four years, we haven’t had a president focused on this board and now we have one ceremonially firing Peter Robb to say, ‘hey, I am not that other guy. I am with you, unions.’”

Bloomberg Law reported that President Joe Biden fired Peter Robb, the Trump-appointed general counsel for the National Labor Relations Board, after Robb refused a request from the new administration to resign.

“I respectfully decline to resign from my Senate-confirmed four-year term appointment as General Counsel of the NLRB less than 10 months before the expiration of my term,” the labor board’s top lawyer wrote.

The NLRB enforces private-sector workers’ rights to organize, and its general counsel has sweeping authority to determine which types of cases the agency does or does not pursue. Robb, a former management-side attorney who helped Ronald Reagan defeat the air traffic controllers union, had pushed an aggressive, pro-business agenda at the labor board.

Removing Robb was one of Joe Biden’s first acts as President of the United States and according to a *Fortune* report, “was probably unconstitutional. It was certainly highly unethical.”

Biden fired Robb despite the NLRB being an independent federal agency. “And Biden apparently did it because his union friends don’t like Robb,” *Fortune* reported.

There are several major changes the Biden administration has made that may have an impact on businesses across America. “Changes made at the NLRB indicate that there will be significant reversal in policy from Trump administration as it relates to several big-ticket items including, Paid Sick Leave laws and rules, Minimum Wage and Unionization of Workers,” said Miner.



Minimum wage is just one of the issues that MIRA is paying attention to as it relates to Biden policies.

“Now with the Biden administration, we are looking at possible \$15 minimum wage, 40-hour work week with mandatory paid vacation and sick time which will certainly affect small business,” said Miner. “On the issue of a \$15 minimum wage, the Congressional Budget Office has indicated that an increase this sharp and this fast would create a \$54 Billion budget deficit, a higher price for goods and services, significant issues with unemployment and an increase in government spending on Medicaid and nutrition programs.”

The labor shortage is playing a role in hourly wage. “It’s already demanding a dollar increase,” said Juan Escareño, government relations with MIRA. “Our members run lean operations. The profit margins are very small. The industry already determines the outcome. Our members don’t need government interference on these issues.”

Escareño explains that MIRA members and independent retailers typically pay employees at higher wages than chains. “Our members don’t need government intervention in these areas,” said Escareño. “An active NLRB will most likely affect national chains more than independent retailers.”

The competition in our industry also affects success. “Customers have so many options today,” said Escareño. “People can buy food at a gas station and dollar store today. They can buy food online.”

The forced minimum wage increase could have a direct negative impact on the various communities. “Retailers in places like Chicago and Detroit may not be able to sustain business and could be forced to close their doors,” said Escareño. “The inner cities already suffer food shortages and store options.”

On the Issue of Paid Sick Leave, “the Biden administration wants to remove the exemption for businesses with 50 or fewer employees, increase the allowable leave to 14 weeks and increase the benefit to \$1,400 per week,” said Miner.

The Biden administration is also requesting heroes pay for essential workers in the grocery business. “If the government wants to give out more federal funds to essential workers, we don’t have an issue with that, but if the government is demanding that grocers pay for this out of their budgets than it becomes an issue,” said Escareño. “Our members have already given bonuses and higher wages as they adjusted to deal with the pandemic. When municipalities force this upon small

businesses, it sets a bad precedence. There is disparity in this approach. Retailers can make these decisions based on their own abilities and needs. We already saw grocery stores close because of these mandates.”

The NLRB is one area that MIRA will closely watch moving forward. “We have to wait and see what will happen and evaluate throughout the year and his term,” said Miner. “We will continue to assess how these policies and executive orders impact our industry,” said Escareño.

Another issue that could negatively affect Petroleum MIRA members is Biden’s \$2 trillion plan that would require the electric grid to be relying solely on “clean” electricity by 2035.

The plan, which also calls for big investments in energy efficiency and electric vehicles, is the third climate-change proposal put forward by leading Democrats over the past two weeks.

On his presidential candidate website, Biden claimed his Energy Efficiency and Clean Energy Standard will “cut electricity bills.”

However, that claim ignores the fact that overhauling the electric grid will drive up the cost of electricity and therefore hurt low- and middle-income consumers. In addition, it ignores the raging land-use conflicts in rural America over the siting of renewable-energy projects.

“Fuel volume is already lagging behind same-month previous-year volume numbers, because motorists are working from home and parents aren’t driving their children to school” said Ed Weglarz, MIRA President and CEO. He continued, “Newer cars are getting better mileage, so if your driving habits are the same, your fuel usage will decrease.” If the government “force-feeds” electric cars onto the public in the form of decrees and/or tax credits the usage of EVs will expand faster than the normal supply/demand factors would dictate.

“Retailers need to consider expanding their offerings to their customers to account for the loss of fuel volume” Weglarz added.

“Now, more than ever, it’s important to acquaint yourself with your State Senator and House Representative to express your concerns about the future of small businesses,” Weglarz concluded.

It’s just two months into this new presidency and changes are happening quickly; The association is closely watching the policies that will affect our industry. “We will continue to wait and watch to see what will happen and get ahead of the issues,” said Miner. ■

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



Prince Valley and the Pandemic



■ BY EPIPHANY COMMUNICATIONS AND COACHING*

When the pandemic hit the United States more than a year ago, businesses across the country began to pivot and this included the independent retailers and MIRA member Joe Gappy.

Some of the changes made last year just might end up as permanent protocols in the store. We share with you a continuation of last's months article on *COVID Carryovers* with a spotlight on a market in Detroit.

Packaging became a COVID-19 convenience, but now a mainstay at Prince Valley Market in Detroit. "Containers, containers, and more containers are definitely a holdover and of course so are sanitizer stations" said Joe Gappy, owner of Prince Valley. "We increased our hot food presentation with new hot food displays. We now package most of our hot food items in containers."

Since the pandemic, Gappy and team package all of baked goods. "Customers used to come and grab a tray or items from an open display in our baked goods department and then we would box everything, but now we prepackage everything in containers," said Gappy. "All of our cakes are now packaged in a grab-and-go fashion, where before we would have all of them displayed; now they are in plastic containers instead of in paper boxes."

Items on the deli counter are not selling at the fast-pace they used to prior to COVID-19, but the salad case with sealed products in containers have significantly increased sales.

Many protocols have changed because of the virus that spread into the United States more than a year ago. "We used to have a large selection of food on display in front of customers," said Gappy. "Now we have more packaged products."

COVID-19 changed store operations last year that are continuing into 2021. "This virus changed our service," said Gappy. "We don't serve our customers the same way. We continue to prepackage more and more items for sanitary reasons. We make more food for customers on the spot where before we had more hot fresh food on display."

Six-foot distancing and masks might not be a long-term practice, but it continues in businesses across the country.

With restaurants either closing or at limited capacities, grocery sales increased. Prepared food has been on an incline even before COVID and so has business overall at Prince Valley. "We changed most of the equipment and got a larger line of equipment to be able to produce more," noted Gappy. "We added a 10-foot hood with more equipment to be safer in the kitchen. We had outgrown our department in the past and took a little bit of space from our bakery to expand the kitchen."

The prepared food department serves daily breakfast burritos, soups and smoked barbecue including ribs and chicken. They also offer rice and assorted meat dinners. "We are known in the community as the best place for hand-crafted tamales," said Gappy. "The process is a huge ordeal. We have six ladies making tamales five days a week and then still offering Mexican food to go."

Like many businesses today, Gappy is challenged to find employees. "For the past three months our kitchen has only been open from 7:30 am until 1:00 pm because we cannot find the help," he said.

He is hoping that issue will not be a permanent COVID carryover. ■

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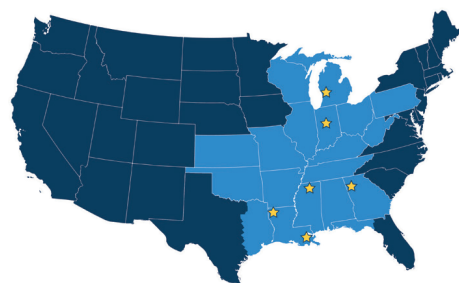


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How COVID-19 Impacted Urban Communities



■ BY EPIPHANY COMMUNICATIONS
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The first confirmed cases of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) were identified in late 2019 in Wuhan China in the Hubei Province. It soon turned into a fully-fledged pandemic rapidly sweeping through many countries including the United States.

As of February 15, 2021, there have been 108,579,352 confirmed cases of COVID-19, including 2,396,408 deaths, according to the World Health Organization (WHO).

Researchers and experts are now shedding light on the pandemic as it relates to urbanization and urban sprawl. Given the high concentration of population and economic activities in cities, urban areas are often hotspots of COVID-19 infections.

Many researchers are struggling to explore the dynamics of the pandemic in urban areas to understand impacts of COVID-19 on cities. In a study published last December in *Sci Total Environ*, researchers sought to provide an overview of COVID-19 research related to cities by reviewing literature published during the first eight months after the first confirmed cases were reported in Wuhan, China.

The focus of the study is to understand impacts of the pandemic on cities and to highlight major lessons that can be learned for post-COVID urban planning and design. Their results indicate the impacts of COVID-19 on cities is mainly related to four major themes: environmental quality, socio-economic impacts, management and governance, and transportation and urban design.

At the height of the pandemic in April of 2020, *U.S. News and World Report* was covering how the Coronavirus was wreaking havoc in Detroit, labeling it “the nation’s poorest big city, and among its unhealthiest – has emerged as one of the United States’ major epicenters.”

There were numerous news stories about Detroit being hit hard by the pandemic reporting high number of cases and deaths including that of elected officials and those in law enforcement. Wayne County Sheriff, Benny Napoleon, lost his battle to COVID-19 this last December at the age of 65.

At the end of March last year, a report was published to show that new interdisciplinary research from the University of Chicago quantifies how COVID-19 has attacked large U.S. cities at much higher rates—growing roughly 2.5 times faster, for example, in the New York metropolitan area (pop. approx. 20 million) than in Oak Harbor, Washington (pop. approx. 84,000).

The COVID-19 outbreak led to large-scale closures of schools, workplaces and public gathering places across the United States, and “social distancing” measures recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) are likely to lead to further disruptions.

In March of last year, the Pew Research Center reported a survey on their website stating that “the thousands of cases of the new coronavirus are not evenly dispersed across the country, and the people most likely to say the disease threatens “day-to-day life” in their communities are those living in urban areas in states that have seen relatively high numbers of cases.”

At that time, overall, 36% of Americans say the coronavirus outbreak is a major threat to day-to-day life in their community, according to the 2020 survey.

The *Sci Total Environ* study showed improvements in air and water quality in cities during lockdown periods. This highlights the significant environmental impacts of anthropogenic activities

and provides a wake-up call to adopt environmentally friendly development pathways. The paper also provides other recommendations related to the socio-economic factors, urban management and governance, and transportation and urban design that can be used for post-COVID urban planning and design.

Prior to COVID-19, urbanization—“the process through which cities grow, and higher and higher percentages of the population comes to live in the city,” according to National Geographic—was on the rise globally. “So was a rise in urban sprawl, which increased the need for travel infrastructure as communities required more routes to accommodate commuters,” NACS reported in January.

By the second quarter of 2020, nearly half of American workers were working from home, and many began to wonder if the pandemic forever changed the trajectory of urbanization and overall vehicle miles traveled.

In a recent episode of *Carpool Chats*, *Urbanization in the Age of Pandemic*, John Eichberger, executive director of the Fuels Institute, discusses trends in urban planning and e-commerce with Jeff Wood, principal for The Overhead Wire.

Highlighted were two developments that showcase the complexity of human behavior. First, pandemic-driven relocation that has led to two-thirds of homebuyers and sellers considering moving or having moved to a different city or area—if given the opportunity to work remotely permanently. Second, the natural desire for humans to want personal interaction.

“Overall, existing knowledge shows that the COVID-19 crisis entails an excellent opportunity for planners and policy makers to take transformative actions towards creating cities that are more just, resilient, and sustainable,” researchers in *Sci Total Environ* noted. ■

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Getting Ready for the Spring and Summer Season



■ BY EPIPHANY COMMUNICATIONS
AND COACHING*

If you asked people a year ago if they would still be dealing with COVID-19, chances are they would have said no way!

Experts have weighed in and the thought is that we can put COVID-19 behind us by the end of this year. As the director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, Anthony Fauci predicted last November that “if 75% to 80% of Americans are vaccinated, then by the end of 2021, we can reach a degree of normality.”

Regardless, independent retailers are forging ahead while still following pandemic protocols. “Like many others, we are struggling to find team members to staff our stores during the pandemic,” said Michael G. Mitchell, vice president of Markham Oil / Markham Enterprises Inc, Sunoco Distributor

Council Secretary and MIRA Board Member.

There is no certainty when COVID-19 will no longer be an issue. “I wish I could say what the future holds for us with COVID-19 and what changes will stay or go,” said Mitchell. “It seems that we get new information all the time. We just try to do the best we can to keep our employees and customers safe.”

In 2020, Elvira Grimaldo at Supermercado Santa Fe Market in Holland, Michigan, began the installation of a Grab n’ Go food and beverage counter, but when the pandemic hit, plans were put on hold. “This year we hope to open a snack and refreshments bar near our deli and restaurant area,” said Grimaldo. “Our goal is to make last year’s plan a reality and offer more options to our customers. We want Santa Fe to be their one-stop store. We strive to be of service for those who come in before work to get coffee, and/or breakfast tacos, or those who come in later in the

day picking up an after-school snack for the kids and their dinner items.”

In addition, they anticipate increasing sales of their homemade flour tortillas by installing a new machine to boost production. “Santa Fe’s flour tortillas are a hot commodity among our customers. They are soft and tasty,” she noted.

Along with the self-serve counter, plans at Supermercado Santa Fe include opening an ice cream bar. “With the hot summers in Michigan and the beach not too far from our business, tourism increases and ice cream is definitely what most people want,” said Grimaldo. “In addition, we are strategizing to expand menu options to our Taqueria to include breakfast tacos to our already diverse menu of tacos, tamales, tortas, burritos, and quesadillas.”

With COVID-19 still around, plans at Supermercado Santa Fe could stall, but they are optimistic that the Grab n’ Go and ice cream bar will open. “Our mask policy is strongly enforced and complied by our employees,” said Grimaldo. “We are grateful customers help us by doing their part in following social distancing guidelines and by taking advantage of the hand sanitizing stations that we have placed throughout the store. Although we won’t be able to allow as many people to dine in when the Taqueria opens up, we will continue to offer order by phone or to-go option for our customer’s convenience.”

MARKET TRENDS
continued on page 24.

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MARKET TRENDS

continued from page 22.

In addition to the pandemic, retailers have industry changes to address throughout the years. "Gas prices and margins change every day and we like most others adapt to meet the market," said Mitchell. "In addition, we have a new site we are hoping to break ground on and we are rehabbing a rental property into our office."

Immediate changes were made to comply with State and local orders during the pandemic. Occupancy loads, social distancing, mask policies and curfews have all been a factor in running businesses because of COVID-19. "Our employee's and customer's health and safety comes first, and feel that by enforcing these orders, it will allow for a better work and shopping experience," said

Grimaldo. "This can be compared to the safe handling instructions on our meat products that help protect the consumer from becoming sick after handling raw meat: it's a preventative measure. Additionally, we also installed sanitizing stations around the store for accessibility and offer disinfecting wipes for items that are touched, which will remain permanently. We look forward to continue to comply and hoping for the best to have all orders lifted in order to go back to normal and resume regular operations."

Despite having to pivot, business owners are focused on the next season. "We are always looking at new items to sell and we are going to do some indoor storage units at our Howell location," said Mitchell. "We are cautiously optimistic that COVID-19 will get manageable in the near future and we will ride the wave of pent-up demand for travel

and recreation in our great state."

"At Santa Fe, we are always looking for best prices and new items to offer our clientele," said Grimaldo. "This is a great way to keep our customers coming back and glad we can service their wants and needs."

As it has been reported "these are unprecedented times" and MIRA members are focusing on a successful year. "This wouldn't be possible without our loyal customers and our great employees," said Grimaldo. "At this point, it's still unknown what the rest of this year will look like, but we are optimistic that we will be able to continue to grow and offer our customers a wider variety of options from food to household items." ■

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Cummings, McCloy, Davis & Acho, PLC. (734) 261-2400
Dawda, Mann, Mulcahy & Sadler, PLC (248) 642-6961
Denha & Associates, PLLC. (248) 265-4100
Kullen & Kassab, PC (248) 538-2200
Lippitt O'Keefe Advisors, LLC (248) 646-8292
Willingham & Cote, PC (517) 351-6200

LIQUOR SHELF TAGS

M Saxon, Inc. **M** (248) 398-2000

LOTTERY

All-Star Gaming	(855) 772-4646
IGT Global Solutions	(517) 272-3302
Michigan Lottery	(517) 335-5648
Ohio Lottery	1-800-589-6446

MILK, DAIRY & CHEESE PRODUCTS

 Borden Dairy 	(855) 226-7336
 Lipari Foods, Inc.	(586) 447-3500
 Prairie Farms Dairy Co. 	(248) 399-6300
Cedar Crest Dairy, Inc.	(616) 797-1103
LaLa Branded Products (Lipari)	1-866-648-5252
Harvest Sherwood	(313) 659-7300

MONEY ORDERS

 Retailers Express Money Orders	1-800-666-6233
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OFFICE SUPPLIES & PRODUCTS

 Office Depot	(855) 337-6811
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PAPER PRODUCTS & PACKAGING SUPPLIES

Cartotecnica Cambianese Srl	
daniele@cartotecnicaCambianese.it	
Rolly Receipts LLC	(937) 344-3242



PET SUPPLIES MISC.

 Great Lakes Pet Treats	(810) 715-4500
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PIZZA SUPPLIERS

 Omni Food Concepts  	1-888-367-7829
Hunt Brothers Pizza	(615) 259-2629

POINT OF SALE & RETAIL TECHNOLOGY

 Great Lakes Data Systems (LOC Software)	(248) 356-4100 ext. 107
 Petrosoft LLC	(412) 306-0640
BMC-Business Machines Company	(517) 485-1732
Success Systems	1-800-653-3345


PRINTING, PUBLISHING & SIGNAGE

 Saxon, Inc. 	(248) 398-2000
Ahearn Signs, Inc.	(734) 699-3777
CLE Billboards	(216) 801-9924
EGI Solutions	(586) 978-9630
Fisher Printing	(708) 598-1500
Pace Custom Printing	(248) 563-7702


PRODUCE DISTRIBUTORS

Anthony Marano Company	(773) 321-7500
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PROPANE

 Blue Rhino	(989) 345-0170
Tank Traders Midwest	(877) 429-5797

REAL ESTATE

 Sell Your Business Program	1-800-666-6233
Trade World Consulting	(614) 332-8762


REFRIGERATION SOLUTIONS (COMMERCIAL)

Cooler Fabrications	1-800-396-1480
Raves Cooler Doors	(248) 887-0648
Sprint Business	(248) 893-8017

RETAIL CONSULTING

White Knight Marketing	(901) 494-1352
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RETAIL FIXTURES, DISPLAYS & FLOORING

 Display Max	(810) 494-0400
Mitchell's Flooring	(248) 887-4864








REVERSE VENDING MACHINES & SERVICE

UBCR, LLC	(248) 529-2605
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SECURITY, SURVEILLANCE & MORE

Defense Alarm Systems	(586) 777-7222
Netco Services	(248) 850-2228

SODA POP, WATER, JUICES & OTHER BEVERAGES

 Coca-Cola Refreshments (Metro Detroit program)	
..... Metro Detroit 	(313) 868-2008
..... Belleville 	(734) 397-2700
..... Flint 	(810) 237-4000
..... Cleveland 	(216) 690-2653
 Faygo Beverages, Inc. 	(313) 925-1600
Amica Tea LLC	(312) 796-7445
Boom Boom Energy	(313) 722-2221
Monster Energy Company	(800) 426-7367
Pepsi Beverages	Detroit 1-800-368-9945
..... Howell	1-800-878-8239
..... Pontiac	(248) 334-3512
..... Cleveland	(216) 252-7377
..... Twinsburg	(330) 963-5300
Smart Life LLC	(248) 466-0770

TOBACCO ALTERNATIVES

Bumble CBD	(216) 854-0090
E-Alternative Solutions	(904) 843-3731
Grinds Coffee Pouches	(412) 414-3155
Swisher International	(904) 607-7405

TOBACCO COMPANIES & PRODUCTS

Altria Client Services	(513) 831-5510
Fully Loaded, LLC	(877) 728-2547
R.J. Reynolds Tobacco Company	(336) 741-0727
Xcaliber International	(918) 824-0300

WASTE DISPOSAL & RECYCLING

 Midwest Recycling   (Clothing recycle boxes)	(313) 304-9099
Commercial Waste Systems (Cardboard recycling buyers)	(219) 663-5678
Stamper Facility	(586) 228-6500

WINE & SPIRITS COMPANIES

 Benchmark Beverage Co.	(734) 744-6132
Cheurlin Champagne	(312) 929-2699
Cornerstone Wine Distributor	(586) 839-2552
Endless West	(313) 590-7491
Heaven Hill Distilleries	1-800-348-1783
Luxco	(313) 333-4637
Proximo Spirits	(810) 278-0599
Remy Cointreau USA	(248) 347-3731
Tenute Delogu	info@tenutedelogu.com
Tito's Handmade Vodka	(248) 885-3424
Wise Men Distillery	(616) 805-7003

WINE & SPIRITS DISTRIBUTORS

European Wine Imports of Ohio, LLC	(216) 426-0979
Great Lakes Wine & Spirits	1-888-860-3805
Lagniappe Beverage	(773) 358-2344
RNDC of Michigan	1-888-697-6424

FOOD RESCUE / FOOD BANKS

MICHIGAN

Feeding America West Michigan Food Bank	
.....	(616) 784-3250
Feeding America West Michigan Food Bank - Benton Harbor	(269) 926-2646
Feeding America West Michigan Food Bank - Cadillac	(231) 779-0056
Feeding America West Michigan Food Bank - Ishpeming	(906) 485-4988
Feeding America West Michigan Food Bank - Sault Ste. Marie	(906) 632-0348
Food Bank of Eastern Michigan	(810) 239-4498
Food Bank of South Central Michigan	(269) 964-3663
Food Gatherers	(734) 761-2796
Forgotten Harvest	(248) 967-1500
Gleaners Community Food Bank	(866) GLE-ANER
Greater Lansing Food Bank	(517) 908-3680
Kalamazoo Loaves & Fishes	(269) 343-3663
The Manna Food Project	(231) 347-8852
Western Upper Peninsula Food Bank	(906) 482-5528

OHIO

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

ILLINOIS

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



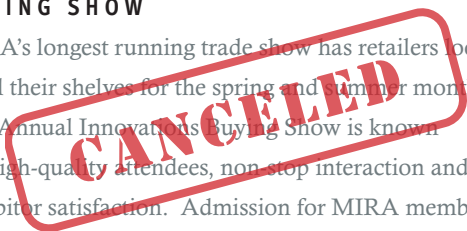


MARCH 10, 2021

MIRA'S 35TH ANNUAL INNOVATIONS BUYING SHOW

MIRA's longest running trade show has retailers looking to fill their shelves for the spring and summer months. The Annual Innovations Buying Show is known for high-quality attendees, non-stop interaction and exhibitor satisfaction. Admission for MIRA members is free. Must be at least 21 years old to attend this show.

Andiamo Warren Banquet Center // Warren, MI



MARCH 27, 2021

MIRA'S 3RD ANNUAL CHICAGO METRO GROCERS GALA

Enjoy fine cuisine, network, dance and enjoy live entertainment with more than 500 industry leaders. Sponsorship opportunities available.

The Empress // Addison, IL



JUNE 15, 2021

MIDWEST INDEPENDENT RETAILERS FOUNDATION'S 13TH ANNUAL SCHOLARSHIP LUNCHEON

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

Detroit Athletic Club // Detroit, MI



JULY 14, 2020

MIRA'S 45TH ANNUAL MICHIGAN GOLF OPEN

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

Fox Hills Golf & Banquet Center // Plymouth, MI

publishers statement

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