

# BottomLine



THE VOICE OF MIDWEST INDEPENDENT RETAILERS // VOL. 33, NO. 3 // MARCH 2022



# WE TE



Industry Experts Provide Insight  
on Midterm Elections

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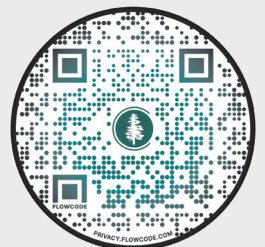
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# BottomLine

THE VOICE OF MIDWEST INDEPENDENT RETAILERS  
VOL. 33, NO. 3 // MARCH 2022

## features



### COVER STORY //

#### INDUSTRY EXPERTS PROVIDE INSIGHT ON MIDTERM ELECTIONS

A Gallup, Inc. survey published in January of this year shows that only 40% of American adults approve of President Joe Biden's job performance. In addition, the poll found that political party polarization is the highest on record under Biden, in his first year, even more polarizing than President Donald Trump's first year.



#### C-STORES PREPARING FOR EMERGENCIES, PROVIDING BEST PRODUCTS FOR CUSTOMERS

The only lockdown that seemed to work when it came to COVID-19 response was the shutdowns of bars, and according to a Johns Hopkins University meta-analysis of several studies, lockdowns during the first COVID-19 wave in the spring of 2020 only reduced COVID-19 mortality by 0.2% in the U.S. and Europe.



#### SOCIAL MEDIA CHANGES HOW WE EAT

Food retailers, like everyone else, have to change with the times. Social media and its power over our psychology and consumer choices has forever altered the landscape of food marketing and who exerts influence.



# chairman's message

CLIFTON DENHA // MIRA CHAIRMAN

## Dismantling Your Business?

In today's business atmosphere you have choices. You can let a competitor dismantle your business from underneath you or you can be in charge of the dismantling. Dismantling sounds like such a destructive word and so final. Perhaps I should have said "remove and replace" or, tear down and rebuild! You can be the project manager and supervise the change of permit your competitor to be the dismantler and see the demise of your business.

As much as we might wish it, 2019 is not resurrecting in its previous form. Oh, some parts, fragments, and traditions of 2019 are beginning to appear, but almost all businesses will be reborn in 2022 as we put COVID-19 in our rearview mirror.

Customers developed new habits and dropped old ones over the two-year pandemic cycle. Many retailers lost touch with customers evolving needs.

It's our job to separate fads from trends. Your future may well depend on your ability to differentiate one from the other. New markets are starting to emerge while old markets are dismantling themselves. Look around you and see what the competition is doing. Ask yourself: "What business are we in?" Adding products and services to your offerings that the new customer wants, and needs is your challenge. Dismantling the outdated products and services is also your job, making room for the new, and maximizing your floor space and staff.

Spend your time shopping the competition to see what's selling. What is new? Complaining about the problems of doing business in today's atmosphere is counter-productive making you a prime target for being dismantled by a competitor.

Reinvent your business. Be curious, get out and talk with your suppliers about what you can change to upgrade your operation. Suppliers visit many stores every week and they can share ideas with you if you will just embrace change.

No matter your age. No matter how long you have been in business. As an entrepreneur you need to maintain your curiosity and learn to embrace change. If you don't practice those traits, you are doomed to being dismantled.

A good place to start reinventing your business is by looking at the rebate, discount, and exclusive member-only deals offered by our supplier programs. ■

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A photograph of three diverse people (two men and one woman) sitting at a table in a cafe, smiling and looking towards the left. The man on the left is holding a coffee cup. The background features exposed brick walls and industrial-style pipes.

# A FORCE FOR GOOD

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# government relations report

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

## More Bottles, Less Money

*"A government might help, when necessary, but a government was secondary, not enough."*

— AMITY SHLAES

Once again, this year we are facing a threat to expand the bottle returns. There are rumors of universal redemption occurring and forcing our members to become garbage intake processors for the aluminum and plastic recycling businesses.

But this time around it goes deeper than expanding bottle returns. They are looking at creating a new formula to give a few over \$24 million dollars for the pain and suffering of doing bottle returns. None of that \$24 million will come to the independent and small retailer. It will be left for the big players only. They won't reduce your responsibility to redeem cans for customers. They won't risk reducing their opportunity to collect millions of dollars through under redemption.

The question on what we should do to respond is left up to you. Government will not do the right thing. Our elected officials won't do the right thing. It's up to you to call, engage, and participate with MIRA in educating

our elected officials on the negative impacts expanding the bottle bill will have on your business. We have an opportunity to change the bottle return law to benefit you, but we can't do it alone.

The rumors of the expansion are that it will only be canned wine and ciders, but the large payout isn't covered by only adding these items. The question returns to what you as a retailer want from the bottle return? I am challenging you to look beyond allowing others to make the decisions for you. I hope you see an opportunity to shape legislation to reduce your burden.

The rumored bottle bill expansion is being supported by the governor, some industry associations, and the environmentalists. I left the quote up top incomplete because the second half involves you. We can not wait for someone else to do it for us. If we want to impact the laws and policies that are going to impact your business, this is your chance.

The rumored bill has all the cards in its favor. With the preliminary work that the opposition has laid out to get this bill drafted, I suspect it has the votes needed to pass. This bill will open the door to us having to take back more than just canned wines or ciders.

In the world of politics, nothing is certain, but we learn how to interpret the motions and intentions of others. It's a game of relationships and following your gut. This bill to expand the bottle return law will pass and we wonder why nothing was done to stop it. This is your opportunity. ■







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## c-store news & views

JIM GREEN // MIRA VICE PRESIDENT, PROGRAM DEVELOPMENT

### The Value of Consolidating

**T**here are 1,440 minutes in a day. Time is our most precious commodity and when it is gone, it is gone. We should continually be challenging ourselves and asking ourselves, “How can I best utilize my time to produce the best results for my business?” As independent retailers it is easy to get caught up in the daily grind of running your business and then try to do strategic and long-term planning with the time that is left over in the day. Unfortunately for many of us this can be little if any at all. In this month’s article I am going to recommend independent retailers take a hard look at the suppliers they are using and the amount of time and energy they use when dealing with their suppliers.

When I talk to independent convenience store retailers about their business, I always ask who is their distributor? Since I have 35 years of experience in the convenience store wholesale business, I really cannot help myself but ask that question. I am still surprised when I come to learn they are buying from three or four different distributors. When I ask them why, I get the same set of answers. This distributor has better cigarette pricing, that distributor has better OTP pricing, this distributor has better Hostess pricing, etc. Some retailers are spending a sizable portion of their time trying to save a penny here, nickel there or a dime somewhere else. I will be the first to say it is important to have a competitive price model and I am not suggesting you do not periodically examine your pricing. Large chains go through this exercise every 3 to 5 years and buy from one distributor. They know it is more efficient and it enhances their buying power.

I would encourage independent retailers take a strong look at consolidating their volume to one primary distributor. Let us say you are using three different

distributors. With the cost of fuel, labor, and equipment, each one of those distributors has an approximate cost of \$100 just to get the delivery to your store. This does not have the cost to procure, pick, load, administrative expense, etc. I am just focusing on the delivery expense. No matter how good of a negotiator you think you are, you are paying \$300 in delivery fees in your cost of goods by buying from three distributors when you should be paying only \$100. I would recommend having a meeting with your distributor sales representative and inform him you want to consolidate your volume with him or her and in return you would like to see what they can do with your price model. If your sales representative cannot offer you a better price, then ask for a meeting with their boss on how you can save if you buy more. Those who read this article every month may not be aware that prior to coming to MIRA I was Vice President of Sales and Marketing for a \$750,000,000 a year distributor. We always welcomed these conversations with retailers on how to craft a win-win price model that benefited everyone!

When going through this process it is important to understand that distributors are not going to line price each item or brand to be the cheapest on every item. Large distributors do not price down to the individual item. Retailers price to the item level so this may seem hard to get your arms around that concept. They have approximately 15,000 sku’s to maintain pricing so they price by NACS category or sub-category. Most distributors offer a non-tobacco rebate, which could range from one to two percent. This is done to help off set the cost of items you could get cheaper from another source when you consolidate with them, so please do not be afraid to ask for it and understand why it is being offered.

In the end you will always come out better consolidating your volume. It will make your life easier, and it will save your time and energy. It will also allow you to spend time on strategies that bring in more customers and increase the market basket size. I know you will find it to be a more valuable use of your time! ■





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## BOTTOM LINE:

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# michigan liquor report

PAT GAGLIARDI // CHAIR, MICHIGAN LIQUOR CONTROL COMMISSION

## Uncle Nearest – From Unknown to World’s Best Whiskey

For many people who hear the name Jack Daniel, whiskey probably comes to mind. But what about the name Nathan “Uncle Nearest” Green? It too, has now become known as a great brand of whiskey.

Green’s legacy as the African American man who taught the *real* Jack Daniel to distill and make Tennessee whiskey, emerged thanks to the efforts of Fawn Weaver, founder of Black-owned Uncle Nearest, Inc.

Around the mid-1800s, Green, a slave, worked on the farm of a local preacher and distiller, the Rev. Dan Call. This was typical in an era in which enslaved men were commonly involved in the making of spirits due to its reputation as dangerous and dirty work.

“Uncle Nearest” as he was known to family and friends, was a skilled distiller who specialized in a process known as sugar maple charcoal filtering – also called the Lincoln County Process. To be called Tennessee whiskey, the spirit must go through sugar maple charcoal filtration that’s still done today. The whiskey Green made was unique in its smoothness.

Jack Daniel, 30 years younger than Green, was a chore boy on the same farm. He became Green’s apprentice and was taught the Lincoln County Process, making Green responsible for the Tennessee whiskey we know today.

When the 13th Amendment was ratified on December 6, 1865, Green became a free man. Not long after, Call sold his distillery to Jack Daniel who renamed it after himself. He appointed Green to be the Jack Daniel Distillery’s first master distiller, making him the first African American master distiller on record in the United States.

Weaver’s efforts to uncover Nearest Green’s remarkable untold story involved meeting Green’s descendants during her research. She asked them how they would like to see him honored. They told her that “putting his name on a bottle, letting people know what he did, would be great.”

Weaver decided to start her own whiskey company that honored Green’s legacy and opened the Nearest Green Distillery, the world’s first distillery to commemorate an African American, located in Shelbyville, TN.

With no background in distilling, she immersed herself into the world of spirit-making, an industry mostly dominated by white men and a few major corporations. Weaver now serves as CEO of the company, with Victoria Eady-Butler, Green’s great-great-granddaughter as master blender and who became the first Black female master blender in the Spirits industry.

Uncle Nearest Premium Whiskey, the most awarded American Whiskey or Bourbon of 2019 and 2020, confirmed in January 2022, that it won the honor for the third year in a row, raking in a record 198 awards in 2021.

Since its debut in 2017, the super-premium whiskey topped every major spirit competition, garnering 380 total awards, including 46 Best in Class, and 213 Gold, Double Gold and Platinum medals.

The whiskey is currently available in all 50 states and 12 countries, in more than 25,000 stores, bars and restaurants.

Uncle Nearest, a true, Black, whiskey icon that the world never knew, would have been proud. He didn’t just make great whiskey, he made history.

There has never been a more important time to raise a glass to one man in the drinks industry that history almost forgot. ■

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





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# ohio lobbyist report

TERRY FLEMING // TC FLEMING & ASSOCIATES

## A Slow Start to 2022

**S**o far 2022 has been all about elections with very little legislative activity. However, the Ohio Supreme Court ruled that the state legislative and Congressional redistricting maps don't meet constitutional standards and this has thrown a monkey wrench into filings and finalizing the district maps. The filing deadline for all races in Ohio was February 2nd – 90 days before the May primary on May 3rd – which came and went without the maps being approved. The General Assembly pushed back the filing date but kept May 3rd for primary election day.

Here's the update on elections as they stand currently:

- One U.S. Senate seat is open held by Republican Rob Portman who is not seeking reelection. There are seven republicans running for the seat and they are spending record amounts of money, while on the democratic side, one Congressman and two Mayors are in the race. This is a very important race at national level as republicans seek to regain the U.S. Senate. Due to the 10-year census numbers, Ohio did not gain enough population to prevent the loss of one congressional seat going from 16 to 15. Until court approves the new maps, these races are in a quandary.

- There are three seats up for election on the Ohio Supreme Court, two republicans including Chief Justice and one democrat. These will be very important races because control of the court is in doubt. The Ohio Senate is in control of republicans 24-9 with 17 seats up this year, so it would take a miracle for democrats to win enough elections to take control.
- All 99 House seats are up and republicans will retain a huge majority but the real battle will be for Speaker of the House as the current Speaker is term limited.

November 8th is election day and all of these issues will be decided by November 9th.

Legislators are very hesitant to deal with any controversial bills in an election year so you will see what's referred to as apple pie bills passing until the lame duck session between November 9th and December 31st.

If you ever wonder what happened to former Speaker Larry Householder, who was indicted almost two years ago for numerous allegations, he still hasn't gone to court. Last summer, the FBI said they hoped to go to court in October, later they said February 2022, and now it's sometime in the fall.

MIRA members, I would remind you that you should take every opportunity you can to meet legislators and tell them your story and give support where you think it's deserved. Nobody does a better job of describing business than the owners. ■





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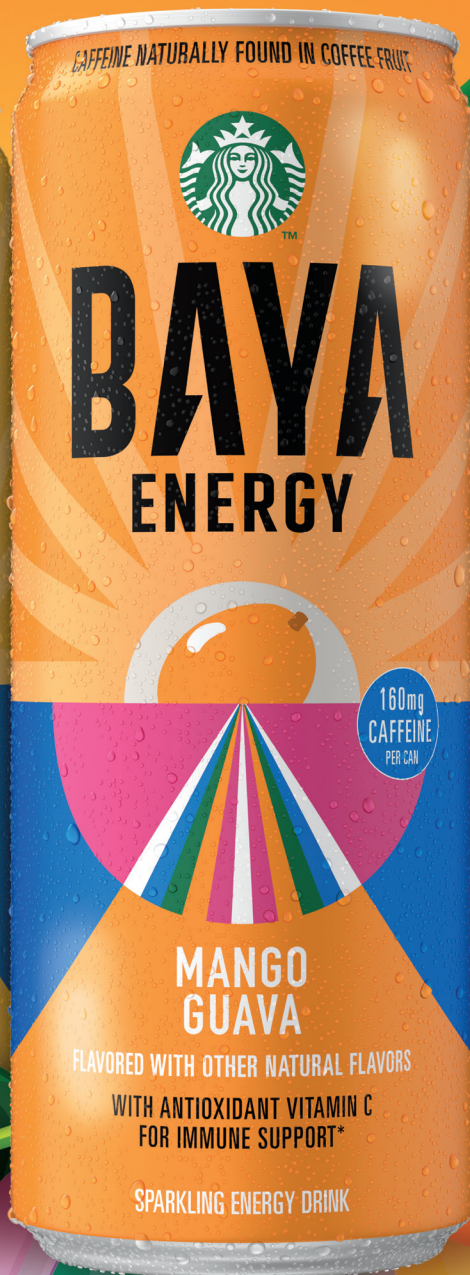
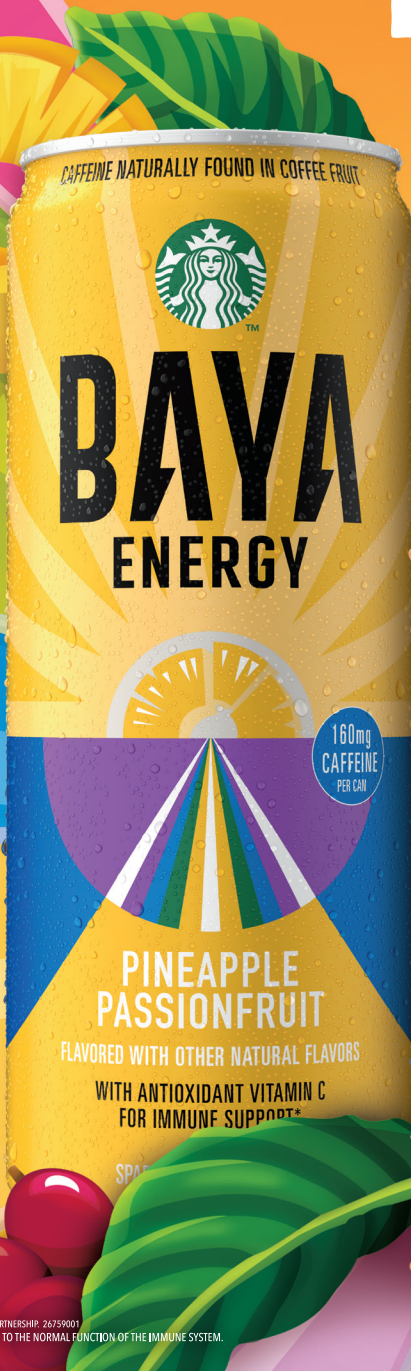


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# Industry Experts Provide Insight on Midterm Elections

■ BY EPIPHANY COMMUNICATIONS AND COACHING\*

**A** Gallup, Inc. survey published in January of this year shows that only 40% of American adults approve of President Joe Biden's job performance. In addition, the poll found that political party polarization is the highest on record under Biden, in his first year, even more polarizing than President Donald Trump's first year.

In the survey, Gallup asked, "Do you approve or disapprove of the way Joe Biden is handling his job as president?"

"In the latest survey, 40% of Americans approve and 56% disapprove of the job he is doing, as the U.S. is plagued by the highest inflation in four decades and another surge of COVID-19 cases, this time fueled by the omicron variant of the coronavirus," reported Gallup.

By political party, Biden has seen the greatest decline among independents. Only "33% approve of the president now compared with ratings of 50% or higher during the first six months of his presidency," said the survey firm.

No doubt, midterm elections are critical. MIRA's team of lobbyist share their perspective on what the midterm elections mean for the industry:

## MIDTERMS IN OHIO

In Ohio, lobbyist Terry Fleming offers an overview of the political climate regarding midterm elections. He explains that this year, 2022, is all about elections as all 99 House seats and 17 Senate seats, as well as 15 Congressional seats and 1 U.S. Senate seat, along with all 5 statewide offices and three Supreme Court seats are up for election.

"With republicans holding all 5 statewide offices and huge majorities in the legislature, it's very unlikely any anti-business bills will move in the legislature," he said. "Ohio has become a very red state, that could change, but its many years off."

Although Fleming doesn't foresee any harmful legislation surfacing this year, he believes the midterm elections are critical. "The biggest issues for our industry this year would be to do everything possible to make sure republicans retain a majority on the Ohio Supreme Court and that a republican wins the U.S. Senate seat from Ohio," he said.

The lack of understanding on how the supply chain works and the industry profit margins, independent retailers are unfairly accused of price gauging. "Service station owners are always blamed by some for high gas prices, and nothing could be further from the truth," said Fleming. "Margins for service stations are better when prices are low. We need to constantly get the message across that our members are *not* responsible for high pump prices."

He continues to note that bills that would increase the price of plastic bags or other products is bad legislation. "A number of cities banned plastic bags three years ago only to have to repeal the legislation, because the pandemic made plastic bags safer," said Fleming. "Government getting involved in the marketplace is almost always bad news. I would encourage all MIRA members to educate themselves to what candidates really believe and support those who support you and your industry and encourage others to do the same."

Elections have consequences. "If we aren't vigilant, we end up with what we have in D.C. today, bad government," said Fleming. "These midterms are especially important to our members as we try to return to normalcy. In terms of gas prices, the local service station has very little control over price, that's determined by the price of crude oil, but you'll have a hard time convincing the public of that."

When prices are high, demand is lower and that impacts not only gasoline sales, but convenience store sales as well. "When gas prices get so high the public is demanding something to be done, politicians will look for any crazy idea to stem the rise. That's when we need to be vigilant to stop goofy bills from moving forward," said Fleming.





# MIRA MEMBER EXCLUSIVE

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## MIDTERMS IN ILLINOIS

Lobbyist Curt Fiedler, with Morrill & Fiedler, LLC, is taking a look at midterm elections in Illinois. Taxes including corporate and individual tax rates are being looked at but they do not anticipate income tax changes for corporations and individuals.

“Service tax may be expanded and could apply to suppliers and vendors that would increase the cost of doing business,” said Fiedler. “There is a push in Illinois to eliminate food deserts. There is an effort to incentivize grocers to operate in areas where there is a need for a quality grocery stores. It is a focus at the city and Cook county level.”

Not the most important priority for midterm elections, but still an issue, is increase of crimes. Crime continues to be a problem in Chicago. “There has been an increase in carjackings, muggings and violent crimes in the city,” said Fiedler. “The root of it is the lack of enforcement and prosecution. This has resulted in a uptick in crimes. If there are no consequences, there are no deterrents. These crimes cause good customers to stay away from certain businesses.”

As elected officials are focusing on midterm elections, proposals are being presented. The Governor in Illinois is recommending a suspension of the scheduled gas tax increase and proposes to suspend the sales tax for a year,” said Fiedler. “This would affect local communities and not the at the state level. However, the governor proposed to make local communities whole with the budget surplus.”

In terms of the 10-cent bag bill, Fiedler said it’s a net neutral issue. “From my understanding, it is not costing the industry, but it is a tax on the patrons,” he said. “Everyone hates additional taxes but it ends up being a net neutral issue for retailers.”

When it comes to midterm elections and what industry members should be paying attention to as they head to the polls, Fiedler shares his thoughts. “The concern for many people is being able to afford the standard of living over the next four years,” he said. “Looking at the candidates as you think of who to vote for, you have to remember that Illinois is fragile from a fiscal perspective. Education, public safety and fiscal policy are essential.”

These are big issues Fiedler believes voters and retailers should consider as they pick a candidate to support. He also encourages people to do their research on the candidates and look to those who can achieve balance. “The midterm election will impact the industry,” said Fiedler. “Illinois is a super majority democratic state. The primary election is June 28th, so you need to look at all the candidates and think about who you want to represent you. A super majority of either side is not good for the industry. I really

encourage our industry members to look for moderate candidates to level the playing field and who can respond to our industry concerns.”

## MIDTERMS IN MICHIGAN

Heading into the midterm elections, national issues will likely be at the forefront of voter’s minds. Typically, the first midterm election of a newly elected President tends to fare poorly for his party. “Very rarely have Presidents overcome this jinx and this year may prove to be the worst in modern history for a sitting President,” said lobbyist Matthew D. Miner of Capitol Strategies Group.

“The lingering COVID-19 pandemic has many Americans exhausted with the rules and regulations being pushed down from government. Inflation and the government’s response has many Americans nervous and upset. The price of goods and services is causing pain and people tend to blame the party in charge for these issues. Also, America’s security and lingering issues in the Ukraine have Americans wondering if war is on the horizon.”

Another issue Michigan is looking at, like other Midwest states, is the 10-cent bag bill and the effects on our industry even though Michigan has a ban on plastic bag fees through legislation that was passed nearly a decade ago. “However, it is likely that if democrats take control of the legislature, this is one of the laws they will look to repeal immediately,” said Miner. “Giving communities the ability to assess a tax on plastic bags would only increase the price of groceries and exacerbate the effects of inflation felt today.”

Like lobbyists in other states, Miner also has his pulse on what industry members should be taking note of as they head into the polls. “At the moment there are nearly a dozen petition drives across Michigan working to collect signatures on everything from voter ID to vouchers for education to the legalization of psychedelic mushrooms for recreational use. They are all on the streets looking to get enough signatures to make the ballot,” said Miner. “While these issues are often overlooked because they are usually lengthy and always at the back of the ballot, they are always consequential. Miner urges members to do their research on these measures, “because whether they pass or fail it could mean big things in their life.”

Bottom line, the party that controls the legislature will likely dictate the path Michigan takes for the next decade. “Democrats have controlled Washington D.C. for the last 14 months and their agenda has been on display for Americans to evaluate,” said Miner. “It can easily be assumed if democrats control the legislature and governor’s office, many of those national themes will be carried forward here in Michigan.” ■

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





## C-Stores Preparing for Emergencies, Providing Best Products for Customers



■ BY EPIPHANY COMMUNICATIONS AND COACHING\*

The only lockdown that seemed to work when it came to COVID-19 response was the shutdowns of bars, and according to a Johns Hopkins University meta-analysis of several studies, lockdowns during the first COVID-19 wave in the spring of 2020 only reduced COVID-19 mortality by 0.2% in the U.S. and Europe.

"While this meta-analysis concludes that lockdowns have had little to no public health effects, they have imposed enormous economic and social costs where they have been adopted," the researchers wrote. "In consequence, lockdown policies are ill-founded and should be rejected as a pandemic policy instrument."

As Fox News reported, the researchers – Johns Hopkins University economics professor Steve Hanke, Lund University

economics professor Lars Jonung, and special advisor at Copenhagen's Center for Political Studies Jonas Herby – analyzed the effects of lockdown measures such as school shutdowns, business closures, and mask mandates on COVID-19 deaths.

"We find little to no evidence that mandated lockdowns in Europe and the United States had a noticeable effect on COVID-19 mortality rates," the researchers wrote. The researchers also examined shelter-in-place orders, finding that they reduced COVID-19 mortality by 2.9%. Researchers also pointed out other unintended consequences of lockdowns, such as rising unemployment, reduced schooling, an increase in domestic violence incidents, and surging drug overdoses.

The pandemic also negatively affected the supply chain. "It's not so much what items we no longer sell as it is what items we cannot

get," said Skattie. "Supply chain has been severely impacted by the pandemic, and now more so by not being able to hire the help needed to fill the pipeline. We are selling more of the items we can get and continue to order items that have been impacted by the pandemic."

Perhaps there won't be another lockdown, but there are still weather emergencies and situations that will impact the products convenience stores carry.

"In preparation for storms and emergencies of that sort, many have purchased generators," said Rob Skattie, District Sales Manager with S. Abraham & Sons—A Division of Imperial Trading Co. "This enables them to keep the doors open to service their customers without interruption. That has been a big benefit, especially in smaller communities where they are the small grocery store or fill-in grocery store in those areas."

MIRA member John Abbo, who owns a gas station and c-store, agrees with Skattie. "Generators are a great solution for storms and power outages," he said. "Our industry is an essential business and are providing safety measures according to CDC regulations. Masks, and glass barriers, and markers on the floor to keep 6-foot distance between customers and hand sanitizer. And procedures for checking employee temperature and requiring covid tests for employees

**C-STORES PREPARING...**  
*continued on page 24.*





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## Social Media Changes How We Eat



■ BY EPIPHANY COMMUNICATIONS AND COACHING\*

Food retailers, like everyone else, have to change with the times. Social media and its power over our psychology and consumer choices has forever altered the landscape of food marketing and who exerts influence.

Over the last few decades, different fad diets have taken over the zeitgeist and significantly altered which food is bought and consumed. One of the first fad diets in America, the Hollywood diet, consisted of eating grapefruit or drinking its juice with every meal.

Keto, paleo, vegan, Mediterranean, and low-fat diets, among others, once dominated discourse and traditional media. In many ways, they still do, and many consumers tailor their purchases to align with those diets.

Social media diets can be roughly translated to fad diets with a few big differences.

First, they are created and altered much more quickly than past fad diets. A celebrity influencer can post about a new diet in a matter of

seconds. In just a few hours, millions of people will see and wonder about the diet.

Second, anyone can post on social media or talk about a diet on a podcast, instantly making it popular. Fad diets in traditional media would often undergo a significant examination of its credibility and effects by health scientists or at least health journalists, but this check is no longer there.

In addition to instant popularity, social media can also have a large, overarching influence on consumer trends. Dr. Russell Zwanka, director of the food marketing program at Western Michigan University, said grocers have seen huge draws on baking products: yeast, dough, and spices in particular.

"It's difficult to attribute changes to one influence," he said. "Did the pandemic spur baking at home, or did a few people on social media influence baking at home?"

With social media, identifying a root cause can be difficult, but Zwanka said he thinks both factors were heavily at play. This specific example also shows how the outside world can interact with trends which

can interact with social media, and back again. It's a big confluence of many different factors that all affect one another, according to Zwanka. Other items that have become popular because of social media trends are hot chocolate bombs, homemade ramen, and dishes that use cinnamon and turmeric.

Zwanka said the concept of an influencer is nothing new to the food marketing world. Dr. Oz and Oprah both have aired many diets over the years as individual influencers. With social media, however, anyone can pose as an expert or even cause trends without meaning to.

One example involves the high-profile podcast celebrity Joe Rogan. He regularly hosts other high-profile individuals and influencers, including psychologist and internet personality Jordan Peterson. Peterson maintains a strict diet of almost all meat and a few greens. He spoke very positively about his diet and how it helped him lose weight and improve his mood when he went on Rogan's podcast, sparking a huge amount of interest in the carnivore diet, perhaps inadvertently.

Zwanka said he wouldn't particularly suggest an all-meat diet any more than he would an all-plant diet. "The best suggestion is balance and a steady approach," he said. "Some trends can be unhealthy and dangerous ... The best retailers have a licensed and registered dietitian on staff, or at least as a retained consultant. A retailer's reputation is too important to jump on a diet trend without subjecting that trend to a professional's scrutiny." ■

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# Coming Out of Retirement to Represent the Independent Retailer

■ BY EPIPHANY COMMUNICATIONS AND COACHING\*

**T**erry Fleming was exposed to politics at a young age. Growing up in Marietta near the Ohio River in southeast Ohio with West Virginia on the other side of the bridge, Fleming began to learn about government and political life from his grandfather and father, both elected judges.

When his father first ran for a judicial seat, the young Fleming helped put up posters on trees throughout the rural county. In high school, Fleming ran campaigns for the student body president and for friends running for prom king, but he never ran for any seat himself. “Working behind the scenes was always my forte,” he said. “I was not a good student except for history and upon graduation from high school, I joined the U.S. Air Force and four years later was honorably discharged.”

Over the next five years following high school graduation, Fleming was in and out of college. “I roamed the country and worked at various jobs until 1972 when I finally graduated from college,” he said. “I sent out letters to a number of people and businesses one of which went to State Senator Bob



Secrest, an old friend of the family and he got me a job working for the Bureau of Motor Vehicles.”

Fleming spent seven years in that position and through a friend interviewed for a job with Ohio Chamber of Commerce selling memberships over the phone, but his real intent was to get a job in politics at the statehouse. “I was good at my day job but at night I went to the bars that legislators frequented, and I learned a lot of political insight and information which I passed on to Chamber members,” he said.

Finally, these same chamber members went to the president of the Ohio Chamber and recommended Fleming for a job, stating “your salesman knows more about legislature than your lobbyist.” Just like that, he became a lobbyist. Fleming spent another seven years at the Chamber and then interviewed and got a job with the Ohio Petroleum Council representing major oil companies. One year later, he was named Executive Director.

“When a bill I’m supporting or opposing works to the benefit of the people I represent, MIRA members, it’s that much more satisfying because you’re helping independent small businessmen.”



Fleming eventually retired, 27 years later, and within two months he was approached by MIRA and accepted the offer to represent the association at the State House. “I really love it,” he said. “When a bill I’m supporting or opposing works to the benefit of the people I represent, MIRA members, it’s that much more satisfying because you’re helping independent small businessmen. MIRA is a great association to work for, they let you do your job without interfering and provide help when you need it and as I said they represent independent businessmen.”

Politics today is totally different than when Fleming first started. “There is so much hatred and divisiveness that it’s very hard to get people to agree on issues,” he said. “There was a time when compromise meant something but now its non-existent.”

Remembering earlier years, Fleming noted that in the 70’s, 80’s and even 90’s democrats and republicans would argue all day and then go out at night and have drinks and dinner with each other, “that does not happen anymore,” he said.

Fleming cherishes his free time. “I’m not a traveler, which my wife would attest to as she travels around the globe,” said Fleming.

“Anyone who knows me, knows you can find me in the backyard pool in the summer with a good book and playful dogs,” said Fleming. “I read three or four books a month. I also tinker with my baseball collection often.”

“I love animals,” said Fleming. “I also spend more time than I should pontificating on Facebook and following politics on social media.”

In the fall, winter, and spring he volunteers at middle school and high school working sporting events. Fleming’s hobby is collecting baseball cards; he has more than 200,000 cards. “My son just presented me with my first grandson late last year, so I look forward to spending a lot of time with him,” said Fleming. “If I had advice for young people in any profession it would be to give small kindnesses, a kind word or praise, and when a favor is asked of you if you can do it then do so. People will never forget small kindnesses.” ■

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



FLEMING IN HIS CAR WITH HIS LATE DOG, SUMMER, AND HIS SON'S DOG, ZOXY BELLE.



FLEMING IN HIS POOL LAST YEAR WITH HIS LATE DOG, SUMMER.





## The Pitfalls of Not Completing Comprehensive Environmental

■ BY BLDI, INC.

It is good common practice to complete a Phase I Environmental Site Assessment (ESA) when purchasing or refinancing any commercial or industrial property and lenders routinely require that a Phase I ESA be completed prior to closing. Many lending institutions have internal lists of “approved”, reputable consulting firms they have experience with to complete environmental due diligence (EDD), including a Phase I ESA, on behalf of their borrowers. However, some lenders may not have such a list to refer to and others may place the responsibility of choosing an environmental consultant onto their borrowers.

If the lender or the borrower obtain a Phase I ESA from a consultant simply based on turnaround time or cost, there is a risk that such a report may not be fully compliant with the revised ASTM standard (issued in late 2021). Several significant changes and reinterpretations were identified in this revised ASTM standard, ranging from how vapor should be included into a consultant’s findings to what historical information for adjoining properties should be discussed, among many other things. Alternatively, an otherwise fully compliant report may have substantial gaps due to an expedited timeline. These gaps may prevent the consultant from drawing meaningful conclusions and adequately evaluating the risk at the property. The most common example of this occurs with obtaining (or failure to obtain) appropriate agency files. Agency files are a required source of information under the ASTM standard, although the sites files that are requested and the type of files reviewed are up to the discretion

of the environmental professional. If the Phase I ESA report is provided without conducting an agency file review or waiting for files to be received in order to meet a faster turn-around time, a consultant may have no choice but to identify a recognized environmental condition (REC) for the potential for contamination to migrate onto the property, as only limited information would be available. However, by waiting for the agency files, it is possible that this REC could be mitigated and the borrower could be issued a “clean” Phase I ESA.

### THE RISK TO THE POTENTIAL PURCHASER

If a fully-compliant Phase I ESA is not completed (which is likely to take longer to complete and cost more following the issuance of the revised standard) prior to purchasing the property, the purchasers liability protections awarded under CERCLA are at risk. Those liability protections assume that the purchaser completed their All-Appropriate Inquiry (AAI), which routinely includes a Phase I ESA, in good faith. Completing comprehensive EDD prior to closing on a property is essential for purchasers. When EDD is rushed or done in a matter to keep costs as low as possible, potential risks associated with the property and/or nearby/ adjoining properties may be missed or improperly evaluated. Uncovering potential (or, in some cases, already documented) environmental issues at a property prior to closing provides better protections to the purchaser (i.e., ability to complete a Baseline Environmental Assessment in Michigan, the ability to negotiate a lower purchase price or seller financing for some of the additional environmental

work necessary), compared to discovering those issues later when the property is preparing to sell or be refinanced.

### THE RISK TO THE LENDER

Historically, there have been situations where completing EDD was waived or otherwise not considered to be necessary prior to lending on a property. This could be based on the loan amount; the known, current use of the property in question; or for a variety of other reasons at the discretion of the lender. In foreclosure, risk is typically evaluated differently. A property that did not have any EDD completed prior to the initial lending, or that had a Phase I ESA completed with significant gaps in its evaluation, may not be sufficient for the lender in those circumstances. It’s possible that a new Phase I ESA may identify previously unknown risks that could have been caught at the time the loan was initiated. For example, there are numerous examples of rural properties where significant environmental contamination was later uncovered due to improper disposal (i.e., dumping) activities which may not be identified without completing a fully-compliant Phase I ESA. In those cases, a new Phase I ESA may be necessary before the lender can sufficiently assess the risk associated with that property. In addition, if the environmental issues identified during the foreclosure process are significant enough, the lender may have considerable expenses related to getting the property in a condition to re-sell and the new price with the environmental issues may be significantly less than what the original loan was for.

Please contact Nichole Mason, EP at BLDI (616) 459-3737 for more information. ■



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**C-STORES PREPARING...**  
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before they return to work if they get sick.”

The pandemic increased sales of face masks and sanitizers at Abbo’s store. It also forced Abbo to change hours in certain departments due to lack of employees which has had a negative impact on sales. There continues to be a labor shortage and that labor shortage is affecting all industries. “Most of our maintenance vendors have labor shortages and getting regular maintenance on equipment has been a challenge,” said Abbo.

During the pandemic, many consumers were hesitant to shop in larger grocery stores, so the convenience store became their fill-in grocery store so they could make less trips to the larger stores. “More of the convenience stores have carried additional staple grocery

items for their customers,” said Skattie. “This trend has continued as we see more staple grocery items being purchased from us. We have also seen an increase in food service sales. As restaurants were shut down, the c-store became the QSR for takeout meals for breakfast, lunch and dinner. This trend seems to be continuing even as restaurants are opening up again.”

Overall volume is up at many c-stores since the pandemic started. “The convenience stores stayed open and operational throughout the entire pandemic,” said Skattie. “They saw more frequent visits by consumers, and higher dollar sales per customer than prior to the pandemic. “Again, food service seems to be growing as consumers buying habits have changed from drive through restaurants to the convenience store.”

Convenience stores enabled customers to prepare for last-minute emergencies but in order to do that,

they must be prepared themselves. “They should continue to operate as they are, but be mindful of the changing consumer buying habits,” said Skattie. “It has almost come full circle from the start of convenience stores with full grocery selection, to becoming more of a snack shop, to once again selling more of the staple groceries.”

The supply chain issues are affecting day-to-day business at c-stores. “The biggest challenge we are facing is getting shipments from our suppliers,” said Abbo. “This has affected our ability to offer our customers the full selection of products that we carry, because our suppliers and experiencing labor shortages, and due to supply chain issues, our ability to keep certain items in stock has been a challenge.” ■

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UBCR, LLC. .... (248) 529-2605

## 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  
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

## TOBACCO ALTERNATIVES

Swisher International ..... (904) 607-7405

## TOBACCO COMPANIES & PRODUCTS

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

## WASTE DISPOSAL & RECYCLING

Commercial Waste Systems (Cardboard recycling buyers)  
..... (219) 663-5678  
Midwest Recycling (Clothing recycle boxes) ..... (313) 304-9099

## WINE & SPIRITS COMPANIES

Benchmark Beverage Co. .... (734) 744-6132  
Cornerstone Wine Distributor ..... (586) 839-2552  
Endless West ..... (313) 590-7491  
Heaven Hill Brands ..... (248) 885-5664  
Luxco ..... (313) 333-4637  
Proximo Spirits ..... (810) 278-0599  
Tito's Handmade Vodka ..... (248) 885-3424

## WINE & SPIRITS DISTRIBUTORS

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

## FOOD RESCUE / FOOD BANKS

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

### OHIO

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

### ILLINOIS

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





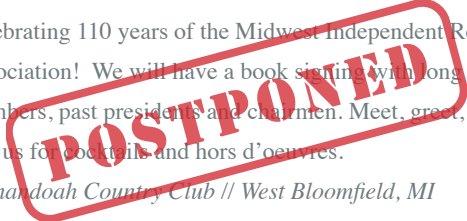


**MARCH 10, 2022**

## HISTORY BOOK VOL. 2 SIGNING

Celebrating 110 years of the Midwest Independent Retailers Association! We will have a book signing with long time members, past presidents and chairmen. Meet, greet, and join us for cocktails and hors d'oeuvres.

*Shenandoah Country Club // West Bloomfield, MI*



**MARCH 29, 2022**

## 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*



**MAY 20, 2022**

## MIRA'S 3RD ANNUAL CHICAGO METRO GROCERS GALA

With a "Saturday Night Fever" theme, enjoy fine cuisine, network, dance and enjoy live entertainment with more than 500 industry leaders. Black tie recommended.

Sponsorship opportunities available.

*The Empress // Addison, IL*



**JUNE 14, 2022**

## MIDWEST INDEPENDENT RETAILERS FOUNDATION'S 14TH 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*

## publishers statement

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