

# THE GRIFFIN REPORT

*of the Northeast a Shelby Publication*

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**MARCH 2024**



## Imperial Distributors makes several leadership changes

Massachusetts-based Imperial Distributors has announced key organizational changes to its leadership team.

Michael Sleeper, who joined Imperial in 1964 and became president and CEO in 1970, has transitioned into the role of executive chairman of the board. Sleeper's entrepreneurial and visionary leadership and commitment to Imperial's values have shaped its success and influence in the industry.



Michael Sleeper, Naomi Sleeper and Joe Kirby

In his new role, Sleeper will continue to provide strategic guidance to the company's board and management team.

Joe Kirby, former president of Imperial, has succeeded Sleeper as the new CEO. Since joining Imperial in 2003, Kirby has demonstrated exceptional leadership in a variety of roles in the organization.

Please see 34

## RoNetco Supermarkets hailed for service



The National Grocers Association honored New Jersey-based RoNetco Supermarkets Inc. ShopRite with this year's Peter J. Larkin Community Service Award.

RoNetco Supermarkets encompasses nine ShopRite locations owned and operated by the Romano family, which has maintained deep ties to the communities they serve for many years.

In 2023, the company's stores raised more than \$141,000 during the ShopRite Partners in Caring Campaign, a cooperative-wide annual initiative to raise awareness around food insecurity.

Please see 34

## Shelby salutes independents at EIA reception

The 141 recipients of Shelby Publishing's second annual Exceptional Independents Awards were recognized March 11 during a reception at the Caesars Forum Convention Center in Las Vegas.

Accompanied by friends and family, 64 of the honorees were on hand, filling the Summit Room on the show floor.

Addressing the crowd, Shelby VP Publisher Maggie Kaepfel thanked the program's sponsors – ECRS, LOC Software, C&S Wholesale Grocers and Southern Champion, maker of BuzzBallz – and reminded the gathering that independents are the backbone of the industry and essential to their communities.



She also expressed gratitude for the company's relationship with NGA, which gave Shelby the platform to host. The awards program, she said, is Shelby's way of shining a light on these businesses that "continue to help feed our communities."

Shelby President and COO Stephanie Reid agreed.

Please see 34

### Inside

Coverage of the Exceptional Independents Awards recipients from the Northeast can be found on s 17-29.

The other Shelby regions will follow in their respective editions, as well as online at [theshelbyreport.com](http://theshelbyreport.com).



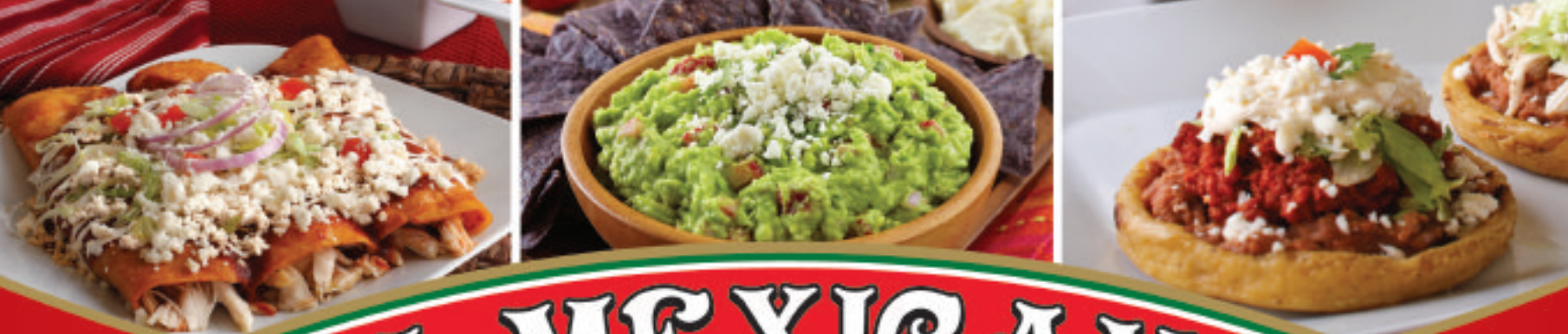
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# THE GRIFFIN REPORT

of the *Northeast*

**MARCH 2024**

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Online at [theshelbyreport.com](http://theshelbyreport.com)

Founder : John Griffin (1931–2014)

## CONTENTS

Executive Interview.....	12
Executive News .....	3
Expo West 2024 .....	6-8
Independent's Perspective .....	16
Market Profile: <b>NEW HAMPSHIRE</b> .....	4
Marketshares .....	14
NGA Show .....	30-32
Organics, Health, Wellness & Natural .....	10-11
Regional News .....	12
Snacks & Candy .....	16

## Note from the VP Publisher

Welcome to the March 2024 issue of *The Griffin Report of the Northeast*. We are featuring our second annual Exceptional Independents Award honorees in this issue, as well as extended coverage from the 2024 NGA Show in Las Vegas.

The EIA event is Shelby Publishing's opportunity to highlight those companies that have demonstrated true, industry-changing innovations. Independent grocers are the lifeblood of the grocery industry, and we are thrilled to recognize them for their contributions.

Independents also are an integral part of the communities they serve and lead the way in caring for the health and well-being of their customers. We appreciate all that they do.

Our popular Women of Influence awards program will be featured in our May editions. Please refer to our website, [theshelbyreport.com](http://theshelbyreport.com), for more information about making nominations. Good luck and happy spring.

Maggie Kaepfel VP Publisher,  
Northeast & Mid Atlantic



The Shelby Publishing team – Maggie Kaepfel, Dannielle Kent, Bob Reeves, Jan Meade and Stephanie Reid – gathered before the company's Exceptional Independent Awards ceremony.

**For more Northeast grocery news, scan QR code**



## EXECUTIVE NEWS

### United Natural Foods Inc. selects Tarditi as next president, CFO

Giorgio "Matteo" Tarditi has been named president and CFO of Providence, Rhode Island-based United Natural Foods Inc., effective April 15, when current President and CEO Sandy Douglas will relinquish the president role but remain CEO.

Tarditi succeeds current CFO John W. Howard, who will leave UNFI following a transition period.

"Matteo is a proven executive who, over the course of his more than 26 years at GE, served as CFO for seven business units, including Renewable Energy and Energy Connections as externally reported segments and large divisions of the power, oil and gas, aerospace and healthcare businesses," Douglas said.

"His deep financial expertise and knowledge of these businesses enabled him to successfully drive operational excellence, efficiency and increased productivity in complex transformations and M&A integrations.

"A certified Lean Six Sigma Black Belt, he also led the development and implementation of processes that have increased forecast accuracy, accountability and continuous improvement. We are pleased to welcome Matteo to our team and look forward to his contributions."

Douglas also commented on Howard's departure.

"We also want to thank John Howard for his years of dedicated service and leadership. John played an instrumental role in the integration efforts following the 2018 SUPERVALU acquisition and in helping UNFI navigate the challenges of the global pandemic. I have greatly appreciated his counsel since I joined UNFI."

In his new role, Tarditi will oversee UNFI's corporate finance, treasury, strategy, financial planning and analysis, tax, accounting, investor relations, risk management and shared services.

"I am thrilled to join UNFI's talented team, renowned for its customer-centric and collaborative culture," Tarditi said.

"I am excited by the opportunity to contribute to the mission of feeding families across North America and to support the customer- and supplier-driven strategy and transformation plan for the company. I look forward to leading the finance organization and partnering with the people who make UNFI the market leader and a company that delivers profitable growth and value creation for shareholders."

Tarditi began his career with GE in 1997 and has held positions of increasing responsibility in healthcare, where he served as CFO of GE Healthcare Japan from 2005-07; in GE Aerospace, where he served as CFO of

Avio Aero; GE Aviation from 2013-15; in GE Oil & Gas, where he served as CFO of drilling and production from 2010-13; in GE Grid Solutions, where he served as CFO from 2015-16; in GE Energy Connections, where he served as CFO from 2016-17; in GE Power Services, where he served as CFO in 2018; in GE Renewable Energies, where he served as CFO from 2019-21; and

in GE Corporate, where he served as group financial planning and analysis leader from 2021-present.

A frequent speaker on global leadership, turnarounds, mergers and acquisitions and talent motivation, Tarditi has a master's degree in finance and business administration from Università Bocconi in Milan, Italy.

UNFI is a grocery wholesaler delivering a variety of fresh, branded and owned brand products to more than 30,000 locations throughout North America, including natural product superstores, independent retailers, conventional supermarket chains, e-commerce providers and food service customers.

UNFI also provides a range of value-added services and segmented marketing expertise, including proprietary technology, data, market insights and shelf management to help customers and suppliers build their businesses and brands.



Giorgio "Matteo" Tarditi

# Grocery industry in Granite State gets creative with employee shortages

## Swipe fees, 'skyrocketing' energy costs among biggest challenges facing NHGA members

by Treva Bennett / senior content creator

As a whole, New Hampshire had a good year economically in 2023, providing a healthy runway for 2024, according to Kevin Daigle, president and CEO of the New Hampshire Grocers Association. He said the state's workforce returned to pre-pandemic levels, and population growth continues to outpace the New England region.

"Unemployment remains low and economic growth is strong. The low unemployment rate is kind of a good news/bad news situation. The good news is that we have a strong labor market, the bad news being a challenge for our businesses who are trying to hire," Daigle said.

"For our industry, inflation has slowed, and we are hearing that workforce issues have improved, with more stores at or nearer to being fully staffed."



Kevin Daigle

According to Daigle, the grocery industry in the state continues to be healthy, with a good mix of chain and independent operators "providing competition and choice to offer a wide range of products that their consumers are looking for."

He added that while labor and supply chain haven't returned to pre-pandemic levels, they have become more manageable. Supply chain disruptions are not as frequent, and when they do occur, there are ample substitutions available.

"On the labor side of things, though 'help wanted' signs can still be found on a number of store fronts, it has lessened to a degree. Our members continue to be creative in working with employee shortages by over-scheduling to make up for lost shifts to adjusting the hours of operation to avoid burnout of the current staff," Daigle said.

He noted that inflation is decreasing, and although grocery prices still remain high, they have stabilized. Some items, such as eggs and vegetables, have seen price drops.

On the issue of retail theft, Daigle said while New Hampshire hasn't experienced the "large smash-and-grab type crimes seen in larger states, retail theft does occur and impacts our retailers' bottom line. Each time they find a solution to an issue, thieves get creative and find another way to steal."

Through loss prevention seminars and periodic updates, the NHGA continues to urge its retailer members to stay aware of scams and systems that thieves are employing so they can prevent these issues before they occur.

Among the biggest challenges for independent grocers in New Hampshire are swipe fees and energy costs. Daigle said the former are one of the biggest expenses independent grocers have outside of payroll, and "skyrocketing" energy costs are continuing to impact NHGA members.

The association offers several resources to assist members in lowering costs, Daigle said. Some of the most utilized programs are NHGA's credit card discounted processing program and energy savings programs for electric and natural gas. The most popular program continues to be NHGA's self-insured workers compensation program, with more than two-thirds of the membership participating.

Through its scholarship foundation, the association has provided scholarships to 1,129 students, amounting to more than \$1.12 million in aid since 1985.

### Legislative news

NHGA is monitoring "the usual and annual" labor, environmental and business issue bills proposed in this year's legislative session.

Daigle said some of the bills taking most of the association's time thus far include one mandating that employers pay a worker's unused earned time when they leave employment, several privacy bills, an alcohol packaging/labeling bill and one that would ban grocers from scanning a driver's license for age verification.

"We continue to educate the legislature on the impacts of these bills on New Hampshire's retail food industry and are hopeful that positive outcomes are weeks away with each of these bills," he said.

NHGA's annual Government Day is scheduled for April 9 in Concord. This will be the first live event since the pandemic began.

"Our members enjoy the interaction with legislative and regulatory leaders and getting to see their association in action, advocating on their behalf," Daigle said.

Overall, he said the state's grocery industry remains strong.

"We work hard to educate our legislature about continuing to be a business-friendly environment for our industry, in addition to the benefits of cross-border sales benefitting members as well as the state."

### Limited access to housing, childcare remain 'key constraints'

New Hampshire's economic growth stalled during the last two years but has shown some signs of improvement. According to a report on the New Hampshire Fiscal Policy Institute's website, labor force limitations have been a contributing factor in the state's sluggish growth.

The key reasons for workforce constraints are expected to continue in 2024. These include housing issues, with an estimated 23,500 housing units short of meeting demand; an average of about 16,000 adults in the Granite State out of the workforce because they are caring for young children; international migrants, who had accounted for about half of the state's total population growth from 2010-22, are arriving in smaller numbers; and more Baby Boomers are retiring.

"While external headwinds may jostle the state's economy, the underlying challenges of limited access to housing, childcare and other resources families need to thrive will likely continue to be key constraints on the well-being of Granite Staters and the economy," the report stated.

New Hampshire's unemployment rate in February was 2.6 percent, according to the Urban Institute's State Economic Monitor.

According to a report from the UI, New Hampshire's per capita income was \$74,663 in 2022, ranking seventh among states. It was above the national average of \$65,423 but below the New England regional average of \$76,651.

The state's median household income (five-year estimate) was \$90,845 in 2022, ranking sixth among the states and above the national average of \$75,149. Its poverty rate was 7.3 percent in 2022 (five-year estimate), below the national rate of 12.5 percent.

While these averages are for the entire state, New Hampshire is composed of diverse localities. According to the report, the city of Claremont's median household income was \$53,697 and its poverty rate was 15.9 percent, while the city of Londonderry's median household income was \$113,557 and its poverty rate was 2 percent.

The state's unemployment rate comes in below the national average historically, and in recent years has been among the lowest in the U.S.

The report lists the major industries contributing most to New Hampshire's GDP in 2022 were finance, professional services, manufacturing, social services and government.



## NGA Show among Trade Show Executive's Fastest 50, keeps exceeding expectations

The NGA Show has been selected as a member of the Fastest 50 Class of 2023, which recognizes rapidly growing trade shows that took place in the U.S. last year, by trade show industry journal *Trade Show Executive*.

The Fastest 50 are ranked in three categories: net square feet, exhibiting companies and total attendance.

"This is a great honor, and we are continuing the momentum since our 2023 show, which exceeded pre-pandemic numbers for attendance and exhibitors," said Greg Ferrara, president and CEO of the National Grocers Association, which presents the show with Clarion Events.

"We just closed the 2024 NGA Show, which set new records for attendee numbers and a sold-out expo hall. We thank all the retailers, wholesalers and suppliers whose generous support of our event contributed to this honor."

Jamie Reesby, VP of generation and grocery at Clarion Events, echoed Ferrara's sentiments.

"The NGA Show continues to exceed our expectations for growth, driven by our loyal attendees and exhibitors. We appreciate being ranked by TSE among some of the finest trade shows in the country," Reesby said.

Other Fastest 50 honorees include Data Center World, ProMat, RE+, FABTECH,

International Roofing Expo, MAGIC Nashville, h+h americas, Live Design International, Motion + Power Technology Expo, ISC West, Manifest and CES.

The 2023 class represents more than 15 million net square feet of paid exhibit space, 48,517 exhibiting companies and more than 1.4 million attendees.

Fastest 50 honorees are invited to TSE's Fastest 50 Awards & Summit, set for May 8-10 at Resorts World Las Vegas. The annual gathering offers fresh educational content from the trade show industry's thought leaders and various networking opportunities.

In addition, the grand award winners – those shows that experienced the highest growth rates from 2022-23 – will be revealed.







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Chris Judkins, Coombs Family Farms, and Daemon Borek, Bascom Maple Farms



Colin Babin and Monica Plawecki, Applegate Farms



Dan O'Connor, Spencer Singer, Jessica Wetzonis and Andrew Crowley, Polar Beverages



Jake Jacobsen, Emily Whelahan and Helge Weitz, Oatly's



Michelle Bratmeyer and Victoria Novo, Goya Foods



Ryan Selleroli, Maggie Leenas and Steve Atieh, Like Air



Gavin Ramsey, Once Again Nut Butter



Heather Haas, Jenny Bostock, Rachel Wells, Kayleigh Swift, Levin Fiske, Lanser Boint and Jennifer O'Malley, St Pierre Group



John Card, Patrick Ford and Jon Slone, Bone Suckin' Sauce



Joseph Basile, Linda Perle, Sheala Teirney, Mark Coleman, Diane Basile, Anthony Basile and Kevin Cyer, Catalina Oils



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Advantage Solutions panel discussion from the Experiential Services Division



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Brooke Burke, Vanessa Hudgens, Rhonda Tagge, Oliver Trevena, Bob Reeves and Nikki Reed



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## After 'big innovation year,' Kevin's expands into frozen aisle

Kevin McCray, founder of Kevin's Natural Foods, was at ExpoWest 2024 to promote the company's move into the frozen aisle. He chatted with *The Shelby Report's* Bob Reeves about the product innovation.

The expansion was a result of "following the consumer around in their daily lives." McCray said customers wanted a complete meal they could take to work.

Initially a multi-serve sous vide meal, McCray said the original packaged proteins or sides feed two to three people. "We looked at how do we take [these] and turn that into a complete meal and then put it all in one container to give to the consumer on the go. That led us to the frozen aisle as our best delivery vehicle for that."

Kevin's Natural Foods launched a line of eight frozen entrees, all with the nutrition attributes the brand is known for, such as Paleo-certified and Keto-certified options. All are sous vide proteins – chicken raised without antibiotics or hormones, grass-fed, grass-finished beef – with no refined sugar.

"As opposed to selling Thai coconut chicken on its own, now you can get a bowl and it has the same Thai coconut



Kevin McCray

sauce you know and love, the same sous vide chicken, but now it's also with cauliflower rice and fresh vegetables. You can just pop it in the microwave for three minutes."

Researching frozen foods, McCray said "the first thing we did was eat everything in the frozen aisle." The products they most liked had protein that was tender and moist, and the sauces were full of flavor. They started experimenting with their sous vide proteins and found that they hold up "extraordinarily well" in the freezer.

For the new line, McCray said the company has opened a new production facility in Stockton, California, about two miles from its sous vide facility. The proteins and sauces are assembled "in a cleanroom into these frozen bowls."

McCray added that 2023 was a "big innovation year" for the company. At the end of the year, it launched a line of raw marinated proteins for this year's grilling season. The chicken breasts are cut into portions.

"Just like in our sous vide meals, no bad bites, fully trimmed nice chicken breast filets in a marinade so you can just slap this on the grill in the summertime."

The company also launched a line of chilled soups at retail, with "the health claims that Kevin's is known for." Currently in about 4,000 retail locations across the country, McCray said the soup line will expand later this year.

## Chosen Foods' new sauces have taste of classics 'without all the bad ingredients'

Chosen Foods, an avocado oil company, was at ExpoWest 2024 to debut three new sauces and a chocolate hazelnut spread. Kendyll Neveau, marketing manager, discussed the new products with *The Shelby Report's* Bob Reeves.

The new sauces are avocado oil based, Neveau said. "We have a chicken sauce, an everything bagel sauce and a burger sauce. They are that restaurant-style sauce but made with avocado oil and the good fats from that oil, cleaner ingredients and are non-GMO."

The packaging for the sauces was designed as a squeezable, smaller size.

"We want people to try it and make sure they love the taste. Then we're hoping to get in a bigger pack later ... It really does taste like those classic sauces you love but without all the bad ingredients."

The chocolate hazelnut spread also is made with avocado oil and has 40 percent less sugar than the leading brand, according to Neveau.

"The first ingredient is hazelnuts. It's creamy and delicious, contains those good fats ... You really get that nice hazelnutty taste," she said. "We don't use any natural or artificial flavors. It's all of those roasted hazelnuts and no palm oil, which is great."

Neveau said the spread will be available in Sprouts this summer and also is available on Amazon and Chosen Foods' websites. The sauces will be debuting at Walmart in early April.



Kendyll Neveau, Chosen Foods

## Riding popularity of fast-growing gallon format, Perfect Hydration prepping for packaging refresh

Perfect Hydration is preparing to roll out the brand's packaging refresh in the next two months, according to Louisa Lawless, chief strategy officer for the Los Angeles-based company.

*The Shelby Report's* Bob Reeves visited with Lawless during Expo West 2024 in Anaheim, California.

"Stratis Group, our parent company, is an incubator of brands, like Perfect Hydration, which is the alkaline water side of our business, and we also have co-organic kombucha – two better-for-you wellness brands underneath the Stratus group portfolio," Lawless explained.

"Perfect Hydration is focused on sustainability, better-for-you hydration and domestic sourcing, which I think is just as important as talking about the substrates in which the packaging comes in. We are sourced locally within miles of every plant that we work for. The premium nature of the water and the soft palate finish is really what sets us apart."

Perfect Hydration announced its brand refresh in November, with the new look debuting this spring. The packaging will highlight the beverage's premium qualities and help promote its position as a brand for active lifestyles

and athletes.

"We wanted to give it a little bit more motion in the way that it showed up in the world, because we have been a national partner of the CrossFit Games, and we continue to focus on sports, active nutrition and fitness," Lawless said.

"The people that are consuming our water, they are looking for function and enhanced fitness. We hope that our packaging refresh will resonate with that change."

Perfect Hydration's gallon bottle has recently become the fastest growing jug in water and premium water, according to Lawless. One reason for this is due to the company's growing distribution in national retailers and large format stores, such as Walmart, Rite Aid, Kroger and its first national retailer, CVS.

The gallon format has become the brand's fastest growing SKU, becoming No. 1 in growth in the last 52-week read from Circana.

"We're also finding that this gallon is showing up in c-stores as well. This is a premium package – it's a large package – it takes up a lot of real estate, but people are willing and able to pay for a premium. It's the only gallon in existence," Lawless said.

"People repurchase [our product] because they really enjoy the experience of the water. They feel hydrated faster is what we continue to get from our consumers."



Louisa Lawless, Stratis Group/ Perfect Hydration

## Caliwater taps into benefits of 'super fruit' prickly pear cactus

Oliver Trevena, co-founder with Vanessa Hudgens of Caliwater, was at ExpoWest 2024 to promote the cactus water brand. He spoke with *The Shelby Report's* Bob Reeves about the origins of the healthy water product.

Trevena said Caliwater has half the calories and half the sugar of coconut water and more health benefits. He added it is a fully sustainable brand.

Trevena said he is involved in the health and wellness space and always tries to eat healthy. When some blood work showed high sugar levels, he realized it was due to his coconut water intake. "Just by drinking two or three coconut waters a day, I was doing around 70 grams of sugar."

This realization led him to seek an alternative with the same or better health benefits but less sugar. Trevena said the solution was in the prickly pear cactus.

Caliwater is sold in cans, with four flavors, but Trevena said they were introducing their new line of kids pouches at ExpoWest.

"That's fronted by Vanessa Hudgens, Roselyn Sanchez, Nikki Reed and Brooke Burke, all incredible mums. Vanessa Hudgens is a mum to be ... They're investors. We have some amazing people involved in this brand because I think once you taste it, it tastes amazing. It's non-carbonated, it's good for you, incredible hydration, immunity, digestion, skin benefits. The prickly pear is like a super fruit that no one really tapped into."

Trevena said he and Hudgens created the brand and are very hands-on with "every single component from the design to the team. It's our brand. It's our baby."

When the brand launched, Trevena and Hudgens wanted to donate part of the proceeds from the business to charity. He said he attended Olive Crest's annual gala last year and met Cher Cech, grocery sales manager at Albertsons, who introduced him to the Olive Crest Foundation.

The donated proceeds support Olive Crest's mission of "preventing child abuse by strengthening, equipping and restoring children and families in crisis ... One Life at a Time."

Through its national cause marketing campaign, Child Abuse Stops Here Network, a portion of the proceeds from Caliwater's kid pouches will raise awareness and funds to help stop child abuse.

"What Olive Crest does for families and children ... is truly second to none," Trevena said. "We stand by that, and we want to raise money."



Pat Posey, WAFC, and Frank Chessman and Nick Benz, Caliwater



## Mary's Gone Crackers highlights gluten-free innovations coming to market

Mary's Gone Crackers has come a long way from its humble beginnings, crafting gluten-free crackers and cookies for more than 20 years.

CEO Michael Finete detailed the Reno, Nevada-based company's history with *The Shelby Report's* Bob Reeves as it showcased several products at Expo West 2024.

"[The] idea came about 10 years before [the company's founding]. It was a psychotherapist named Mary Walden, who found out that she was suffering from celiac disease and decided to find a solution to poor tasting gluten-free options," Finete said.

"It wasn't easy for [Mary] she had to go into debt and had some tough times. But in the end, it really worked out and she brought this great company, brand and products to life. And we're building on her legacy and what she started to take things to the next level."

Mary's Gone Crackers has strong distribution throughout the natural channel. Consumers can find its products in natural and organic stores, such as Whole Foods Market, and in major retailers such as Kroger and Walmart. As the company continues to



Michael Finete

grow, consumers will begin to see the products in more retailers, according to Finete.

At Expo West, the company highlighted several new products that are in market or soon will be arriving on retailer's shelves.

"We've recently come up with some new flavors, some new products, new textures, some great things that we're sharing with the public. And so far, the feedback has been pretty incredible," Finete said.

Mary's Gone Crackers has several flavors of crackers and cookies, including dark chocolate, cheddar and herbal products.

"We have a lot more products and new flavors coming [down] our pipeline, and we're really happy to be sharing our new focus on innovation, working as a team to understand consumers and to bring the best products possible to market," Finete said.

"Our ultimate goal is to make sure that consumers are able to consume healthy gluten-free products without sacrificing taste. I'm very happy with the public's reaction to our new products and look forward to having a lot more of that as we bring these products to market in the very near term."

## GOOD PLANeT offering olive oil cheese

*The Shelby Report's* Bob Reeves caught up with Bart Adlam, CEO of Bellevue, Washington-based GOOD PLANeT Foods, during Expo West 2024 to learn about the company's plant-based cheese products, highlighting in particular its new-to-market olive oil flavor.

"Plant-based cheese is our focus, and our mission is to expand that to as many consumers as possible," Adlam explained.

"At this show, we're launching our olive oil cheese and we've basically rebooted the entire company around this concept."

According to Adlam, the plant-based category as a whole has stalled. With that, so has the plant-based cheese category. The company hopes to cater to vegan and dairy-free consumers by bringing a new plant-based innovation to the market, therefore reinvigorating the category as a whole.

Adlam shared that its products differ from coconut oil offerings, as they "take away the protein that's in dairy cheese and they double the worst part of cheese, which is saturated fat...We're the only ones doing olive oil cheese."

"Our products have almost no saturated fat. So we're taking away something that in dairy cheese – and especially in the plant-based alternatives – is a barrier. We are making it into a positive almost superfood that people are drawn to."



Bart Adlam

## Pasturebird taking chickens back to basics

Paul Greive, founder of Temecula, California-based Pasturebird, is proud to say his chickens are "pasture-raised," thanks to mobile chicken coops.

*The Shelby Report's* Bob Reeves met up with Greive as he showcased the company at Expo West 2024.

"Our system takes flocks of like 6,000 chickens and – using solar power – moves them to a fresh spot every 24 hours, not to return for 90 days. It's this new technology applied to a very old concept of moving animals around like you would buffalo on the Great Plains."

The mobile chicken coops take just seven minutes to relocate. A majority of chickens in the U.S. are in a stationary environment, eating corn and soybeans. What sets Pasturebird apart



Paul Greive

is that its chickens' diets are more diverse, taking in different plants, bugs and seeds.

"Because [our] birds are out running around all day long, they've got something to do and something to forage for," Greive explained.

"In our environment, they're a lot more active and that leads to a lower fat and a more nutrient-dense protein."

Greive began the business after suffering from Lyme disease due to a tick bite, which caused him to look through a new light at the food system and his health. He and his family began raising chickens in their backyard.

"We put 50 birds in our backyard and thought that was just going to be for our family. But friends and different people started finding out about it, so 50 became 100, which became 200. And now we're the largest pastured poultry producer in the world," Greive said.

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# YOUR REGIONAL NEWS

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NEW HAMPSHIRE • NEW YORK • PENNSYLVANIA • RHODE ISLAND • VERMONT

## CONNECTICUT

According to a report from *CT Insider*, supermarket experts say Connecticut is ripe for further expansion by **Aldi** even though the low-price grocer already has 31 stores in the state.

## DELAWARE

The *Cape Gazette* reported that the **Grocery Outlet** at the Rehoboth Mall on Route 1 appears to be nearing completion after nearly a year of renovations. A large banner at the site is announcing an April opening.

## MAINE

Patrick Doak, who manages **the Hannaford** at 15 South St. in Blue Hill has been named the grocer's Store Manager of the Year.

Doak played a role in the opening of the Blue Hill store in May 2023 and led his team through an inaugural summer season under the Hannaford banner.

## MARYLAND

According to a report from *Southern Maryland News Net*, three locations of **Shoppers Grocery Store** in St. Mary's County are being shuttered. They include the stores in the cities of California, Charlotte Hall and Leonardtown.

In a letter from VP General Manager Jeff Bleichner to employees, the stores are expected to close April 27, with the last day for employees May 10. The letter attributed the decision to ongoing financial and profitability challenges.

## MASSACHUSETTS

According to a report from *Energy News Network*, a group of energy equity advocates in Boston is launching a community solar cooperative they say could be a scalable model for reducing carbon emissions and building wealth in disadvantaged communities.

The Boston Community Solar Cooperative is in the pre-development stage of an 81-kilowatt solar project on the roof of the Dorchester Food Co-op in one of the city's lowest-income neighborhoods.

## NEW HAMPSHIRE

Following the announcement by U.S. Rep. Annie Kuster (D-NH) that she does not plan to seek re-election in November, NCA President and CEO John Downs released the following statement:

"For nearly a decade, Congresswoman Kuster has been an unfailing champion of the U.S. confectionery industry, most notably in her role as the founding co-chair of the Congressional Candy Caucus. Her spirit of bipartisanship and dedication to the cause has helped pave the way for manufacturers of chocolate, candy, gum and mints to successfully navigate historic economic and political uncertainty."

Two of the **Hannaford's** 13 District Store Managers of the Year hail from New Hampshire – Suzanne Riel of Goffstown and Tim French of Franklin.

Each honoree is recognized for leadership and communication skills, work to motivate others and implement key change initiatives, as well as their ability to create a safe and open environment for associates and customers.

## NEW JERSEY

**ShopRite** held a grand opening March 17 for a new 80,000-square-foot store with pharmacy in the Glenwood Green Shopping Plaza in Old Bridge that replaces a former location.

ShopRite surveyed residents to learn what they wanted in the new store, with those responses playing a role in the overall design and product selection.

**Wakefern Food Corp.** has launched Wakefern Media Exchange, an omnichannel retail media network that helps consumer brands maximize advertising investments across onsite and offsite media channels through one platform.

## NEW YORK

**Upside** has entered into a long-term agreement and an enhanced tech integration with Schenectady-based **Price Chopper/Market 32**. This comes after their initial collaboration resulted in 500,000 incremental transactions from 50,000 customers.

**Tops Friendly Markets** held a ribbon cutting ceremony March 12 for a recently renovated 57,000-square-foot store that has been a community staple of Grand Island for nearly 50 years.

During the ribbon cutting celebration, Tops presented local community nonprofits with a donation.

## PENNSYLVANIA

**Giant Eagle** has expanded its partnership with **DoorDash** to make on-demand grocery delivery available through all corporate Giant Eagle

supermarkets and Market District locations across Pennsylvania, Ohio, Maryland and West Virginia.

Sunbury-based **Weis Markets** promoted Nick Cicco to VP of pharmacy, responsible for strategy development and overseeing the day-to-day merchandising, operation and management of the company's 127 pharmacies.

Cicco, who previously held the position of senior director of pharmacy operations, also is responsible for managing Weis' team of dietitians.

In addition, Weis promoted Jack O'Hara to SVP of legal affairs and real estate, responsible for the strategic leadership and oversight of the day-to-day operations of the company's real estate and legal teams.

## RHODE ISLAND

The **Rhode Island Community Food Bank** was among the recipients of funds from **Price Rite Marketplace's** annual Check-Out Hunger fundraising campaign, which raised a total of \$47,000 to help hunger organizations in eight states.

## VERMONT

Roland Tessier of Essex was among **Hannaford's** 13 District Store Managers of the Year. He was recognized for leadership and communication skills, work to motivate others and implement key change initiatives.

## WASHINGTON, D.C.

**The National Grocers Association** has welcomed Caroline Sar as its manager of marketing and member engagement and has promoted Max Wengroff to senior manager of government relations.

## EXECUTIVE NEWS

### LOC Software ready to help grocery retailers optimize their performance

As technology has become more entrenched in grocery store operations, some retailers feel they are running more of a tech company than a grocery store. Stephan Mercier, CTO of LOC Software, said he heard this from several retailers during the recent NGA Show, where he chatted with Shelby Publishing's Maggie Kaepfel.



Stephan Mercier

"They have so many components to integrate," said Mercier, noting loyalty, payments, e-commerce, self-checkout, electronic shelf labels and POS. "There are all these things they have to integrate with multiple subsystems that they have to make all work together ... They constantly have to be concerned about the everyday of running multiple systems at the same time talking to each other."

Mercier said this resonated with him because LOC Software offers a solution for that. LOC is a provider of all-in-one retail software for independents in high-volume retail, offering solutions to optimize performance. It has created a network of value-added reseller partners to deliver its retail POS software solutions to its customers.

"We have modules that cover pretty much everything

that I mentioned ... we have modules that do all that within one system."

He said getting that message to retailers – that LOC has the capability of providing a valid all-in-one solution – can be a challenge. "Even though we have a solution that basically addresses the problem of fragmentation in-store, it's still a challenge to bring it all the way down to the retailer."

Mercier said another challenge is the turnover of IT staff in companies. The person who is supposed to be providing the training and support often has not been working for the company long enough to fully understand the technology.

To meet that challenge, he said there needs to be a better way of transmitting that knowledge.

Rene Stai, head of marketing for LOC Software, said its value-added resellers that are certified LOC installers can be that IT consultant and conduct the necessary training.

"We have a ton of VARs right now that are doing lunch-and-learn sessions, where they're super focused on how you can take the software to the next step and improve the customer experience," she said.

According to Mercier, another solution is artificial intelligence. Customers can use AI to read the documentation and provide a simple explanation. "I think that's the way of the future for knowledge transfer, the machine doing

the interface between the written material and the human being that needs to have an answer."

He said this is an exciting time for LOC Software, as it refreshes its technology and transforms into its new platform. "It's like we're starting over in some way of challenging people to engage in our new platform. So I feel very excited, very confident, very engaged at this time of the company's evolution."

Mercier said the company was presenting its self-checkout software, along with a kiosk module, at the NGA Show.

He said the strategy of LOC always has been to offer an all-in-one solution. The company is modernizing its technology to prepare for the future, including running its software from a browser.

Stai said part of the company's rebranding is ThriVersa, a combination of thrive, versatility and applied.

"Thrive is what we want the grocers to do. At the end of the day, you need a product that is going to make your business better, to make you reach those customers. We've also done versatile in the industry. Grocery is tough. You have to be able to compete against the Whole Foods, the Walmarts, and you have to be able to being nimble and versatile in the market. And you're going to apply that to your business needs. And so that's how we came up with that word."

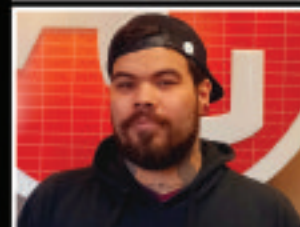
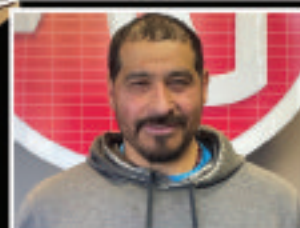




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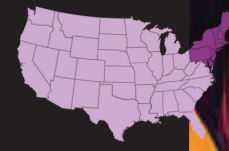


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NAME	NO. OF STORES	SALES	% OF MARKET
SHOPRITE	84	\$3,881,418,000	16.26%
WALMART INC.	106	\$3,338,832,000	13.99%
ACME MARKETS	103	\$3,178,977,000	13.32%
GIANT FOOD STORES	160	\$3,164,401,000	13.25%
WEIS MARKETS	106	\$1,624,365,000	6.80%
WEGMANS	21	\$1,462,805,000	6.13%
REDNER'S FRESH MARKETS	37	\$691,769,000	2.90%
WHOLE FOODS MARKET	16	\$635,143,000	2.66%
TARGET	75	\$467,854,800	1.96%
SAM'S CLUB	18	\$396,727,040	1.66%
BJ'S WHOLESALE CLUB	27	\$367,692,970	1.54%
GERRITY'S SUPERMARKET	10	\$259,720,000	1.09%
COSTCO WHOLESALE	12	\$243,753,440	1.02%
ALDI	116	\$207,914,000	0.87%
FOOD LION	16	\$199,525,000	0.84%
KARNS QUALITY FOODS	10	\$195,000,000	0.82%
TRADER JOE'S	14	\$183,807,000	0.77%
SAVE-A-LOT	40	\$182,891,000	0.77%
BOYER'S FOOD MARKETS	16	\$164,272,000	0.69%
MCCAFFREY'S FOOD MARKET	8	\$158,729,000	0.66%
PRICE CHOPPER	7	\$103,883,000	0.44%
IGA SUPERMARKETS	7	\$94,624,000	0.40%
THE FRESH GROCER	6	\$94,184,000	0.39%
PRICE RITE	8	\$86,013,000	0.36%
GROCERY OUTLET	35	\$79,892,000	0.33%
MARTIN'S FOOD MARKETS	4	\$78,146,000	0.33%
SAFEWAY	3	\$75,343,000	0.32%
STOP & SHOP	3	\$63,840,000	0.27%
SCHIEL'S FAMILY MARKET	2	\$59,390,000	0.25%
ALL OTHERS	308	\$2,133,321,000	8.94%
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>	<b>1,378</b>	<b>\$23,874,232,250</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

To keep our Market Data current, all Retailers are asked to send their store address list in Excel format to [MarketShares@shelbypublishing.com](mailto:MarketShares@shelbypublishing.com). Marketshares are updated as the market changes.

This month's data reflects expanded Market Areas with a \$2 million annual sales threshold. ACV (sales) is derived from verifiable sales volume figures, where available, or through predictive modeling estimations; the primary source of model is the U.S. Department of Commerce-supplied data on sales per employee for each six-digit NAICS code at the county level. Grocery sales figures for mass merchandisers and warehouse clubs were calculated based on percentages found in the companies' annual reports. Data Axle has been compiling B2B data for more than 40 years through 4,000-plus sources where figures are verified daily. It includes 15 million businesses and more than 170 million executive contacts and employees.

## STATE PENNSYLVANIA

NAME	NO. OF STORES	SALES	% OF MARKET
WALMART INC.	126	\$3,299,270,800	14.04%
GIANT FOOD STORES	162	\$3,140,518,000	13.37%
GIANT EAGLE	100	\$2,646,232,000	11.26%
WEIS MARKETS	116	\$1,735,614,000	7.39%
SHOPRITE	31	\$1,724,761,000	7.34%
WEGMANS	20	\$1,389,316,000	5.91%
ACME MARKETS	50	\$1,340,444,000	5.71%
SHOP 'N SAVE	49	\$721,285,000	3.07%
WHOLE FOODS MARKET	16	\$664,485,000	2.83%
REDNER'S FRESH MARKET	34	\$653,725,000	2.78%
SAM'S CLUB	24	\$463,340,160	1.97%
TARGET	77	\$369,106,400	1.57%
GERRITY'S SUPERMARKET	10	\$259,720,000	1.11%
TOPS FRIENDLY MARKET	16	\$256,594,000	1.09%
ALDI	150	\$254,147,000	1.08%
SAVE-A-LOT	54	\$223,095,000	0.95%
BJ'S WHOLESALE CLUB	21	\$202,196,130	0.86%
KARNS QUALITY FOODS	10	\$195,000,000	0.83%
MARKET DISTRICT	6	\$192,933,000	0.82%
BOYER'S FOOD MARKETS	16	\$170,790,000	0.73%
TRADER JOE'S	13	\$160,474,000	0.68%
COSTCO WHOLESALE	12	\$150,137,680	0.64%
KUHN'S QUALITY FOODS	9	\$141,432,000	0.60%
MARTIN'S FOOD MARKET	10	\$134,461,000	0.57%
PRICE CHOPPER	10	\$108,608,000	0.46%
THE FRESH GROCER	6	\$94,184,000	0.40%
PRICE RITE	9	\$92,721,000	0.39%
GROCERY OUTLET	32	\$79,892,000	0.34%
MCCAFFREY'S FOOD MARKET	5	\$79,012,000	0.34%
COMMUNITY SUPERMARKET	4	\$74,465,000	0.32%
IGA SUPERMARKETS	8	\$62,261,000	0.27%
SCHIEL'S FAMILY MARKET	2	\$59,390,000	0.25%
ALL OTHERS	340	\$2,351,417,000	10.01%
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>	<b>1,548</b>	<b>\$23,491,027,170</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

## STATE NEW HAMPSHIRE

NAME	NO. OF STORES	SALES	% OF MARKET
MARKET BASKET	32	\$1,455,550,000	33.25%
HANNAFORD	35	\$821,779,000	18.77%
WALMART INC.	25	\$743,951,040	16.99%
SHAW'S SUPERMARKET	25	\$688,219,000	15.72%
BJ'S WHOLESALE CLUB	8	\$74,812,590	1.71%
ASSOCIATED GROCERS OF NEW ENGLAND	8	\$69,745,000	1.59%
TARGET	10	\$67,492,600	1.54%
WHOLE FOODS MARKET	3	\$60,640,000	1.39%
PRICE CHOPPER	4	\$48,566,000	1.11%
SAM'S CLUB	2	\$44,000,000	1.01%
TRADER JOE'S	3	\$42,344,000	0.97%
HANOVER CONSUMER CO-OP SOCIETY	1	\$26,547,000	0.61%
ALDI	9	\$22,322,000	0.51%
DURHAM MARKETPLACE	1	\$21,225,000	0.48%
RALPH'S SUPERMARKET	1	\$15,623,000	0.36%
LAPERLE'S IGA	1	\$10,781,000	0.25%
ALL OTHERS	50	\$164,426,200	3.76%
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>	<b>218</b>	<b>\$4,378,023,430</b>	<b>100.00%</b>

As an investor, developer or tenant, Shelby Marketshares are designed to give you the most up-to-date industry outlook by comparing current retail market trends in the grocery industry for each local market. Stay on top of changes in your local markets by subscribing to *The Shelby Report* for your region or simply request Market Data for a small fee by contacting Circulation at 888-498-0771 or email [MarketShares@shelbypublishing.com](mailto:MarketShares@shelbypublishing.com).



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## the independent's PERSPECTIVE

by  
**Greg Ferrara**  
President and CEO  
National Grocers Association

### Foundation scholarships offer boost to college students who are our future

The future of the independent grocery industry depends largely upon having talented leadership that can steer it through changing times and dynamic market conditions.

Part of cultivating that leadership is encouraging today's students to become tomorrow's leaders by demonstrating the opportunities and benefits of working in a business that lifts up communities and feeds the nation.

And part of that encouragement is offering support for the education needed to help them grow into managers, directors and executives.

The NGA Foundation, the National Grocers Association's philanthropic arm, seeks to position the independent grocery industry as an employer of choice for college students and is committed to supporting students planning careers with this industry.

Since 1990, NGA and its affiliates have awarded more than \$1 million in scholarships, providing critical resources needed to invest in future leaders.

NGAs members continue to recognize the need to support rising leaders, helping develop a portfolio that now offers 22 scholastic awards.

The latest: Buehler's Fresh Foods of Ohio this year is sponsoring two new scholarships available to college students pursuing a career in the grocery industry. These awards, each worth \$1,000, are available to current full-time, part-time or seasonal employees at Buehler's or their immediate family members.

Buehler's joins a list of NGA members that have seen fit to invest in the future leadership of the industry.

In 2024, that list also includes two legacy scholarships from FMS Solutions, for the children of state and local law enforcement officers; Kimberly-Clark and Mondelez International legacy scholarships; and the Ronnie Horton Legacy Scholarship, two awards given in memory of the late director of retail operations at Brookshire Grocery Co.

There are also scholarships designed to drive diversity in the grocery industry. Women Grocers of America offers its WGA Scholarship as well as the Mary Macey Scholarship, while Ecolab sponsors a Women in Grocery Scholarship.

The Della Noce Family Industry Diversity Scholarship is awarded annually to a female or person of color.

In addition, the Asparagus Club supports five

scholarships, plus there is the Thomas K. Zaucha Scholarship that honors NGA's founding president and CEO.

The Asparagus Club was founded in 1909 as a group bound by friendship, cooperation and fellowship among independent grocers. The club's name symbolizes the concept that while one spear of asparagus standing alone would fall, when tied together in a bunch they can stand upright.

That symbolism holds true for today's NGA. United for a common purpose, independent grocers possess strength in numbers – strength to advocate for our industry as well as to support emerging leaders for the good of our future.

Interested in joining that bunch? Anybody can fund a legacy scholarship, in their name or that of their organization or to honor an inspiring person.

Meanwhile, I invite everyone to spread the word about the scholarships that are available to rising college freshmen through graduate students pursuing majors that can lead to careers in grocery. The deadline is April 15.

#### Online

- Those interested in applying for a scholarship can do so at [webportalapp.com/sp/ngafoundation2024](http://webportalapp.com/sp/ngafoundation2024).
- More information about all the NGA Foundation scholarships can be found at [www.nationalgrocers.org/foundation/nga-foundation-scholarships](http://www.nationalgrocers.org/foundation/nga-foundation-scholarships).

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## SNACKS

### NCSA names inductees into Candy Hall of Fame

The NCSA, which is celebrating its 125th anniversary, has named the Candy Hall of Fame Class of 2024, one of the highest honors in the confectionery industry.

The new class will be formally inducted during the association's annual event Oct. 24-27. The ceremony will take place on Oct. 26, and the weekend's events will be at Signia by Hilton Orlando Bonnet Creek in Orlando, Florida.

This year's inductees are:

- Sylvia Buxton, Perfetti Van Melle USA;
- Edward Dee, Smarties Candy Co. (posthumous);
- Georgia Gallicchio, Thayer Distribution;
- Patrick Hagerty, Performance Food Group;
- Amos Ma, Amos Sweets & Food Co.;
- Matthew Pye, Just Born Inc. (retired);
- Jeffery Rome, Rome Consulting;
- Marlene Stauffer, Blommer Chocolate Co.; and
- Joyce Steet, Mars Wrigley.

"Congratulations to our new class of Candy Hall of Fame inductees," said Shelly Clarey, president and CEO of NCSA and a member of the 2016 hall of fame class.

"We are thrilled to welcome these outstanding individuals who have committed their careers to improving and innovating the confectionery industry. We look forward to formally inducting them into the Candy Hall of Fame this October in Orlando."

Since 1971, the Candy Hall of Fame has recognized lifetime career achievements in the confectionery industry.

Hall members come from all disciplines within the confectionery industry. Honorees should demonstrate loyalty to building and supporting the confectionery industry through active participation over and above job requirements.

Registration for the 2024 induction ceremony will be available later.

The NCSA administers the Candy Hall of Fame and the Kettle Awards. The hall was founded in 1971, and recognizes lifetime achievements in the confectionery industry, with induction based on dedication to the overall betterment of the industry.

Established in 1946 by industry publisher Don Gussow, the Kettle Awards annually recognize a deserving person working within the U.S. confectionery industry for excellence in manufacturing, production and operations.







## Introducing a salute to 'backbone of our industry'

On the following pages, Shelby Publishing is proud to present its second annual Exceptional Independents Awards. Nominations were open to independent retailers, wholesalers, technology and other service providers.

"Independents are the backbone of our industry, and this awards program is an opportunity to recognize them for their contributions," said Stephanie Reid, Shelby president and COO.

"Independents are a vital part of their communities and lead the way in caring for their customers. Our Exceptional Independents Awards shine a light on these businesses that continue to help feed our communities."

Coverage of the award winners will appear by region in the March 2024 editions of *The Shelby Report of the Midwest*, *The Shelby Report of the Southeast*, *The Shelby Report of the Southwest*, *The Shelby Report of the West* and *The Griffin Report of the Northeast*. Awards winners also will be featured on [theshelbyreport.com](https://theshelbyreport.com).

### Adams Fairacre Farms

In 2023, Adams Fairacre Farms opened its fifth location in the Hudson Valley area of New York, providing investment into the community and creating numerous jobs.

Adams is known for growing education and providing opportunities for its staff, a number of whom were promoted into positions at the new location.

Pride in the company's stores and staff shines in every location. At this new store, Adams invested in opening different checkout options to shoppers by introducing self-checkout for the first time.

The company sources most (if not all) of its produce, meats, cheeses, dairy products, flowers and honey from local farmers, demonstrating its commitment to serving the local community.



### Brackett's Market

Brackett's IGA Market, located in Bath, Maine, is truly the heart of the community.

During a December storm, its area of town was without power and it reached out, offering the facility to support local businesses.

"No power for many again today. We are fully functional except WiFi. We welcome our neighbor stores like Loyal Bisquit, J'Adore, Shoreline Nutrition, etc. to use Bracketts as a pickup spot. MSG me we can work it out," the company posted on Facebook.

Brackett's uses its Facebook page almost daily to recognize other businesses in the community, including restaurants, gift shops, skate sharpening and bookstores.

Another example of Kim Brackett helping her neighbors rather than making life difficult for others was a post from the pre-Christmas shopping season: "Yup, it's OK to park in our lot and visit our neighbors."

During and after the mass shooting in Lewiston and Lisbon, Maine in October 2023, the store stayed open to not only provide a sense of normalcy to the community but as a safe place where people could go and be with others.



## Cingari Family ShopRite

The Cingari family and their company, Cingari Family ShopRite, have a long commitment to Connecticut, with deep roots in Fairfield, Litchfield and New Haven counties, where their ShopRite stores are located.

Salvatore Cingari opened Grade A Market in a Stamford storefront in 1943, and his sons soon joined him in the business. The family joined the retailer-owned supermarket cooperative Wakefern Food Corp. in 1991 and began opening ShopRite stores.

Today, the third and fourth generations of Cingaros run the business, employing more than 2,200 associates across 12 stores. The company is headed by Tom Cingari Sr., who has said the family is committed to providing a vibrant and welcoming shopping space for customers.

The company recently completed extensive renovations at stores in Shelton and on Shippan Avenue in Stamford. The work followed remodels at stores in



Fairfield and Norwalk. The family plans to renovate two stores a year until all 12 locations are complete. Changes incorporate new and expanded offerings and updated store departments with contemporary décor, eco-friendly display cases and lighting.

The company is also reducing its environmental footprint through innovative and successful methods. Its 12 stores are composting nearly 100 tons of organic material a month – compost that is converted to energy to power local homes and businesses.

Cingari Family ShopRite also focuses on inventory management and food donations to reduce its waste stream by more than 60 percent.

Connecticut has always been home and that is why the Cingaros believe it's important to give back to the communities that support their stores. The Cingari Family Foundation has donated more than \$5 million to local organizations, with donations to Connecticut food banks and area hospitals, including Yale New Haven and Stamford.

The family donates \$500,000 annually to support local schools, sports teams and first responders in the communities their stores serve, and each year the foundation hosts a golf outing that raises nearly \$2.5 million for charitable organizations.

Cingari Family ShopRite also makes sure that CPR-certified employees are always in their stores. That training was on display recently at the ShopRite



of Fairfield when a customer suffered cardiac arrest. Associates jumped into action and started chest compressions until first responders arrived. Their efforts saved his life.



## Crop's Fresh Marketplace

The Independent Grocers Alliance has announced John and Chad Cropper, owners of Crop's Fresh Marketplace in Downingtown, Pennsylvania, as one of its nine USA Retailers of the Year for 2024.

Crop's Fresh Marketplace has been active in participating in multiple IGA programs, including the IGA national digital ad, the IGA Coca-Cola Institute and the quarterly IGA marketing program to promote itself throughout the community.

The company also incorporates the IGA branding philosophies of Local Equals Fresh and Hometown Proud throughout the store, along with the local community and charities.

Along with partnering with local farms and vendors,

they hold neighborhood events on site. These include car shows, Girl Scout Trunk or Treats, car wash fundraisers for churches and youth organizations and food drive shopping events.

The grocers are progressive in embracing modern technology, social media and digital marketing to help differentiate their store. They have introduced new physical store features, including kitchen equipment, a modern salad bar from Picadeli and an in-house smoker run by the prepared foods department.

Furthermore, Crop's offers a strong assortment of the IGA Exclusive Brands private label throughout the store to aid value-seeking customers. The store exemplifies what it means to be a modern-day IGA.



## Dave's Marketplace

Dave's Marketplace, a distinguished 10-store grocery retailer in Rhode Island, is a deserving nominee for *The Shelby Report's* Exceptional Independents Award.

Operating since 1969, it holds a special place in Rhode Island's heart as the largest independent grocer. Known for fresh foods, gift baskets and unparalleled catering,



Dave's Marketplace offers a unique and delightful shopping experience.

Beyond commercial success, the store's substantial contributions to charitable causes such as the Rhode Island Food Bank, Rhode Island Blood Center, RI Coalition Against Domestic Violence and the Tomorrow Fund underscore its commitment to community welfare.

Dave's Marketplace exemplifies excellence, seamlessly combining outstanding service, community engagement and culinary prowess.







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## DeCicco & Sons

John DeCicco Jr. has embraced technology and automation to the fullest. With full software integration with best of breed software platforms, he's transformed much of the manual effort into full automations. This has helped him streamline operations and continue to focus on the customer. DeCicco & Sons has



also created "DeCicco Cares." At New York-based DeCicco & Sons, they care about the community, as well as national charity organizations. Along with customers, it raised more than \$40,000 in its sixth year as an official sponsor for the American Cancer Society's Making Strides Against Breast Cancer.



## Friends & Family Market

David Welch, the proprietor of Friends & Family in Ellsworth, Maine, since 2017, and Village Market in Fairfield since 2005, stands out as an AGNE retailer who fully embraces the transformative power of technology in cultivating a loyal customer base. Leveraging innovative strategies, Welch employs a loyalty app to showcase deals and foster ongoing engagement with customers between their visits. His use of social media and Facebook campaigns has not only led to notable sales increases but has also contributed to a heightened sense of morale among employees. Welch's stores exhibit a local focus, driven by a genuine passion to bring the best of Maine's culinary offerings to customers. This commitment is evident in his support for local farmers and fishermen, with offerings such as locally sourced sausages and fresh crab meat. In addition, the stores showcase products from regional brewers and distilleries, including a store-branded coffee sourced from a local Maine roaster. Welch's dedication to local partnerships extends to barrel picks, collaborating with distilleries to curate and brand exclusive batches of whiskey for his stores. Beyond commerce, Friends & Family Market contributes to the local community, particularly through its support for Loaves and Fishes food pantry in Ellsworth. The market's involvement includes donations of Thanksgiving turkeys, hosting food drives with local residents' participation and organizing events such as a NASCAR simulator.

In a summer collaboration with Darling's Ice Cream for a Cause, a Maine-based charitable ice cream truck, Friends & Family raised additional funds for Loaves and Fishes. Friends & Family also sponsors a team for the Downeast Horizon's Annual Color Run, a charitable event that raises funds to support children and adults with developmental disabilities. These multifaceted ways of giving back are just a few examples highlighting Welch's enthusiasm for making a positive impact on those around him. Welch and his stores are stand-out figures for their forward-thinking, creativity and inclusivity. He is an extraordinary example of what it means to be an independent grocery retailer and truly deserves the recognition of his contributions.



## Friends' Marketplace

Since purchasing Friends' Marketplace in Orleans and Rochester, Massachusetts, from his father in 2016, Brian Junkins and his wife, Monila, have continued to carry on the family legacy: "Good Food, Good People, Good Times ... life's too short for anything less." Passionate about offering the best in food, wine and plant selections, the Junkins have cultivated a reputation for excellence. Their stores boast fresh produce, an in-house bakery and a coffee bar featuring local New England suppliers that they carefully curate. However, while it may be the exceptional product quality that first draws customers in, it's the Friends' culture that keeps them coming back. Brian Junkins prides himself on putting his employees first and understands that it's the people that set a business apart. In addition to investing in his year-round staff, Brian Junkins has made it a practice to regularly hire local college and international students during the stores' busier months. This not only provides these students with valuable life experience, but it's also a means to continually maintain

fresh perspective on store operations. Beyond being store owners and mentors to the next generation, the Junkins are active members of their community, consistently looking for opportunities to give back.



Their full garden center in Orleans has hosted weekend plant sales to support area nonprofits, and Friends' also offers a Bagging for Good program at its stores. For every reusable bag customers have, they will receive a nickel token that gets deposited into a canister for one of three local charities. Since 2017, they have raised almost \$5,000 for charity through this program. What's more, they have also saved more than 90,000 single-use bags in that time. Lastly, Friends' is an active supporter of organizations such as the NRMS Education Foundation, Cape Cod Children's Place, the Lower Cape Outreach Council and CapeAbilities. Brian Junkins embodies the essence of a socially responsible independent retailer. Through the support of staff, a commitment to quality and meaningful local engagement, the Junkins have elevated Friends' Marketplace to not just places of commerce but integral components of the communities they serve.



## Geissler's Supermarket

Bob Rybick and his team at Geissler's provide incredible service to their community. They are always excited to try new ways to save their shoppers money and keep them coming back for more.







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## EXCEPTIONAL INDEPENDENTS

Award Winners

**Rich Hayes**

Hayes Market  
Waymart, PA



**Stephen Ellis**

Mega Foods



**David Martin**

Piggly Wiggly  
Hilton Head, SC



**piggly wiggly**

**Ryan & Megan  
Olsen**

Piggly Wiggly  
Mequon/Cedarburg, WI

**piggly wiggly**





## Hawthorne Valley Farm Store

Hawthorne Valley Farm Store has been organized as a 502(c)3 nonprofit since 1971. It is deeply committed to serving the community, running three to four Round Up for Charity campaigns annually.



In April of 2023, Hawthorne Valley launched a Double Up Food Bucks campaign to help combat inflationary price increases and to continue to tackle the issue of affordability in the natural food world. Hawthorne Valley looked at programs that could help customers be able to still have the same, if not greater, access to the best quality and healthy food. Jeremy Laurange, director of retail operations, became familiar with the

DUFB program from his work with Rolling Grocer 19, another CATAPULT customer, that had implemented the program.

Shortly after adopting the program, its marketing department reached out to host a press conference with State Sen. Michelle Hinchey, where she announced a \$2 million grant and her support for the program.

Hawthorne Valley is a Demeter-certified biodynamic farm and its campus hosts: an early childhood through grade 12 Waldorf school; on-farm education programs; a 4,500-square-foot, full-line organic/natural foods and grocery store; biodynamic creamery and organic bakery; 300-plus member organic/biodynamic CSA; social, ecological and cultural research groups; teacher education programs; and arts initiatives.

It also leveraged ECRS' eCommerce solution to launch a school lunch program that allows for easy program sign-up and payment, providing funds for Hawthorne Valley to cater food for 85-100 students three times a week.



## Hayes Market

In 2012, Rich Hayes kicked off an annual event that would become a huge part of the community, raising much-needed funds for an animal shelter in Lackawanna County, Pennsylvania.

He had some stops for experience between the time of 2015-19, such as with Bozzuto's Inc. His roles were new business development/store counselor, but regardless of who he was employed by, the efforts he put forth locally would not change.

In 2019, he opened a supermarket in Waymart, Pennsylvania, that was closed for nine months after the previous retailer of the location retired. His dream of owning a supermarket happened at the age of 39, but what he wasn't expecting to happen was to be faced four months later with a pandemic. The timing to open the store couldn't have been better, but the challenges would only increase in the industry.

Hayes says he has to set himself apart from the competition. And he's done that by being committed to the community with Pedaling 4 Paws, an annual charity bike ride.

In August 2023, he once again set off on his 12th year of cycling more than 300 miles throughout eight counties in northeastern Pennsylvania, raising awareness

and a record-breaking \$52,000 for area animal shelters. The results of the bike ride are owed to those that continue to believe in his efforts, from corporate sponsors to the generosity of customers and folks throughout the region.

He's also proud of Hayes Markets' partnership with local school districts, where it supports students with developmental disabilities with employment in the pursuit of an "everyday life."

Hayes was honored to accept the Employer of the Year award from Wayne County in November 2023.

Hayes, a huge animal lover, has three French bulldogs that are known as the official store mascots of Hayes Market. He uses social media to market his company and by having a weekly live segment on WBRE 28. He looks forward to the future of Hayes Market and adding on more miles to Pedaling 4 Paws.



## Jake's Market & Deli

Bruce Bergeron, current owner of 10 Jake's Market & Deli locations throughout New Hampshire and Vermont, has dedicated the past 35-plus years of his career in the convenience industry to support the communities he serves.

Giving back lies at the heart of his ethos, as evidenced by his involvement in several organizations. Most recently, Jake's Market & Deli sponsored the CCBA, a rec center in Lebanon, New Hampshire, dedicated to providing affordable physical fitness and recreation for people of all ages.

Bergeron has also collaborated with the Town of Lebanon to institute a Styrofoam recycling program, addressing an environmental concern that traditional facilities overlook. Both of these initiatives underscore his dedication to fostering a sustainable and inclusive community.

At the store level, Bergeron tailors the product assortment at each Jake's Market & Deli to align with the unique needs of the surrounding area. The diverse offerings include expanded grocery selections, fresh produce, high-quality meats, foodservice and commissary options, a curated beer and wine collection and a compact hardware section.

This adaptive approach ensures that no two Jake's Market & Delis are alike, a deliberate strategy to bridge product gaps and meet the diverse demands of rural

consumers.

Always championing others and supporting his peers where he can, Bergeron also strives to showcase local brands within his stores. To provide just a few examples, Jake's store-branded coffee is sourced from a Manchester-based coffee roaster, several locations proudly carry Brother's Donuts from Franklin and a variety of their products come directly from New England farms.

This commitment not only highlights the richness of local offerings but also demonstrates Bergeron's support for other independently owned businesses. His influence doesn't stop there, however. Serving as a board member of the New Hampshire Grocers Association for over six years and chairman of the board for four, he leverages this platform and his extensive experience to benefit other retailers in northern New England.

In summary, Bergeron embodies the qualities sought for recognition. Through his commitment to social responsibility, he consistently does his part to improve the lives of his customers, peers and the independent grocery industry as a whole.



## Key Food

Key Food stands out as an exceptional independent in the grocery industry with a unique co-op model that unites more than 350 diverse owner groups.

Representing a wide range of owners, each overseeing one to 20 stores, Key Food leverages shared name recognition and collective buying power. The Key Food brand is a household name in the New York metro area and Florida, providing employment

to a diverse population.

Its commitment to community is evident in the tailored product offerings that reflect and enhance local cultures. Key Food invests significantly in staff and technology, incorporating advanced retail tech like registers, loyalty programs and self-checkouts.

It is an integral part of the New York landscape, catering to the varied needs of constituents and leaving an indelible mark on the city's grocery scene.







# Congratulations to The Shelby Report's 2024 Exceptional Independents Award winners!

You set the bar for excellence in grocery operations and business management, helping to define industry best practices while also providing essential products to the communities you serve. The entire LOC Software organization, including our ThriversA retail management platform team extends a sincere thanks for all you do for the grocery industry!



LOC Software is proud to continue to sponsor the Exceptional Independents Awards presented at The NGA Show.

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## Pump & Pantry

Since its inception in 2000, Pump & Pantry in Williamstown, Vermont, under the leadership of Sam Adams, has undergone remarkable growth, doubling in size and evolving into a full-line grocery store.

Pump & Pantry is renowned for its exceptional deli, local selections, fresh food offerings, extensive beer and wine choices and serves as a fuel station, all within a warm and inviting neighborhood atmosphere.



The store received the prestigious *Times Argus* Best of the Best

Readers' Choice Award in 2022 for the Best Convenience Store in Central and Northern Vermont, which is a testament to its commitment to delivering top-notch services and products.

In a strategic move in late 2022, Adams expanded his retail footprint by acquiring Wings Market & Deli in Fairlee, Vermont, from the Davenport family, who had owned it since 1954. Adams is actively engaged in making the stores his own, renovating everything from their product offerings to the floor plan, showcasing his passion for modernizing and enhancing customer experience.

Currently serving as the vice chairman of the Associated Grocers of New England's Board of Directors, Adams leverages his business acumen to share valuable insights that help guide AGNE and the cooperative as a whole. His wealth of knowledge makes him a vital resource for current and future independent retailers, contributing to the continued success and innovation within the industry.

In addition to his professional endeavors, Adams is deeply connected to the local community, exemplified by his active involvement with the Williamstown Foodshelf, a local food pantry dedicated to providing meals to those in need in Central Vermont.



## McCaffrey's Food Markets

McCaffrey's is hyper-focused on serving the community, providing food for people in need, offering financial support to local organizations, participating in local events and sitting on the boards of nonprofits.

McCaffrey's is an exceptional independent retailer by harnessing technology that delights shoppers and simplifies business operations, allowing them to increase profits so that it can continue to fulfill its mission of serving the community.

In 2023, McCaffrey's opened its eighth location in Gladwyne, Pennsylvania. Director of IT Ben Norton led the way in leveraging technology at this location, implementing electronic shelf labels to save on labor costs and adding self-checkout to increase speeds for shoppers.

To better anticipate shoppers' needs and to efficiently run the enterprise, McCaffrey's is using a new business intelligence tool, CATAPULT Cognition, to forecast demand, discover personalized promotions to increase sales and shopper engagement.



## Redner's Markets

Redner's Markets is 100-percent employee, American and locally owned, with a mission of creating rewarding experiences by being a great place to shop and work. It has 44 Warehouse Markets and 22 Quick Shoppe locations throughout Pennsylvania, Maryland and Delaware. The stores provide exceptional customer service and offer the freshest products at the lowest prices.

Redner's strives to exceed customers' evolving expectations with the VP of IT, Nicholas Hidalgo, harnessing innovative technology to enhance the customer experience. Hidalgo is constantly seeking ways to incorporate technology to enhance customer service. The company offers e-commerce that uses AI to recommend complementary items to the shopper. It takes special care in training employees to pick excellent produce, ensuring shoppers have the best online shopping experience.

Redner's supports local businesses and agriculture to strengthen local communities, regularly donating to food banks and charities. Throughout the calendar year, Redner's Markets engages in three company-wide causes; USMCR's Toys for Tots, The American Cancer Society Relay for Life and the Feeding America's Huddle to Fight Hunger.





Chex Finer Foods  
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**Dave's Marketplace**

on winning the  
**Exceptional Independent's Award**

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Kinsley Family  
ShopRite of Brodheadsville



Zallie Family  
Zallie Family Markets



Cingari Family  
Cingari Family ShopRite

**Congratulations to the Shelby  
Report Exceptional Independent  
Award Recipients.**





## Save A Lot

Save A Lot Retail Partner Suzanne Schmitz’s career story is inspiring to aspiring grocers and women entrepreneurs. For Schmitz, her love of grocery began with her first summer job, working in a Save A Lot for one of the company’s independent license owners when she was 16 years old.

Following a few more grocery summer jobs of increasing responsibility, and after receiving a business degree, Schmitz came back to grocery full time and successfully operated one of her employer’s top-performing stores, which was also one of the highest volume Save A Lot stores in the country.

From there, Schmitz leveraged her talents and experience to become a Save A Lot owner, opening her first store in 2010. She now owns and operates seven Save A Lots across New York, with plans to open her eighth in 2024. She also operates four additional stores for another ownership group in the area.

Leading a team of 70-plus store employees, Schmitz believes the key to running a successful business is that a store owner must know her employees and customers intimately, maintain a consistent and hands-on presence and stay involved in the intricacies and local needs of the business.

To this day, Schmitz is always moving around her stores and

working hands on, hoping it goes a long way with employees who see she is right there with them.

As a local owner, she takes pride in her stores by keeping her pricing low and looking for opportunities

to woo customers. She created the concept of a “seafood sale,” bringing in an assortment of out-of-the norm seafood options for a weekend sale to drive traffic. The concept is now widely used across many other Save A Lot owner groups.

Schmitz also recognizes her role in helping to empower others to build a career and even a business in grocery. When she opened her store in North Tonawanda in 2018, she offered one of her long-time employees the opportunity to invest as a partial owner with her.

She also serves as a mentor to other Save A Lot owners, serving on the company’s Retailer Advisory Council to provide feedback and shape programming for the broader network. She is a willing testing participant, including being a part of the test of the Healthy Benefits Cards in stores, a program that will roll out to all Save A Lot locations in 2024.



## Seabra Foods

Seabra Foods, an 18-store grocer with a presence in the New York metro, New England and Florida, deserves recognition as a *Shelby Report* Exceptional Independents Award recipient.

Renowned as a top importer of Portuguese foods, Seabra offers a distinctive array of meats, bakery items and produce, creating an eclectic ethnic experience for savvy shoppers.

Its strategic investment in cutting-edge self-checkout devices and diverse e-commerce options showcases a commitment to customer needs and technological innovation.

Seabra Foods stands out as a leader, seamlessly blending cultural richness with technological savvy in the independent grocery sector.

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A circular gold seal with a black center. Inside the center is a map of the United States with the Northeast highlighted in red. The text "Exceptional Independents Award 2024" is written in gold around the inner circle.

The logo for "WOMEN OWNED" in a bold, sans-serif font, with a small graphic of three stylized figures above the word "OWNED".

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# Congratulations!

Mahmound (Frank) Widdi

## Winner of the Exceptional Independent's Award

Frank Widdi, a name synonymous with excellence in the realm of independent grocery store operation. His contributions, alongside his family, have been nothing short of exceptional, as evidenced by their profound impact on the local community.

Frank Widdi's leadership has not only transformed a business but has also positively impacted the lives of those in the community, making him truly deserving of this recognition.



Mahmound (Frank) Widdi





## ShopRite of Brodheadsville

The Kinsley family, operators of the ShopRite of Brodheadsville, have shared a commitment to their Pennsylvanian neighbors since the 1950s. What started as Kinsley Market, a meat market run by Clayton Kinsley in Scotrun, Pennsylvania, has become one of the most visible family-run grocery stores in the area.

The family joined retailer-owned supermarket cooperative Wakefern Food Corp. in 1998. Billed as “The World’s Largest ShopRite,” the new store was built in 2012 and features antiques in every aisle, a “moo-ing” cow, cafe and nearly 100,000 square feet of shopping space.

Today, third and fourth generations of Kinsleys run the business, employing nearly 400 associates and carrying on the family tradition of providing fresh food and personal customer service to the shoppers they call neighbors and friends.

The Kinsleys recently unveiled a 10-acre solar array with nearly 4,300 panels adjacent to the store. The \$4 million system is expected to supply nearly 90 percent of the store’s energy needs. The store also meets EPA GreenChill Gold standards for sustainable refrigeration,

using only non-ozone-depleting refrigerants.

Christopher Kinsley Sr., president of the ShopRite of Brodheadsville, has said the solar array and other green technologies at the store reaffirm a commitment to sustainability and are the right things to do for the community.

Monroe County has always been the special place the Kinsleys call home. That’s why it’s important to them to give back to the communities that have supported them.

The ShopRite of Brodheadsville has been the top fundraising store for ShopRite’s annual ShopRite Partners In Caring Cheerios Contest for three years, raising nearly \$43,000 for local food banks in 2023.

The Kinsleys also raised \$100,000 at a fundraising dinner for the Salvation Army and collected donations for dozens of organizations and causes, including the American Cancer Society, Red Cross, March of Dimes, Operation Touch of Home and local churches, sports teams, fire departments and food pantries.

The store also worked with the Tannersville Lion’s Club to provide supplies to local schools to help children

experiencing diabetic emergencies.

The company offers associates the opportunity to take courses at a local community college, as well as virtual classes as part of Wakefern’s employee development programs. The Kinsleys also provide a \$5,000 scholarship to a star associate each year.



## Stew Leonard’s

Stew Leonard’s, a standout eight-store wine and spirit retailer and seven-store large-format grocer in New England and metro New York City, is a prime candidate for *The Shelby Report’s* Exceptional Independents Award program.

Renowned for an unmatched selection of wines, spirits, meat, produce and dairy, Stew Leonard’s boasts a devoted customer base. Its large-format stores create an immersive shopping experience.

Beyond a commitment to cutting-edge retail technology, featuring advanced registers and self-checkout devices, Stew Leonard’s is a philanthropic force. It invests significantly in local charitable causes, including the annual Turkey Brigade, water safety initiatives and impactful food drives.

Stew Leonard’s truly exemplifies excellence, seamlessly blending top-tier offerings, technological innovation and a deep commitment to community welfare.



## Vanderbilt Food Corp.

Frank Widdi, a name synonymous with excellence in the realm of independent grocery store operations emerges as a distinguished nominee for recognition. His contributions, alongside those of his family, have been nothing short of exceptional, as evidenced by their profound impact on the local community.

As the proprietors of a locally owned and family-operated grocery business in Brooklyn, New York, the Widdis have not only redefined customer service but have also seamlessly integrated cutting-edge retail technology to create a harmonious and efficient retail environment.

At the heart of Frank Widdi’s nomination is the family’s unwavering commitment to community service. Beyond the aisles of their grocery store, the Widdi family has played a pivotal role in supporting and lifting up the local community. From sponsoring community events to actively participating in charitable initiatives, Frank Widdi has demonstrated a profound sense of social responsibility.

The Widdis’ commitment goes beyond the transactional nature of business, as they consistently invest time, resources and energy into initiatives that enhance the overall well-being of the community they serve. Customer service stands as a cornerstone of the family’s business philosophy. In an era where faceless corporations dominate the

retail landscape, Frank Widdi and his family have managed to carve a niche by prioritizing personalized customer experiences. Their locally owned and family-operated model fosters a sense of familiarity and trust, creating a shopping environment where customers are not just patrons but valued members of an extended family.

This personalized approach has not only garnered customer loyalty but has also set a benchmark for customer service in the independent grocery sector. A distinguishing feature of Frank Widdi’s operation is the adept incorporation of the latest retail technology. In an industry that is evolving at an unprecedented pace, the Widdi family has showcased an ability to adapt and integrate cutting-edge technology seamlessly.

From a modern loyalty platform to innovative fulfillment solutions, the Widdi family’s grocery store stands as a testament to the transformative power of technology in enhancing the customer experience. This commitment to staying at the forefront of retail technology not only benefits their customer base but also empowers their associates, creating an efficient and dynamic workplace.



## Zallie Family Markets (ShopRite)

David Zallie has been expanding his store footprint in South Jersey for several years, and his most recent store opening in Swedesboro, New Jersey, is an excellent example of what supermarkets will look like in the future.

The store includes a large area for selecting and staging buy-online-pick-up-in-store orders and delivery orders. It features two restaurants that are leased to third-party operators and offer hot meals and prepared foods.

The store overall is well decorated and includes a vast assortment of local products as well as national brands. The store team is well trained and routinely interacts with customers both in the aisles and at the checkout.

Like all of Zallie’s stores, the Swedesboro location is bright and clean and features a great variety of local produce. He has also sourced some local specialty items that he knows the shoppers enjoy. Each aisle is meticulously faced, and he works hard to

eliminate out-of-stocks.

Zallie loves being in the stores and engages with customers and team members constantly. He knows all the people working at the stores and if he doesn’t, he gets to know them quickly. It is amazing the number of people who come up to him with a smile. These are employees and customers, sincere in their appreciation of what he’s doing as a supermarket operator.

Zallie has focused the merchandising and marketing of all his stores on connecting with shoppers. This can be seen in the digital and in-store communications, as well as the general approach to engagement. He’s just a great operator and loves what he does.







# New England

We are proud to  
support these  
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David Welch



Sam Adams



**Jake's**

**MARKET & DELI**

Bruce Bergeron



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# 2024 NGA Show

CAESARS FORUM CONVENTION CENTER • LAS VEGAS • MARCH 10-12, 2024



Sean Wright, GVH Distribution; Matt Peters, Piggly Wiggly Alabama Distributors; Robin Flaum, GVH; and Jerry McCann, PWAD



Tony Franchi, Jimmy Lipari and Nick Lenzi, Lipari Foods



John Ross, president and CEO of IGA; Winston Griffin, Laurel Grocery; Heidi Huff, Alliance Retail Group; and Roger Hancock, Retail Infolink



Greg Ferrara, president and CEO of NGA, and Manard Lagasse Jr., president and CEO of Associated Grocers Baton Rouge and chairman of NGA's board of directors



Chris Jones, chief government relations officer and counsel for NGA, and Donny Rouse, CEO of Rouses Markets



AJ Rosenberg and Dina Boyce, Lipari Foods



Kim Eskew, Harps Food Stores, and family (Carol Ann and Karen)



Tech Summit Session speakers at the 2024 NGA Show



John Ross, IGA; Brad Morris, Coca-Cola Co.; and Adam Zimmerman, Ideal by Design House



John Thompson, Matt Beaudin and Mark Heckman, ShoptoCook



Michael Kress, Dumac Business Systems, and Jan Meade, Shelby Publishing



Richard Driskell, FireLake Discount Foods



Chad Weinzerl, Cosentino's



Joe Moody with Banjo (center) and other Diabetes Alert Dogs



The Exceptional Independent Awards





Shawn Tuckett, CEO Webstop, moderates a panel discussion.



Juan Cevallos, The Rose Solution



Bob Reeves, Shelby Publishing, and George Goodwin, RetailMetrix



Blake Wilcox and Peg Hamill, Ivar's Soup Co.



Meredith Richelson, Vicki Bergman and Dan Richelson, Huguenot Sales Supermarket Needs



Don Knickerbocker and Patrick Casady, Amerlux



Patrick Mills and Mark Daniels, Idaho Potato Commission



Nick Nickitas, Instacart



Jody and Brad Shirley, Ocean Harvest Shrimp Co.



Paul Sellow, founder and CEO, Little Leaf Farms



Marc Vegh and Daryl Gillit, Carts and Parts/Unarco Industries



Dion Longtin, CPR Sales/Steeldog



Tiffany Coker and Karen Crouch, The UPS Store



Kevin Ruddy and Paul Ruitenbergh, Retail Fluent Media



John Barker, Lance Nieland, Joe Sawaged and Robert Graybill, FMS Solutions



Trey Rush, Wylder Parker, Imran Afzal, Paul Baker, Bill Gregory and Fred Stackpole, Toshiba Global Commerce Solutions



John Scheffel and Kim and Juan Romero, API+



## Popular industry conference wraps up record-setting three-day run in Las Vegas

The National Grocers Association and Clarion Events are hailing the successful 2024 NGA Show, which brought 3,600 grocery retail industry professionals to the Caesars Forum Convention Center from March 10-12 in Las Vegas for networking and education, plus a sold-out expo hall featuring nearly 350 exhibitors of products and services.

A new attendance record plus a sold-out exhibition hall made this year's show the largest such event in the association's 42-year history.

The show brought together independent retailers, wholesalers, food retail industry executives, food/CPG manufacturers and service providers from all over the United States for the three-day event.

"The NGA Show is truly the place where grocers gather – and gather they did, in record numbers," said Jaime Reesby, VP for generation and grocery at Clarion. "Working closely with NGA and its members, we continue to enhance our offerings, from education to networking, to help grocers navigate today's competitive environment. Initial responses have been glowing, and we look forward to continuing to meet and exceed those expectations."

NGA President and CEO Greg Ferrara added, "The NGA Show continues to grow beyond our expectations, for attendance and exhibitors as well as the extensive on-trend educational offerings. I'm grateful for the companies that took time away from their stores and distribution centers to discover new ideas, products, trends and connections to help them drive more growth. The bar continues to rise as we plan our next show for 2025."

Highlights of the show included:

- The return of the popular Technology Summit and Financial Symposium on Sunday, plus a "Snack and See" session honoring the recipients of NGA's Creative Choice Awards for excellence in marketing and merchandising, featuring celebrity chef Curtis Aikens as emcee.

- A sold-out expo hall, featuring more than 350 exhibitors and sponsors, where retailers and wholesalers discovered products and services covering the entire spectrum from store design to innovative food products, along with thought leadership theater sessions with expanded educational opportunities beyond the main stage and breakouts.

- The opening keynote address presented by celebrity chef Carla Hall, a dynamic entrepreneur, author and Food

Network star whose positive energy, love of food and experiences pushing outside of her comfort zone delivered an enthusiastic kickoff to the show. The keynote session was sponsored by KraftHeinz.

- Multiple networking events including the Opening Reception, Best Bagger Championship sponsored by PepsiCo, and the Closing Celebration at Brooklyn Bowl featuring a Women Grocers of America cocktail hour.

- Co-located with the Independent Grocers Alliance Rally and Indoor Ag-Con.

The education program expanded to offer nearly 50 sessions in main stage, breakout and education theater formats, presented by more than 100 subject matter experts who spoke on a variety of relevant topics.

Those included BIPOC independent grocers, labor issues, food as medicine, refrigeration, employee retention, deli trends and connecting with Gen Z. Other topics included private label, retail media networks, the role of AI in marketing and competitive strategy, brand-focused advertising and omnichannel marketing.

Also covered were succession planning, digital promotions, data analytics, store brands, opportunities in RTD coffee, payment technology, sustainability, reducing theft, trends in insurance and retirement funds and SNAP for e-commerce.

Several awards were presented, including:

- The Peter J. Larkin Community Service Award, sponsored by Kimberly-Clark, to RoNetco Supermarkets of New Jersey.

- The Thomas K. Zucha Entrepreneurial Excellence Award, sponsored by Mondelez International, to Kim Eskew, chairman and CEO of Arkansas grocery chain Harps Food Stores.

- WGA Woman of the Year Award, sponsored by Shelby Publishing, to Marcy Nathan, creative director at Rouses Markets.

- The Best Bagger Championship, sponsored by PepsiCo, with a grand prize of \$10,000, was awarded to Madison Ireland of Harmons Neighborhood Grocer in Utah.

- NGA's Creative Choice Awards, sponsored by Kellanova and Unilever: Winners by popular online vote of the Outstanding Marketer and Merchandiser awards were Michigan-based SpartanNash and Hired Man's

Grocery and Grill in Conway Springs, Kansas, respectively.

- Students from the Food Industry University Coalition presented the Student Standout Awards, honoring their choices for the most interesting and valuable products displayed on the expo floor. This year's winners included Amodex in the Center Store category; Soulful Bee for Fresh Health and Wellness/Pharmacy; Retail Data Systems for Operational Services; Digi America Inc. for Sustainability in Store Design; and Shopic for Technology.

- The Student Case Study Competition, sponsored by UNFI, was won by the team from Cornell University.

The 2025 NGA Show will take place Feb. 23-25 at the Caesars Forum Convention Center in Las Vegas.



Thomas Herrin, Mondelez International, Kim Eskew, Harps, and Greg Ferrara, NGA

### More

Additional coverage of the show can be found online at the [shelbyreport.com](http://shelbyreport.com).

## Rouses Markets' creative director receives Woman of the Year award from WGA

Women Grocers of America presented its Woman of the Year Award on March 11 to Marcy Nathan, creative director of Louisiana-based grocery retailer Rouses Markets.

Presented during the 2024 NGA Show in Las Vegas, the award has been given annually since 1996 to a woman working in the grocery industry who displays strong leadership, a passion for the industry and a commitment to her community. The award is sponsored by Shelby Publishing.

Nathan leads big-picture creative strategy, guiding campaigns, day-to-day creative and branding at Rouses. Leading a talented in-house team, she manages public relations and broadcast media strategy, and is the editor-in-chief of the quarterly Rouses Magazine, which celebrates the culture of food to a readership approaching 500,000.

"Marcy started working with Rouses on the agency side when it had 17 stores, and she has led creative and PR efforts through strategic acquisitions that have seen the retailer grow to 64 stores in the Gulf Coast region and become the supermarket of choice for New Orleans culinary luminaries from Ella Brennan to Paul Prudhomme," said Kristin Popp, WGA president. "She is a creator, an influencer, embraces culture and, most importantly, she's a leader and a trailblazer."

Helping to nurture and advise aspiring culinary stars and young food and beverage professionals, Nathan runs Rouses Markets Pop Ups, which bring an assortment of food and products not sold in store to customers; most of the pop-up vendors are women.

She also founded Women in Grocery at Rouses Markets, which has become a commitment to connect women within the company and provide them with

more opportunities to learn and succeed.

Nathan played a pivotal role in planning and launching a small grocery store within the Guste High Rise Apartments located in Central City in New Orleans, bringing convenience and accessibility to fresh products in a longtime food desert, as well as employment to residents who operate the store.

Further, Nathan is a member of Les Dames des Escoffier, a philanthropic organization of women leaders in the fields of food, fine beverage and hospitality. The by-invitation membership is composed of 2,500 members around the world.

In her hometown, Nathan is a member of the Krewe of Iris, the oldest and now largest all-female Mardi Gras Krewe in New Orleans. In addition, she recently concluded a four-year term on the governing board of Touro Infirmary, New Orleans' longest-serving hospital.

"As a New Orleans native, I truly appreciate Marcy's hard work to bring food and opportunities to consumers throughout the community, especially those who need them the most," said Greg Ferrara, NGA president and CEO. "Her commitment to entrepreneurship, diversity and culture embody the spirit of what it means to be an independent grocer and a servant leader."

WGA is a professional development network for women operating under the NGA Foundation. Its mission is to inspire and empower women of the independent grocery industry through personal and professional development, cultivating connections and highlighting accomplishments and achievements.



Stephanie Reid, Shelby Publishing; Greg Ferrara, NGA; Marcy Nathan, Rouses Markets; and Kristin Popp, WGA president





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RoNetco From 1

The company's activities included in-store food drives, volunteer days for employees at local food pantries, Help Bag Hunger events with community leaders, a bake sale and other in-store fundraisers. The company matched donations, with a \$30,000 gift to a local food bank.

The award presentation occurred March 10 during the opening session of the 2024 NGA Show at the Caesars Forum Convention Center in Las Vegas.

"The Romano family and the RoNetco ShopRite team exemplify unwavering dedication to supporting the most vulnerable in our communities. Their extensive list of contributions speaks volumes about their commitment to service," said Greg Ferrara, NGA president and CEO.

RoNetco's commitment to ending hunger continued throughout the year, with stores raising another \$55,000 in November and December through the Check Out Hunger Campaign. That was enough to provide more than 165,000 meals.

Each week, a RoNetco van picks up bread and other baked goods from stores and delivers them to 19 regional food pantries. The company also supports a Stuff the Bus campaign the week before Thanksgiving to help the Sussex County Social Services Food Pantry. That effort filled five full buses of food and goods last year.

The Romano family's community support extends to many other charities, ranging from blood drives to Hope One, a mobile outreach

program by the Morris County Sheriff's Office to support community members with addiction, recovery and mental health services.

The creation of the Larkin award, sponsored by Kimberly-Clark Corp., was announced during the 2019 NGA Show to recognize an independent retailer or wholesaler company for its unique and strong community service.

"I'm honored to congratulate RoNetco Supermarkets as the recipient of this year's Peter Larkin Community Service Award for its commitment to hunger-related initiatives and far-reaching support to its communities," said Denny Belcastro, Kimberly-Clark VP of industry affairs and customer development. "Kimberly-Clark is proud to continue supporting such an important award."

Belcastro also announced the continuation of the company's partnership with NGA member retailers to donate diapers for needy families to the National Diaper Bank Network, established by its Huggies brand in 2011. Since then, the network has contributed more than 250 million diapers to more than 200 banks across the country, serving more than 225,000 children each month.

"In concert with Kimberly-Clark's 'Better Care for a Better World' commitment, we are honored to collaborate with the National Grocers Association and its independent retailer members to donate Huggies diapers and wipes to the National Diaper Bank to help families with baby diapering needs. Far too many parents struggle to provide enough diapers for their baby or toddler," Belcastro said.

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Imperial Distributors From 1

As CEO, he will leverage his deep industry expertise and dedication to operational efficiency and customer satisfaction to lead Imperial for long-term prosperity.

Naomi Sleeper, representing the third generation of the Sleeper family to lead Imperial, has assumed the role of president and chief growth officer.

Having joined Imperial in 2013, she has played a pivotal role in shaping the company's strategic direction as EVP. With a focus on innovation, continuous improvement and sustainability, her leadership will drive sales and growth to ensure the company's

lasting impact.

"As we embark on this new chapter in Imperial's history, I am confident that Joe and Naomi, working in tandem, will continue to grow our company with vision and purpose," Sleeper said. "I am excited for the journey ahead under their leadership."

Kirby commented, "I am honored to take on the role of CEO and grateful for the opportunity to lead Imperial's talented team. Together, we will continue to drive success for our customers, team members and stakeholders."

These organizational changes signify the company's commitment to its tradition of excellence, enduring partnerships and

future prosperity.

Imperial Distributors' mission is to create and provide compelling merchandising and supply-chain solutions that strengthen its retailers and enhance the shoppers' experience.

Imperial has been recognized repeatedly by *The Griffin Report* as a Best Place to Work, by *The Shelby Report* for Diversity, Equity and Inclusion and in 2023 by the Better Business Bureau of Central New England for Marketplace Excellence.

Founded by Frank Sleeper in 1939, the company has 700 employees and is headquartered in Worcester, Massachusetts.

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Shelby From 1

"We are very honored by the overwhelming turnout for our second annual EIA event and excited to celebrate our award recipients," she said. "It is amazing to see all the operators included in this salute and the pride they share in their recognition for excellence."

The reception was part of the 2024 NGA Show, which ran March 10-12 at the convention center, with countless educational sessions and workshops featuring hundreds of speakers spread across its three-day run.

The recipients of the Exceptional Independents Awards were largely retailers, though they varied in size from single-store operators to regional chains. And they came from all corners of the country, California to Connecticut, South Carolina to Missouri and seemingly everywhere in between.

After Kaeppl's welcome, the sponsors took turns calling the honorees to the stage to receive their awards. Photos and fellowship followed.

**If you have questions regarding our NORTHEAST edition, contact Maggie Kaeppl, VP Publisher, Northeast & Mid-Atlantic at mkaeppl@shelbypublishing.com or call her at 708-565-5350.**

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AG New England .....	1, 13, 29
Allegiance Retail Services LLC .....	27
Bozzuto's Inc .....	36
BuzzBallz/Southern Champion, LLC.....	26
C & S Wholesale Grocers.....	5, 21
Chex Finer Foods Inc.....	24
Dietz & Watson.....	8
ECRS.....	19
Fibre Box Association.....	33
Goya Foods .....	9
Imperial Distributors .....	1, 7
LOC Software .....	23
Lux Ice .....	16
Marquez Brothers International .....	2
National Confectioners Association.....	35
Southern Champion .....	15
US Alliance Paper.....	11
Wakefern.....	25





National Confectioners Association

## Candy and snacks: What's in store for independent retailers?

*In preparation for the upcoming Sweets & Snacks show, Anne-Marie Roerink discusses what issues and challenges are important to independent retailers and what topics they can expect to see featured at the show.*

Roerink is the president of 210 Analytics, LLC, a marketing/research company specializing in food retailing. Roerink authors NCA's flagship State of Treating series and the rotating report series on chocolate consumers, candy consumers and seasonal confectionery consumers.



Working closely with retailers, manufacturers and trade associations, Roerink has developed an excellent perspective on the ever-changing wants and needs of the grocery shopper in a one-size-fits-no-one world.

### What are the current challenges and opportunities for independent retailers?

The biggest challenge is the ongoing pressure on income, which isn't unique to independent retailers. While the rate of inflation has moderated throughout 2023, current food and beverage prices are much higher than pre-pandemic. Combined with everything else that has become more expensive, many consumers are making changes to how they shop. This includes the amounts they buy and what and where they shop. Price and promotions have become much more important and everyday value formats are reaping the benefits.

That said, the current market is not a race to the bottom, and there are many reasons why consumers are willing to spend more. The top three are 1) holidays and celebrations, 2) personal indulgence and 3) brands that have earned their loyalty. For this reason, confectionery and snacks have a unique advantage. This explains why chocolate, candy and snack items have experienced very strong sales over the last few years.

### Holidays and celebrations

When charting out the 52 weeks of sales for either confectionery or snacks, you'll see a surge in sales surrounding major holidays like Valentine's Day, Super Bowl, Easter, Fourth of July, Halloween, etc. Retailers can use the opportunity by leveraging great merchandising, secondary displays and online platforms like social media. There are also opportunities to create promotions and merchandising strategies around smaller, secondary holidays like Memorial and Labor Day, National Potato Chip Day (March 14) or National

Candy Month (June). Shoppers love seeing displays that combine chips and dip or candies in red, white and green next to gingerbread houses. These types of solutions can drive an extra item in the cart.

### Personal indulgence

Over the past few years, we've seen the definition of health and well-being evolve. Just five years ago, well-being focused on physical health and nutrition. But as interest in self-care has surged, consumers have become more likely to weigh physical health and emotional well-being equally. My latest research shows 95 percent of Americans agree that physical health and emotional well-being are interwoven. This is another space where chocolate and candy, in particular, thrive. When consumers are asked about the first thing that comes to mind when they hear the word "candy," top associations are yummy, a treat, celebrations and fun.

Independent retailers have a great opportunity to bring that fun to the in-store or online shopping experience. When visiting Jungle Jim's in Ohio, the store had a giant display by the entrance with candies from dozens of countries worldwide. Ingles showcased candies, nuts and other snacks from local candy makers, and Dorothy Lane had a large assortment of their famous Killer Brownies on display for a snack or gifting tin. It's these kinds of delights that provide shoppers with the opportunity to treat themselves.

### Brands

Despite private label brands making deep inroads in many stores, confectionery and snacks still carry strong brand loyalty. Childhood nostalgia creates an almost unbreakable bond between shoppers and beloved brands. Candy and snacks are also categories where consumers are willing to explore the latest product innovation. Independent retailers can leverage the power of brands to catch consumers' eyes in-store and online.

### Candy and snacks have been high-performing categories for many retailers. How can we get the most out of them?

Candy and snacks are categories that have unique incrementality. Confectionery, especially seasonal confectionery, can prompt spontaneous purchases. Independent retailers who leverage endcaps, secondary displays and the checkout lane are likely to see increases in average cart size. Incremental purchases make the big snack displays during the Super Bowl or Halloween worth the effort. These are key opportunities for retailers to test products at a more aggressive price point and sell at full value throughout the year.

### With shoppers so focused on value, how important is innovation for retailer assortment right now?

There is a reason why the Sweets & Snacks Expo, the candy and snack industries' largest trade event, has grown significantly over the last five years. As retailers realize the opportunity these categories provide, they are making a larger investment in products and trends that align with shopper preferences. While each category has a few big sellers that make up a large part of sales, hundreds of smaller brands represent a smaller but important piece of the sales curve.

That's what makes the candy and snack aisles so exciting: you can find your favorites and browse for new options. Recent research found parents often purchase different types of candy for themselves than they do for their children. The difference may be chocolate versus candy or sweet versus sour. The options in confectionery are diverse and can accommodate any taste preference. For independents, these options – including emerging brands – allow for differentiation.

The other opportunity lies in the seasonality of



candy and snacks. While a wide assortment may be a challenge for some independents, having limited-time offerings can inspire and delight shoppers by creating a scavenger-hunt environment that features new items throughout the year.

### Any category or retail predictions? What trends do retailers need to focus on in 2024?

Looking at the recent trend lines, we will likely see unit/volume pressure going into 2024. But the good news is that consumer demand is still strong, and we should see trendlines moving in the right direction. Providing various pack sizes can be a strong option for 2024. I also suspect we will see a continued focus on more frequent and aggressive promotions.

### Where can retailers get started if they're interested in maximizing candy and snack sales?

Candy and snacks provide a unique opportunity for independent retailers to differentiate, delight and convert. In addition to finding locally produced items, independent grocers should attend Sweets & Snacks Expo to discover the latest and greatest innovations. Having attended myself in the past few years, I always discover items with new ingredients and flavors, both domestic and international. It's amazing to watch these new trends appear. Sweets & Snacks Expo is where they're first discovered.

I've also noticed that innovation in candy and snacks is a preview to flavor and ingredient change in other categories, like bakery. Sweets & Snacks is a great place to see what's on the horizon. There's inspiration galore, and that's what we need to prompt new ideas and shoppers' interest.

### What is the Sweets & Snacks Expo? Where can I learn more?

Sweets & Snacks Expo is the premier business-to-business event for the confectionery and snack industries. It was specially designed for retailers and distributors and is unrivaled in new product launches, business-building solutions and innovations in merchandising. Sweets & Snacks features the latest and greatest in the candy and snack industries. **The show will be held May 14-16 in Indianapolis, Indiana.** Don't skip the pre-show day, May 13, for the Most Innovative New Product Awards Ceremony and the Supplier Showcase, a chance for attendees to see innovations in packaging, machinery, ingredients and more.



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