

BOTTOMLINE



MERCURY PROJECT DESIGN:

*The Retail Design Powerhouse
Reimagining the Future of C-Stores*

MICHAEL BENINCASA, CEO/FOUNDER

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Join us in making a difference!

The MIRA Foundation (MIRF) is committed to empowering the next generation by awarding academic scholarships to exceptional and deserving students. Since 1999, MIRF has provided over \$1 million in scholarships to employees, their families, customers, and financially disadvantaged youth, but the need continues to grow. Each year, we receive more applications than we can fund, and *we need your help!*

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BOTTOMLINE



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MESSAGE FROM THE CEO

BILL WILD
MIRA CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER

It's Time for Michigan Leaders to Show Retailers Some Love and Respect

In the March/April edition of *BottomLine*, MIRA called on **Michigan Governor Gretchen Whitmer** and the state's legislature to show its retailers some love (and respect!) and confront the issue of sunsetting the state's 50-year-old bottle bill. This bill which was originally enacted to battle the growing issue of roadside litter, but now burdens retailers, inconveniences families and undermines public health. While the politicians did not want to talk about this issue, it seems like everyone else did as our calls for repeal created quite the media storm. You can catch all the media attention beginning on page 6.

The ongoing war with Iran has sent fuel costs soaring and squeezed the budgets of American families. As our members know too well, when gas price hikes hit, independents get hit the fastest and hardest. We talk with Karam Bahnam (USA 2 GO) and Moe Salem (Memphis Shell), two large independent petroleum chain owners, about how this crisis affects their businesses and what other independents can do on page 15.

We look at how *Convenient, Healthy, and Ready to Eat Foods Fuel Growth*, the second story in a four-part series geared towards helping independent retailers adopt food service into their operations to help compete in today's ultra-competitive c-store marketplace on page 23.

BottomLine loves to showcase our amazing members and share their entrepreneurial stories with our readers. In this issue we introduce Michael Benincasa (cover) and his talented Mercury Project Design (MPD) team on page 30. MPD is reimagining the future of c-stores and we have the before and after images to prove it! In Michigan we put the spotlight on new MIRA member Wild Bill's Tobacco and their 200+ locations (page 28), and in Ohio we spotlight Memphis Avenue's popular Memphis Pop N Place Shell (page 34).

In an earlier edition of *BottomLine* we spotlighted Nino Salvaggio's Innovative Partnership with Schoolcraft College with their new Livonia Michigan location. On page 20 we take you behind the scenes at their amazing ribbon cutting and share some of the first looks at this amazing new 48,000 square-foot marketplace that blends gourmet retail with hands-on learning. We also welcome Prudential to the MIRA family and spotlight financial advisor and former Detroit Redwing John Ogradnick in this issue's Beyond the Business (page 40). You will even see a rare photo of me in my hockey gear!

Lastly, I want to thank everyone who attended or participated in making the recent 108th Annual MIRA Gala a huge success. If you missed this year's event, we have you covered. We look back at the sold-out event on page 44. ■

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MIRA'S CALL FOR REPEAL OF MICHIGAN'S BOTTLE BILL CREATES A MEDIA STORM

■ BY EPIPHANY COMMUNICATIONS:
COACHING & CONSULTING

Since the start of 2026, MIRA has been leading a high-visibility campaign calling for a repeal of Michigan's 50-year-old Bottle Bill—a law that was created to address roadside litter, now places heavy burdens on retailers, creates public-health concerns, and no longer reflects modern recycling systems. The push has generated significant statewide media attention, with major outlets interviewing MIRA CEO Bill Wild and amplifying the concerns of independent retailers who say the law is long overdue for reform.

A SPOTLIGHT ON A 50-YEAR-OLD LAW

Detroit's *WXYZ Channel 7* helped ignite the conversation with its segment, "Is Michigan's Bottle Bill kicking the can down the road? Some want it gone." The story examined the law's 50-year milestone and the growing call for modernization. Wild, in an interview at MIRA's West Bloomfield office emphasized that the Bottle Bill no longer fits today's realities. "We're asking the governor and Michigan's lawmakers to take a fresh look at a piece of public policy law created for a different era, and was trying to solve a different problem," he told *WXYZ*. "The bill was originally created to address litter along the state's highways, today the bill has turned retailers into de facto recycling centers. That's not why the law was created and that's not what these stores were built for."



“Today the bill has turned retailers in de facto recycling centers. That's not why the law was created and that's what these stores were built for.”

— BILL WILD, MIRA CEO

The segment also highlighted MIRA Board Secretary John Denha and the challenges the bottle bill creates for his locally owned grocery store. John Denha is the owner of Savon Foods, a locally owned grocery store on 7 Mile in Detroit. They don't sell alcohol, but when selling carbonated soft drinks, they're legally required to collect a 10¢ deposit and in return, take back the empties, *channel 7* reported. "It's more of a nuisance and a burden on us because we're selling fresh meat, fresh produce, and then we have this dirty area for the bottles," said Denha.

Detroit's *WWJ Newsradio 950*, in a wide ranging interview, explored whether bottle returns still make sense in a state where curbside and community-based recycling programs have expanded dramatically. Wild reiterated the need for change: "We can recycle more—and recycle better—by moving away from the deposit model and investing in curbside programs or drop off centers. Wild explained that only 10 states have a bottle bill and no state has created one in over 25 years. Wild finished with the statement, "It's time to recycle the bottle bill!"

Plastics News examined the broader policy implications, noting the operational strain the Bottle Bill places on small businesses already navigating labor shortages and rising costs. They focused on MIRA asking Governor Gretchen Whitmer to request the repeal of the bill. Wild highlighted the challenge: "The rules keep changing, but the infrastructure hasn't. Retailers are stuck managing waste streams they were never designed to handle."

FOX 2 Detroit's report, "A push is on to repeal bottle and can deposit returns," showcased the real-world impact on retailers who must store and sort thousands of unsanitary containers each week. Wild stressed the urgency: "We're asking Governor Whitmer and lawmakers to support a cleaner, more efficient approach. Curbside recycling is the future—and Michigan is behind." Wild cited a recent University of Michigan report that showed 75% of the state's residents had access to recycling and 60% had access to curbside services.

The *Detroit News* referenced the mounting cost pressures created by Michigan's bottle bill on the retail industry—pressures MIRA has been vocal about and a recent report levied at \$127.7 million annually—\$34.91 million for distributors and \$92.81 million for retailers.

Wild joined Carol Cain on *CBS Detroit's* "Michigan Matters" to explain why the Bottle Bill no longer serves Michigan's environmental or economic needs. He reiterated that modern recycling requires modern solutions and again called for statewide curbside programs.

On St. Patrick's Day, MIRA Vice President of Government Affairs Jerry Griffin joined Paul W. Smith on *WJR 760 AM* during the station's annual special broadcast. Griffin detailed the operational strain the Bottle Bill places on independent retailers and noted the growing bipartisan interest in reform.

In his interview, on *Michigan's Big Show* with Michael Patrick Shiels, Wild discussed why MIRA is urging lawmakers to reconsider the Bottle Bill. He explained that retailers are effectively forced to handle dirty, unsanitary returnables in food environments and that the system no longer delivers the environmental benefits it once did. Wild stressed that "modern curbside recycling is a better long-term solution for Michigan families and communities."

The conversation also touched on the financial and logistical burdens placed on independent retailers.

On *WILS Morning Wake Up*, Wild highlighted the operational challenges retailers face under the Bottle Bill, including sanitation issues, staffing demands, and space constraints. Wild further explained that the law was created for a different era and that Michigan should follow other states in adopting more comprehensive curbside recycling systems. The segment emphasized MIRA's view that reform would reduce costs and improve recycling outcomes statewide.

Gongwer provided a detailed look at MIRA's policy position, including data showing declining return rates and rising program costs. The article quoted Wild's statement that "the Bottle Bill is outdated and expensive," and that Michigan should transition to modern recycling infrastructure. The story also included counterpoints from environmental groups who prefer expanding the law, illustrating the broader policy debate.

A CALL FOR ACTION

Across every outlet, one theme is clear: MIRA is the leading voice pushing for Michigan's Bottle Bill repeal. The association recently hired top rated Lansing Michigan Public Relations

firm Harbor Strategic to help guide the messaging while MIRA continues meeting with lawmakers, informing the public, and elevating the concerns of retailers.

Wild's message has remained consistent: "This isn't about eliminating recycling—it's about improving it. We want a system that works for families, for communities, and for retailers. Participation in this system has fallen from a high of 95% to nearly 70% and continues to decline. If now isn't the time to discuss a new system, when is it? There was over \$115 million in unclaimed deposits in 2024. This bill has gone from a public policy to remove litter from the state's highways to a cash cow for the state. There should not be a taxpayer or an environmental group in the state that is happy about that."

As media coverage grows, so does public awareness. With lawmakers paying attention and retailers unified behind the effort, MIRA remains committed to leading the charge. "We're not just raising concerns," Wild says. "We're offering solutions." And Michigan is listening.

To learn more about MIRA's efforts on the bottle bill, visit www.midwestretailers.org/Online/News/Michigan-Bottle-Bill.aspx? ■





RECYCLE
— THE —
BOTTLE
BILL

**MIRA IS LEADING
THE CHARGE TO
REPEAL THE
MICHIGAN
BOTTLE BILL**

Since the start of 2026, MIRA has been leading a high-visibility campaign calling for a repeal of Michigan’s 50-year-old Bottle Bill—a law that was created to address roadside litter, now places heavy burdens on retailers, creates public-health concerns, and no longer reflects modern recycling systems.

Introducing our panel of retailers:



JEFF KASSAB
COLASSANTI'S
MARKET
MILFORD, MI



CHRIS KARANA
BOTTLES & STUFF
LIVONIA, MI



BASIM SHINA
IMPERIAL FRESH
MARKET
HAMTRAMCK, MI



JOHN DENHA
SAVON FOODS
DETROIT, MI



RON BARKHO
CASA DEL VINO
TRENTON, MI

Is this something you support? Yes or no.

JK Yes.

CK Yes please! I am raising not one hand but both hands!

BS Yes.

JD Yes for so many reasons! It's a significant burden for retailers.

RB Yes.

Is it expensive? What drives the costs?

JK The bottle and can return machines are constantly breaking down. Every couple of years you have to change them out. They cost \$30,000-\$40,000 each. You are constantly cleaning them and unjamming them as they are constantly

getting stuck. Customers are constantly complaining. I sometimes think legislators think that because you have the bottle machines, that there's no labor. It's actually just as much labor maintaining them and keeping them clean as it is emptying them.

CK It adds extra labor costs just to have employees handle the bottle deposits—and honestly, employees don't like doing it. It's dirty. We end up pulling people away from other important jobs in the business just to manage bottles.

BS Yes it can be very expensive. You need to have extra employees and the machines always break down. They are dirty. You have to constantly clean the area. The bottles and cans come in dirty and that leads to other issues.

JD We're talking about real money here. If you're paying someone to handle the cleaning and the bottle area—two shifts a day—you're easily

looking at fifty to sixty thousand dollars a year. Even at four hundred dollars a week, that's twenty thousand dollars a month in payroll just for one person to manage this. Then there's the machine itself. They cost thirty to forty thousand dollars each. You are constantly cleaning them and unjamming them as they are constantly getting stuck. It costs about five thousand dollars a year just to maintain it—never mind repairs or downtime.

RB Labor, it costs me an extra \$20,000 to \$30,000 a year.

How many additional employees do you have to hire to handle your returns?

JK 2-3.

CK 1 or 2.

ASK THE MEMBER *continued on page 36*

ASK THE MEMBER *continued from page 35*

BS My labor cost is at least \$50,000 to \$60,000 a year to employ people to handle returnables.

JD You need 1 to 2 extra employees at least and it could cost a minimum \$50,000- \$60,000.

RB I need at least one extra person.

How easy is it to get your money back from the state that you pay out for returns?

JK Relatively easy.

CK That is not difficult for the most part, but I have issues more with soda distributors. The beer distributors are more efficient at my store.

BS We get our money back regularly.

JD Getting your money back from the companies is actually the easy part. When the order comes in each week, you just send the bags back with it, and they deduct the amount right off your invoice.

RB Easy.

How easy is it to schedule a pickup of your returnables?

JK Ours are picked up on a weekly basis.

CK Sometimes it's difficult with the soda distributors to get our bottles picked up.

BS They pick them up weekly. It's pretty consistent.

JD It's pretty consistent, every week.

RB It's fairly easy.

Do your customers complain that it drives up their grocery bills? Any other complaints?

JK Customers complain all the time that it drives up the cost of groceries and that the machines are always breaking down.

CK Yes. They say it's very dirty. It's not healthy and it makes everything cost more.

BS The customers don't like it because it's dirty and it runs up their bill at the cashier.

JD They mostly complain because it's dirty and a health concern. Bringing dirty bottles into a store that specializes in fresh meats and produce creates real concerns. In the summer, the smell alone is overwhelming. Then you have the insects. And while we don't have rodents, we spend extra on pest control just to make sure we never do.

RB All the time and it's dirty—that's the truth of it. That's why I always make sure people wear gloves before they touch anything in that area. It's the only way to keep it even somewhat sanitary. It's just dirty, and there's no getting around that.

What would you do with the extra space in your store if you no longer had to accept store returnables?

JK In a grocery store, space is real estate and real estate inside a store is very valuable and expensive. I would add more high profit products or expand into new offerings to meet our customer's demands.

CK Storage, there is never enough room for storage.

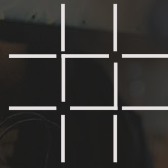
BS There are so many things I can use the extra space for. I can bring in more products. I could use it for storage space. It is valuable real estate that I could use in so many different ways.

JD If I didn't have to dedicate so much space and money to the bottle area, I'd be investing back into the store. I'd add a new department—maybe a hot food section—or expand with another freezer so I could bring in more frozen-food deals. I'd put that money into growing our inventory and offering customers more variety. There's so much more we could do if the space and resources weren't tied up with bottles.

RB Carry more products or add additional storage space.

To learn more about MIRA's efforts on the bottle bill, visit www.midwestretailers.org/Online/News/Michigan-Bottle-Bill.aspx ■





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(TOP LEFT) The 2025 Golf Open brought together 216 golfers for a day of connection, collaboration, and competition. Pictured (L to R) are Ryan Quinlan, MIRA Board Chairman Bobby Hesano, former NFL wide receiver Braylon Edwards, and David Shaw.

(TOP RIGHT) The Golf Open welcomed standout athletes Herman Moore and Braylon Edwards, who joined fellow participants for a day of camaraderie, community engagement, and friendly competition on the course.

(BOTTOM LEFT) El Christiano brought the energy to the course as one of our many display sponsors! Our golfers experienced a wide variety of incredible liquor brands and product sponsors at nearly every hole.

(BOTTOM RIGHT) Featured in this photo (L to R) is Retired Detroit Red Wing Drew Miller, MIRA CEO Bill Wild and Retired Red Wing Hall of Famer Larry Murphy. Other celebrities that attended included Eddie Murray, Frank Tanana, Jim Arnold and George Jamison.

To reserve your spot, contact Kayla Cobetto at (248) 671-9600 or kcobetto@midwestretailers.org.



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A big shoutout to Paul & Nadia Lutfy of Cloverleaf Bottle Shop for being featured on this edition's cover!



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Gas Price Hikes Hit Independents First, Impacting Consumers and Local Economy



■ BY EPIPHANY COMMUNICATIONS:
COACHING & CONSULTING

When gas prices spike, the damage doesn't stop at the pump — it ripples straight into the heart of the local economy. Every extra dollar drivers pour into their tanks is a dollar not spent inside the convenience stores attached to those stations, where margins are already razor thin. For independent retailers, that shift is immediate and painful: fewer fountain drinks, fewer snacks, fewer impulse buys, fewer everyday essentials walking out the door.

High gas prices don't just squeeze consumers — they quietly starve some of the small businesses that anchor our neighborhoods. And no one feels that pressure more acutely than independent operators like Mo Salem, who runs Memphis Shell Stations in the Cleveland, Ohio area, and Karam Bahnam, owner of USA 2 Go Quick Stores across Southeast Michigan. Both men have weathered years of price volatility, shifting consumer behavior, and the growing economic strain on local retailers.

“Consumers are on set budgets, and when gas prices go up, their priorities change. Convenience store items become secondary.”

— KARAM BAHNAM // USA 2 GO

Their message is clear: the public sees the price at the pump — but not the hidden cost behind it.

Few industries feel the impact of fluctuating gas prices as directly as independent gas stations. When prices rise, customer traffic slows, and spending becomes more cautious. The effects ripple outward, touching not only the station but the broader local economy.

“Customers don't always realize how slim our margins are,” said Mo Salem. “Independent retailers carry a lot of the burden when prices rise. It affects every part of our operation.”

Salem has watched customers become increasingly price-conscious — not just at the pump, but inside the store. “Convenience is still important,” he said,

“but when gas prices jump, people start budgeting differently. They plan more. They cut back. Inside sales drop.”

For stations like his, those inside sales are the lifeline. Fuel brings customers to the lot, but the store keeps the business alive. “Fuel margins are tight,” Salem explained. “It's the snacks, the drinks, the everyday items that keep us going. When gas prices go up, those purchases go down.”

Across the state line in Michigan, Karam Bahnam sees the same pattern — and he's been watching it for years. “There's definitely a direct impact on c-store sales,” he said. “Consumers are on set budgets, and when gas prices go up, their priorities change. Convenience store items become secondary.”

■ **GAS PRICES** continued on page 16

GAS PRICES *continued from page 15*

Bahnman said the volatility in fuel pricing creates a financial roller coaster for operators. “In the short term, you might get lucky,” he explained. “If you buy fuel at the right time, you can benefit from the volatility. But long term? It’s a negative impact. The inconsistency makes it hard to plan, hard to budget, hard to operate.”

Even strategies to balance fuel and in-store sales have limits. “To be honest, there isn’t much you can do. Michigan is one of the states that charges higher taxes on gas. Could there be a relief from the state? I don’t know.” Bahnman said. “You can sacrifice a little margin to stay competitive, but that’s short-term. The bigger issue is customer behavior — and that’s driven by the economy.”

CASH VS. CREDIT: A NEW CONSUMER SHIFT

With credit-card fees adding several cents per gallon, more drivers are opting for cash to save money. AAA spokesperson Adrienne Woodland noted that paying cash is one of the simplest ways for consumers to cut costs — and it helps retailers too. Bahnman agrees, but explains that the reaction varies by community. “In some areas, customers see cash pricing as a discount,” he said. “In others, they feel like they’re being punished for using credit. We listen to our customers.

“Independent Retailers carry a lot of the burden when prices rise. It affects every part of our operation.”

– MO SALEM // MEMPHIS SHELL

If there’s pushback, we stick to one price. If they like the cash option, we offer it.” Cash sales reduce processing fees and sometimes bring customers inside — a small but meaningful win for independent operators.

High-volume stations — or owners with multiple locations — often secure more favorable contracts with their jobber, the middleman between the oil company brand and the retailer. Jobbers may offer rebranding funds, rebates, or capital for upgrades, advantages smaller, low-volume operators rarely receive.

“Gas prices always move a few cents day to day, but the real problem is when they swing thirty cents or more at once,” Bahnman said. “For low-volume stations, buying fuel at the wrong moment can leave you stuck with expensive gas while the market drops. It’s horrible for the economy — we’re already seeing delivery surcharges, and what goes up never seems to come back down.”

While operators can’t control global oil markets, they can adapt. Many are turning to:

- At-the-pump technology and QR-code discounts
- Value bundles tied to fuel purchases
- Personalized loyalty-app promotions
- Enhanced services like free air, clean restrooms, car washes and in-store coffee shops
- Third-party apps that attract price-sensitive customers

These strategies help — but they don’t erase the core challenge.

Independent gas stations are more than fuel stops. They are small businesses, employers, and community anchors. When gas prices rise, they feel the shock first — and hardest. As Bahnman put it “People don’t see the behind-the-scenes. But for us, every fluctuation matters.” And as Salem added “We’re committed to serving our communities. We just want people to understand what we’re up against.” ■



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GOVERNMENT RELATIONS REPORT

JERRY GRIFFIN

MIRA VICE PRESIDENT OF GOVERNMENT AFFAIRS

Election Season is Here: Please Consider Donating to MIRA's PACS Today!

In case you haven't noticed—between the TV and radio ads, billboards, mailers, and those digital pop-ups that appear just as you're trying to read an article or watch a video—election season has officially arrived. All of that visibility comes with a price. Every commercial, sign, and sponsored post represents real dollars spent by candidates and their campaigns. Fundraising has become an essential part of the job for anyone running for or serving in elected office at both the state and federal levels.

The year 2026 brings significant midterm elections, with all members of the U.S. House of Representatives and one-third of the U.S. Senate up for reelection. Both Michigan and Ohio will also elect new governors, as the incumbents in each state are ineligible to run again—setting the stage for highly competitive races.

In Ohio, the gubernatorial matchup is largely set, with both major-party candidates already established. Michigan's race, however, remains wide open, with multiple candidates vying to lead the state for the next four years.

Additionally, every seat in the Michigan and Ohio Houses of Representatives will be on the ballot, adding to the intensity and importance of the 2026 election cycle.

Supporting candidates who understand and champion the needs of independent retailers is not only a

priority for MIRA—it is a necessity. That is why we've added convenient credit card donation links to our website: to make contributing to MIRA's Michigan and Ohio PACS easier for members and others who want to ensure policymakers hear and value the voices of small businesses investing in their communities.

The laws governing individual political action committees (PACs) limit contributions to individual donors only; corporate funds cannot be directed to these PACs.

To provide an avenue for members to use corporate dollars, MIRA has established the MIRA Impact Fund, a 501(c)(4) political action fund—often referred to as a Super PAC—which allows us to accept contributions from corporations so members and affiliates can support advocacy efforts through their companies. See page 5 for details.

Why does this matter? When MIRA supports candidates and lawmakers who, in turn, support our members and policy priorities, we amplify the voice of small, family-owned businesses. This helps counter policies that threaten your operations and the investments you have made. It is important to remember that groups advocating for policies harmful to your business are also contributing to office seekers and current legislators.

During this legislative session alone, MIRA has worked closely with other

business organizations to negotiate and reach a compromise on expanded leave and sick-time proposals, advance legislation protecting businesses from frivolous lawsuits, and address the growing influence of third-party litigation financing. We continue to advocate for measures that increase the discount retailers receive on liquor purchases and establish a standard time limit for how long liquor violations remain on a license holder's record. MIRA has also successfully opposed increased taxes on tobacco products and efforts to require retailers to obtain a separate license to sell tobacco.

MIRA also continues to make waves in Lansing with our call to modernize the state's bottle bill by expanding recycling efforts and removing the burden of bottle collection from retailers. This initiative has generated significant media attention, and we will continue pushing for a comprehensive discussion on improving access to curbside and other recycling options.

All of this work requires ongoing communication with policymakers—and meaningful investment in the political process. Your help is needed now! You can strengthen the impact of MIRA's advocacy by contributing to the Michigan and Ohio PACs and the MIRA Impact Fund. See page 19 to donate or visit www.midwestretailers.org and click on the Advocacy tab to or make a contribution. ■



Support the PAC to Advance MIRA'S Legislative Efforts

The MIRA PAC allows the association to financially support candidates that understand our industry and how different policies affect us. The MIRA PAC is our voice in Lansing and Columbus. We need your help in building our PAC. Please consider donating to the MIRA PAC today. Any amount helps. We face a lot of competing interests and need to show our strength. The MIRA PACs are our insurance policy against bad legislation, bad legislators and our megaphone for smart reform. Similar to property insurance, the MIRA PAC can help protect your business and bottom line.

Contributions to the MIRA PAC are used for political purposes. All contributions to MIRA PAC are voluntary.

To donate, please complete this form and mail to:

5779 West Maple Road
West Bloomfield, MI 48322

MIRA

POLITICAL ACTION COMMITTEE

MIRA has three easy ways to contribute:

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Nino Salvaggio Opens New Livonia Marketplace, Launching Innovative Partnership with Schoolcraft College

■ BY EPIPHANY COMMUNICATIONS:
COACHING & CONSULTING

Longtime MIRA member Nino Salvaggio International Marketplace didn't just open a new store in Livonia Michigan—it planted a 48,000-square-foot flag for the future of food, education, and community. When the doors swung open on March 11, 2026, the marketplace instantly became a culinary anchor at Schoolcraft College, blending gourmet retail with hands-on learning in a way no other grocer in Michigan has attempted.

Located adjacent to Schoolcraft College at 18700 Haggerty Road, the bustling

new store offers everything longtime customers expect from Nino's: vibrant produce, premium meats, a full bakery, curated wine and beer, floral, prepared foods, and a bustling café. But the Livonia location carries something more—a built-in partnership with Schoolcraft College that transforms the marketplace into a living classroom.

Both MIRA CEO, Bill Wild, and Director of Membership Sales and Engagement, Michele Halis, attended the ribbon-cutting ceremony on March 11th. "Nino Salvaggios has been a member of our association for years and this location is a true example of

collaboration working for the good of the entire community," Wild said. "We were proud to celebrate this milestone and to stand with members who are genuinely committed to building a strong, sustainable business model."

The idea began years earlier with a simple question from Schoolcraft President Glenn Sarni. "Glenn came to me and asked, 'What do you think about bringing a Nino's to the campus?'" recalled Co-Owner and President Leo Salvaggio. "We sat back, looked at it, and I thought, this could be a can't-miss opportunity."

The first proposed site was on the opposite side of campus, but Leo trusted his instincts. "I came over here and putzed around for about two days," he told Halis in a social media post. "I went back to Glenn and said, 'If we're going to build a Nino's here, it needs to be right next to the Vista Tech Center.' When things are right, they come together. If you have to fight it, sometimes it's just not going to work."

That decision created a natural synergy with the Vista Tech Center—Schoolcraft's culinary and cultural hub—and opened the door to a groundbreaking educational model. Students from Culinary Arts, Supply Chain Management, Social Media, Procurement, and other programs now rotate through the marketplace as part of their coursework. "Students weren't just cooking," Leo said. "They were involved in supply chain, social media, procurement—every aspect of a real marketplace."

Schoolcraft College President Dr. Glenn Cerny called the partnership "invaluable," noting that it gives students a chance to apply classroom learning in a fast-paced, real-world environment.

Prepared foods have become a major focus at the new location, reflecting shifting consumer habits. "This is where the future of food is going," Leo said. "Families are busy. We're cooking for the community, and having the students here helped us be even better at prepared foods."

For the Salvaggio family, the Livonia store is also a continuation of a legacy that began in 1979, when the late Nino Salvaggio opened his first market in St. Clair Shores. Today, the company also operates stores in Bloomfield Township, Clinton Township, St. Clair Shores, and Troy.

Through all that growth, one thing has never changed: the culture. "Customer service is the number one priority," Leo said. "The most important part of Nino's is that smile—'How are you? How can I help you? What can we do for you?' We're a family business, we're a family that runs this business, and you're our family. You eat what I eat."

Leo's own connection to the business runs deep. "I've been doing this since I was six years old—it's just in my blood," he said, remembering childhood days "chasing my dad around the produce."

He is quick to credit the people around him. "I could not do this without my staff," he said. Many have been with the company for decades, including an office manager of 30 years. "The knowledge of the senior staff, passing it down to the younger staff—that's what keeps us moving forward for the future."

As the Livonia marketplace settles into its new home, it stands as both a tribute to the past and a blueprint for what grocery retail can become: community-driven, student-powered, and rooted in the belief that great food—and great service—bring people together.

More information is available at www.ninosalvaggio.com. ■



CO-OWNERS ANDREA SALVAGGIO NICOLELLA AND LEO SALVAGGIO WITH LEO'S DAUGHTER GIANNA



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Questions? Contact Kayla Cobetto at
(248) 671-9600 or kcobetto@midwestretailers.org.

Proceeds from the event's live auction will benefit the MIRA Impact Fund, an initiative dedicated to investing in the future of independent retailers.

With over 115 years of advocacy and support for retailers across the Midwest, the MIRA Impact Fund enhances our efforts in advocacy, education, and community investment. Helping us promote social welfare, economic strength, and retailer empowerment in a competitive marketplace.



CONVENIENT, HEALTHY, AND READY TO EAT FOODS FUEL GROWTH IN THE C-STORE SPACE

Part 2 of a 4-part series on the future of foodservice in convenience retail

■ BY EPIPHANY COMMUNICATIONS: COACHING & CONSULTING

Prepared foods are no longer a side category in convenience retail – they’re becoming a defining one. As consumer expectations shift toward fresher, faster and higher-quality options, distributors across the Midwest are seeing unprecedented growth in grab-and-go meals, ready-to-eat items and premium fresh offerings.

LIPARI HAVING THEIR PULSE ON CONSUMER PATTERNS

For Warren Michigan based Lipari Foods, one of the region’s largest and most influential suppliers, the trend is unmistakable. “Grab-and-go, ready-to-heat and ready-to-eat meals are showing the fastest growth within our portfolio for c-store customers,” said Nick Lenzi, senior vice president of marketing for Lipari Foods. “C-stores are looking for convenient, labor-saving options without sacrificing quality and product integrity, and that’s exactly what’s driving consumer demand.”

Lenzi said the shift toward non-packaged food is accelerating quickly. “Fresh is a key trend,” he said. “Retailers have elevated expectations for cleaner labels and fresh product offerings such as salads, sandwiches, meals and ready-to-eat sides.”

To meet that demand, Lipari is doubling down on differentiated, premium and customizable programs that help retailers stand out. “We offer the flexibility of customized retailer programs to meet their needs with our fresh and specialty offerings,” Lenzi said. “We’re consistently reviewing our portfolio and partnering with new and trending suppliers to bring the next best thing to the market. Our focus has always been on finding unique line offerings that set retailers apart from their competitors – and set us apart from ours.”

One of Lipari’s strongest differentiators is its in-house manufacturing capability. “We keep our portfolio differentiated through our manufacturing facility, JLM Manufacturing LLC, which produces fresh salads, sandwiches, wraps and more for us every day,” Lenzi said.

That includes Lipari’s expansive Premo sandwich line – a cornerstone of its fresh program. “We offer 37 varieties of Premo sandwiches made in our Safe Quality Food (SQF)-certified USDA plant in Warren, Michigan,” Lenzi said. “The product is fresh, never frozen, and has a 14-day guaranteed shelf life for retailers. It frees up valuable labor at store level and helps reduce shrink because of the longer shelf life.”

The lineup includes wraps, subs, croissants, wedges, sliders and co-branded items made with King’s Hawaiian bread. Lipari also produces protein-based salads under its Simple Solutions brand,



■ CONVENIENCE RETAIL *continued on page 24*



CONVENIENCE RETAIL *continued from page 11*

offering retailers a seven-day guaranteed shelf life. “The benefits are the same as the sandwiches — convenience, consistency and quality,” Lenzi said.

As prepared foods continue to reshape the convenience landscape, Lipari is not alone. In the next section of this feature, leaders from Team Sledd share how they’re helping retailers elevate their foodservice programs, streamline operations and meet the growing demand for fresh, fast and flavorful options.

TEAM SLEDD: HELPING INDEPENDENTS COMPETE — AND WIN — IN PREPARED FOODS

While large chains continue to expand their foodservice dominance, Wheeling West Virginia based Team Sledd sees independent retailers making meaningful gains of their own — especially when they lean into simple, scalable programs that meet today’s consumer expectations.

“Pizza continues to be strong,” said Kirstin Myers, Director of Foodservice. “Our component pizza products and low-labor fully topped pizza continue to see growth.”

She noted that tacos and burritos are also performing well across the region, reflecting broader national trends toward global and Hispanic flavors.

For independents, the question is often how to compete with the resources, staffing and marketing power of major chains. Myers said the answer

lies in smart, flexible execution rather than trying to replicate a full Quick Service Restaurant (QSR) model. “Hot grab-n-go is gaining traction as an impulse sale versus a planned sale,” she said. “Small hot grab-n-go units can be filled with breakfast sandwiches and breakfast pizza in the morning, then filled with pizza, burgers and chicken that can easily be heated up in a \$200 oven for the afternoon and evening.”

She emphasized that fresh, turnkey programs are leveling the playing field for smaller operators. “Offer fresh products. Our STAKS sandwich program is ideal for small operators,” he said. “It’s turnkey.”

The program’s pre-proportioned, frozen-to-thaw format helps retailers control waste, reduce labor and maintain consistency — all critical advantages for stores with limited staffing. Beyond operational ease, Myers said independents can differentiate themselves by owning a

signature item. “Have a foodservice item that is unique to your location that provides value. Be the best at it,” she said. “Examples include ‘Home of the \$5.99 Double Burger’ or ‘Home of the \$9.99 Whole Pizza.’”

Looking ahead, Myers expects global flavors to play a larger role in convenience foodservice. “Global foods are gaining in popularity. Asians are leading the way,” she said. “Team Sledd has both prepackaged Asian products as well as prepared hot Asian products.”

Southwest and Hispanic items — burritos, tacos and taquitos — are also poised for continued growth.

She further pointed to the latest NACS data as a wake-up call for independents evaluating their foodservice strategy. “Nearly 40% of in-store gross profit dollars are generated by foodservice,” she said. “These numbers are what large chains like Sheetz and Wawa are experiencing. This is the benchmark independent retailers should be using when evaluating their foodservice performance. Independent retailers need a strategy to move in this direction.”

To support that shift, Team Sledd works directly with retailers to assess their current offering and map out a path forward. “Foodservice is a spectrum,” Myers said. “It starts with simple prepackaged grab-n-go items, moves into low-labor foodservice programs, then component programs, and finally branded programs. Team Sledd can sit down with a retailer, evaluate where they are at, and provide numerous solutions to help them achieve their foodservice goals.” ■



Drink in America





OHIO LOBBYIST REPORT

WILLIAM SCHWARTZ
PAPPAS & ASSOCIATES

The \$24 Billion Question: Is Ohio Ready for the End of Property Taxes?

As all eyes focus on the 2026 midterm elections, a political earthquake is gaining momentum in the Buckeye State. While the headlines are focused on the gubernatorial race between Republican Vivek Ramaswamy and Democrat Amy Acton or the U.S. Senate race between incumbent Republican Jon Husted and challenger Sherrod Brown, another issue has emerged. Perhaps the most consequential choice facing Ohio voters in November may not be a person, but rather a constitutional amendment to eliminate property taxes in the Buckeye State.

Over the past year, a grassroots movement led by Lake County resident Brian Massie, Lake County Commissioner John Plecnik, and others have been working to eliminate the state's property tax, which generates \$24 billion in revenue annually. Supporters have been gathering signatures to place the proposal as a constitutional amendment on the November 2026 general election ballot. To place the issue on the ballot, backers must obtain 413,488 valid signatures from at least 44 of the state's 88 counties by July 1, 2026. If placed on the ballot and approved by a majority of voters, the revenue loss would take place in 2028.

On April 23, 2026, Massie, Plecnik, and others announced they had secured 305,000 signatures – short of the required threshold – but time still remains to gather additional signatures. Massie indicated that same day that

“To offset the revenue loss if the amendment passes, the state would need to more-than-quadruple the current 2.75% income tax rate to approximately 15%, making it the highest in the country. Alternatively, the state's 5.75% sales tax would have to triple to nearly 20%.”

his organization, “Ax Ohio Tax”, would announce in mid-June the status of their coalition and whether they will bank the existing signatures for a 2027 election or roll the dice and submit the signatures for the 2026 election. To date, the elimination effort remains a grassroots phenomenon with no apparent funding support. The proponents' coalition website is <https://axohtax.com>.

In response to this effort, a coalition of organizations representing local governments, teachers, schools, business organizations, nonprofits and others have organized a public education campaign to fight back against the proposal. Titled “Ohioans to Protect Public Services,” the opposition campaign launched on April 16, 2026, with the goal of educating the public about the impact of eliminating billions of dollars in local tax revenue used for policemen, firefighters, teachers, libraries, and more. The coalition website is www.protectpublicservices.org.

Lawmakers and state elected officials are also getting involved, though to varying degrees. The General Assembly in 2025 passed a suite of five property tax bills that, when taken together, represent

more than \$3 billion in taxpayer savings through property tax reform.

Meanwhile, Governor Mike DeWine's budget chief, Director Kim Murnieks, issued a memo on February 4, 2026, outlining the consequences of the amendment if passed. Murnieks explained that the \$24 billion in property tax revenue is roughly equal to the combined revenue generated from the state's sales tax (\$14 billion) income tax (\$10.5 billion). To offset the revenue loss if the amendment passes, the state would need to more-than-quadruple the current 2.75% income tax rate to approximately 15%, making it the highest in the country. Alternatively, the state's 5.75% sales tax would have to triple to nearly 20%. Both changes would have an immensely negative impact on businesses in Ohio, particularly those in bordering counties along the Indiana, Kentucky, Michigan, Pennsylvania, and West Virginia borders.

Whether this proposal ultimately reaches the ballot in 2026 or a future election, it has already begun to reshape the conversation across the state about taxation, spending on public services, and the number of local governments and school districts in Ohio. ■



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WILD BILL'S[®] TOBACCO

A Michigan Success Story Built on Community, Culture, and Customer Loyalty

■ BY EPIPHANY COMMUNICATIONS:
COACHING & CONSULTING

Walk into any Wild Bill's Tobacco location across Michigan, and you'll feel it immediately — the energy, the familiarity, the sense that this isn't just another retail stop, but a brand with deep roots and a loyal following. What began as a single store in 1994 in the city of Roseville as "Smoker's Outlet" has grown into the largest brick and mortar cigar company in

the country and the second-largest tobacco retailer in the United States. The company founded by Mike, John and Luke Samona is known for its expansive product selection, competitive pricing, and commitment to the customer experience.

At the center of that growth is Mike Samona whose leadership and vision have helped shape Wild Bill's into the powerhouse it is today. After 15 years as the VP of Operations for a large Quick Service Restaurant (QSR) Company,

Chris Konja recently joined the Wild Bill's team following a two- hour conversation with Mike Samona.

"His knowledge of business, his vision, work ethic, generosity and sincerity, won me over," said Konja, COO. "He doesn't just focus on his own success, but he truly cares about others succeeding."

Founded on the belief that customers deserve both value and variety, Wild Bill's has built a reputation for offering one of the most comprehensive



selections in the industry — from premium cigars and roll-your-own products to glass, and accessories. But what truly sets the brand apart is its culture: a focus on relationships, consistency, and creating a welcoming environment for every customer who walks through the door.

For Mike, it's not just about product, service, or image—it's about hospitality. His philosophy is simple: every patron is more than a transaction; they are a guest of Wild Bill's, deserving of respect, warmth, and genuine care.

"We don't really use the word customer," said Konja. "They are our guests. We treat every person who walks through our doors the same way we would treat someone entering our own home."

With 245 locations and more to come, Wild Bill's continues to expand while staying true to its Michigan roots. The company's growth is fueled not just by market demand, but by a leadership team that understands the importance of community connection and staying ahead of industry trends.

"We are looking to grow outside of Michigan with a franchisee model," said Konja. "The company's growth model is franchisee based and has a few

markets underway including Tennessee, Arizona and Kansas City, Missouri."

If people are open to franchises, they can reach out to the team. Wild Bill's corporation is looking to open 15 to 20 more of their own stores and 15 to 20 franchise locations in 2026.

When Chris Konja talks about the future of Wild Bill's, he makes it clear that the guest experience is driving every innovation. "We're not just a walk-in service anymore," Konja explained. "Our e-commerce platform and app will be fully integrated with our point of sales (POS). All of our technology—from ordering to inventory—is designed to make the experience smoother and better for our guests."

This upgraded system is part of a larger digital strategy planned for launch in 2026, aimed at creating a seamless, modern, guest-centered experience. As Wild Bill's evolves, one thing remains constant: its commitment to delivering an unmatched retail experience. Whether you're a longtime guest or a first-time visitor, the brand's dedication to service, selection, and community is unmistakable — and it's a big part of why Wild Bill's has become a household name across the region. ■



WILD BILL'S TOBACCO

Location: Headquartered in Troy, MI

Founded: 1994

Employees: ~1,100

MIRA Member Since: 2026

Slogan: "More Options, Better Experience, Your Trusted Source for Premium Tobacco and More!"

Franchise Info: franchising@wildbillstobacco.com

www.wildbillstobacco.com





Crave Marketplace

MERCURY PROJECT DESIGN: The Retail Design Powerhouse Reimagining the Future of C-Stores

■ BY EPIPHANY COMMUNICATIONS: COACHING & CONSULTING

When you walk into Mercury Project’s Rochester Hills, Michigan studio you feel the vibe of a team that knows exactly who they are, and where they’re going. This is a powerhouse of retail design veterans — professionals who have spent decades shaping some of the most recognizable environments in the country and have now reunited under one name, one vision, and one mission: to redefine the future of convenience retail.

“We’re going on our third year as Mercury Project,” said Chief Creative Officer Michael Benincasa, “but our history together goes back more than twenty-five years. We all worked at the same top-ten retail design firm early in our careers. Over time, we spread out—Texas, Montreal, New York—but the goal was always to bring the A-team back together.”

That reunion happened when the group was bought under Federal Heath, a national leader in exterior fuel canopies and signage. “When they bought us, it gave us the opportunity

to rebuild the team we always believed in,” Benincasa explained. “Since then, we’ve added even more talent and really defined who we are as the Mercury Project.”

Architectural Design Director Jeffrey Clark added, “This team has a relationship that spans decades. That’s rare in this industry. We know how each other thinks, how we solve problems, and how to push each other creatively. That history is part of our advantage.”

Founded by owner Michael Benincasa the Mercury Project team includes Jeffrey Clark, Zuzanna Morgowicz, Anna Steenland, Roy Rabban, Katie Blaski and Mike Crosson.

MORE THAN DESIGN — A STRATEGIC ADVANTAGE

Mercury Project Design is not just an interior design firm. It is a strategic branding and retail experience studio specializing exclusively in “growing revenue” for convenience



stores, retail environments, and restaurants through stronger in-store experiences and brand positioning. Their mission is simple but transformative.

They help independent retailers compete — and win — through brand strategy, smart design, and elevated customer experiences. “We believe independent retailers don’t need to be bigger,” said Benincasa. “They need to be smarter, more intentional, and more strategic.”

From brand positioning and store layout optimization to interior environments and customer flow through fabrication and installation, Mercury Project Design helps retailers evolve from “just another store” into a brand destination.

They have a growing collection of industry awards. “We’ve won *Best New C-Store Design* four years in a row,” Benincasa said. “It’s like our version of the Oscars.”

One of those awards came from *C-Store Decisions* magazine

for their Red Barn Market project (pictured to the right), with others coming from retail associations and marketplace competitions. These accolades underscore Mercury Project’s credibility in a rapidly evolving sector.

A TEAM ROOTED IN RETAIL STRATEGY

Before Mercury Project became a c-store design powerhouse, the team spent decades in high-end retail, hospitality, and experiential environments. One member even worked on the first Rainforest Café, a testament to their deep roots in immersive design.

About six or seven years ago, the team saw a shift. Traditional retail was slowing—especially during COVID, when projects like a planned Neiman Marcus came to a halt. But convenience stores were booming. They were essential, accessible, and increasingly becoming one-stop destinations for food, fuel, and everyday needs.

That shift opened a new niche.



Their first major c-store project, Chestnut Market in New York, won *Store of the Year*. That success led to 85 additional Chestnut Market locations and positioned Mercury Project as a national leader in c-store design.

Today, their work spans Michigan, Ohio, Indiana, California, the East Coast, Florida Turnpike rest stops, and even Alaska. They collaborate on projects with their partner McRae Imaging in Rochester Hills, Michigan to fabricate locally, ship nationwide, and send supervisors and installation crews wherever needed.

ELEVATE. COMPETE. WIN.

As Benincasa often says, “You’re not just running a store. You’re building a brand.” Many independent operators focus on the day-to-day: margins, inventory, staffing. Mercury helps them zoom out and ask a more powerful question: “What do customers feel the moment they walk in?”

Through cohesive branding, intentional material selection, strategic lighting, and thoughtfully curated environments, Mercury Project transforms transactional spaces into memorable brand experiences. That emotional shift is what allows independents to compete head-to-head with national players—and win.

As the retail landscape continues to consolidate, one truth stands out:

“The independents who invest in brand and experience will define the next era of convenience,” noted Benincasa.

Mercury Project Design stands at the forefront of that transformation—helping retailers elevate, differentiate, and compete with confidence. Because in today’s market, design and branding aren’t optional. They’re the advantage.

THE SCIENCE BEHIND THE DESIGN

Mercury Project’s work is not just beautiful—it’s strategic. Their design

philosophy is rooted in consumer psychology, retail research, and behavioral patterns. “We know that 90% of customers turn right when they enter a store,” Clark explains. “So we design for that. We create strike points, feature zones, and pathways that guide the customer naturally.”

They even use subtle environmental cues—like bumpy tile—to slow carts and increase visibility of end-caps. Scent marketing is another tool in their arsenal. “Vanilla, cinnamon, coffee—these scents increase dwell time and sales,” Benincasa said. “It’s the same reason real estate agents bake cookies during an open house.”

A CLIENT-CENTERED PROCESS

Longtime MIRA member, Ronnie Jamil, leaned on the expertise of Benincasa and his team when he recently rebranded his stores as The Zone Marketplace (pictured above), “What sets the Mercury Project apart is that every design decision is intentional. It’s not just about aesthetics—it’s backed by research, psychology, and a deep understanding of how customers move and shop,” said Jamil.

There is a definite wow factor with all their projects. “When we saw the final design come together, it completely changed how we thought about our business. It wasn’t just a remodel—it was a transformation,” said Jamil.

Despite their expertise, Mercury Project never imposes a signature style. Instead, they extract the client’s vision through a structured, collaborative pro-



cess. “We don’t want every store to look the same,” Clark said. “We want it to reflect the client.”

Benincasa shared one of their signature questions: “If your brand were an automobile, what make and model would it be?” This helps clients articulate their desired positioning—and their budget. “Sometimes people say Lamborghini,” Benincasa laughed, “but their budget is more Cadillac. That question helps us align expectations.”

They also use hundreds of images to refine preferences, ensuring the final design feels authentic and intentional. Demographics and local context play a major role. If a store is near lakes, they incorporate water themes. For Florida Turnpike rest stops, they vary designs by emphasizing land, sea, or sun depending on the location.

Mercury Project also educates clients on color psychology and environmental comfort. “We’ve had clients want dark red walls, black ceilings, and concrete floors,” Benincasa said. “But that creates a cramped, oppressive feeling. Our job is to guide them toward choices that feel open and welcoming.”

Their holistic approach includes tile, color, texture, lighting, brand identity, naming, and visual systems. They've even renamed brands when necessary to better position the client in the market.

A GROWING NICHE WITH MASSIVE POTENTIAL

The team believes the c-store sector is still in its early stages of embracing good design. "There are thousands of outdated stores across the country," Clark said. "The potential for transformation is huge. And when you redesign a c-store, the impact is immediate. You see it in sales, in customer experience, in community perception."

Independent retailers, in particular, are feeling pressure from national chains like Sheetz and Wawa. Mercury Project helps them compete by leaning into local identity—like offering local baked goods or integrating community-specific design elements. "National chains can't replicate local relationships," Benincasa said. "That's where independents win."

A WELCOMING COMMUNITY WITH REAL IMPACT

For the team at Mercury Project Design, joining MIRA wasn't just a strategic decision—it was a natural extension of who they are and what they believe independent retail can become.

As a retail design firm with decades of experience, Mercury has seen firsthand how local, family-owned businesses shape the character and resilience of a community. Their work has taken them inside stores where owners know their customers by name, where a neighborhood's identity is built aisle by aisle, and where every design choice—from layout to lighting—can influence whether a retailer thrives or struggles. "Independent retailers are the heartbeat of a community," said Benincasa. "But they're also up against national chains with deeper pockets and greater scale. We joined MIRA because we believe in leveling that playing field."

For Mercury, MIRA represents more than an association—it represents a collective commitment to helping in-

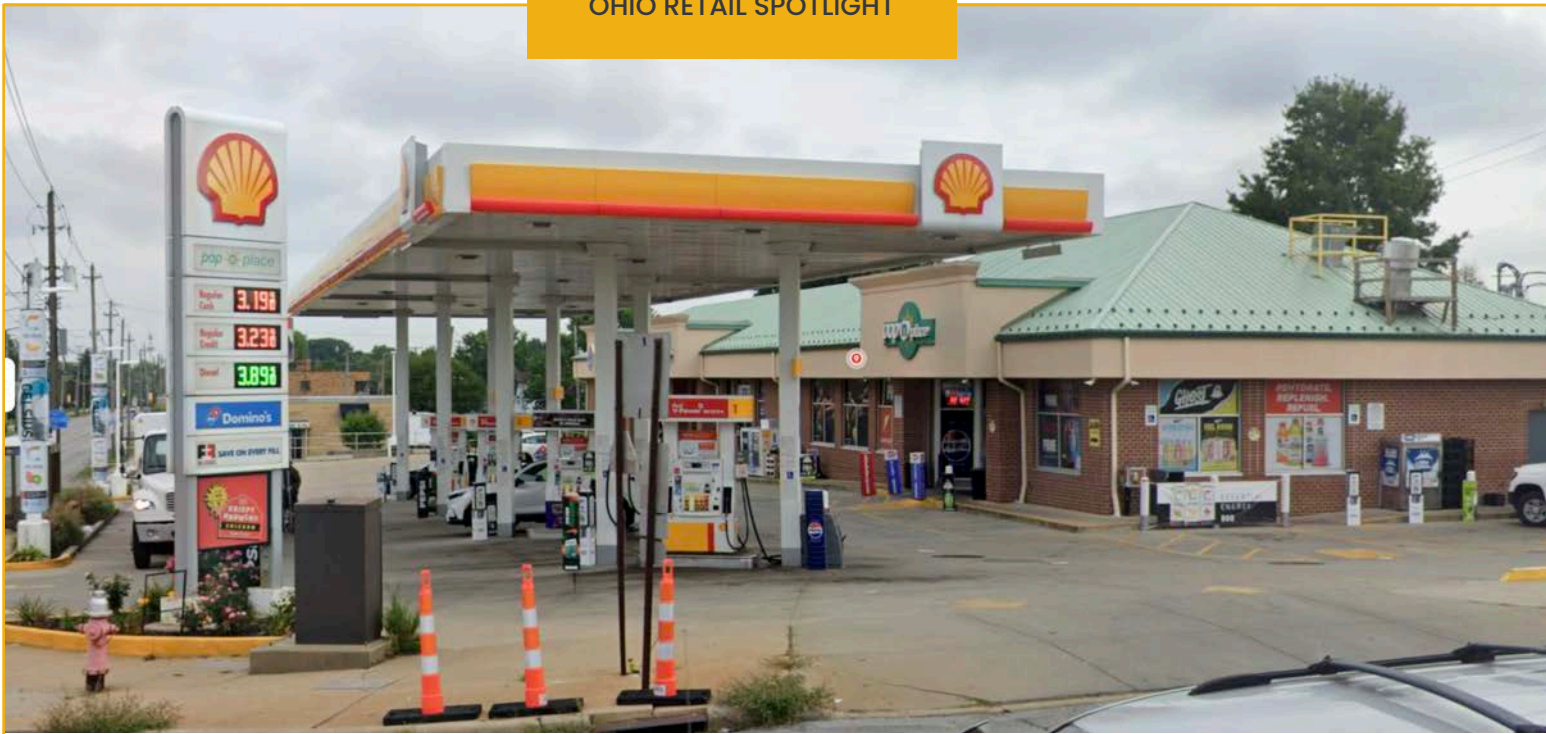
dependent retailers compete, grow, and win. That mission aligns perfectly with Mercury Project's own philosophy: empowering retailers with the strategy, design, and tools they need not just to survive, but to stand out.

Since joining, Mercury Project Design has found MIRA to be exactly what independent retailers need: a network that is open, collaborative, and deeply invested in the success of its members. "There's a genuine sense of community here," Benincasa noted. "MIRA isn't just about industry updates—it's about connection, shared knowledge, and real support."

For Mercury, these benefits reinforce why membership matters—not only for retailers, but for the partners who support them. "In today's competitive landscape, collaboration is everything," said Benincasa. "MIRA gives independent retailers a stronger voice and a stronger foundation. That's something every retailer—and every partner in this industry—should want to be part of." ■



FOUNDED BY OWNER MICHAEL BENINCASA THE MERCURY PROJECT TEAM INCLUDES JEFFREY CLARK, ZUZANNA MORGOWICZ, ANNA STEENLAND, ROY RABBAN, KATIE BLASKI AND MIKE CROSSON.



A Community Cornerstone: Inside the Story of Memphis Avenue Pop N Place Shell

BY EPIPHANY COMMUNICATIONS:
COACHING & CONSULTING

For years, Memphis Shell's popular Pop N Place gas station in Cleveland Ohio has been more than a stop for fuel—it has been a familiar landmark where neighbors cross paths, conversations spark, and the rhythm of daily life unfolds. Under the leadership of Mo Salem and the ownership team, the station has grown into a trusted community hub built on personal connection, consistency, and care.

A BUSINESS ROOTED IN COMMUNITY

From the beginning, the vision for Memphis Shell was simple: create a place where people feel welcome. As independent operators, Mo and his team are deeply involved in the day-to-day operations, ensuring that every detail—from the cleanliness of the store to the friendliness of the staff—reflects their commitment to the community they serve.

Regular customers are greeted by name. New faces quickly become familiar ones. And in a world where convenience often replaces connection, Memphis Shell stands out for offering both.

"We've watched this community grow and change," Salem noted. "And we've grown right along with it."

Over the years, customer expectations have shifted toward speed, variety, and efficiency. Memphis Shell has responded with upgrades to the store layout, expanded product offerings, and a renewed focus on maintaining a clean, safe, and welcoming environment.

NAVIGATING CHALLENGES IN A CHANGING INDUSTRY

Running an independent gas station is not without its challenges. Fluctuating fuel prices remain one of the biggest hurdles, tightening margins and forcing constant adjustments. Staffing, supply chain disruptions, and rising operational costs add additional layers of complexity.

Yet despite these pressures, Memphis Shell continues to adapt and thrive.

"We've had to be strategic," Salem explained. "Every improvement we make—whether it's reorganizing the store or expanding our product mix—helps us better serve our customers and strengthen our business."



Customer service remains the heartbeat of the operation. The team believes that genuine hospitality is what keeps people coming back, even when economic conditions are tough.

STRENGTH THROUGH MIRA MEMBERSHIP

To stay competitive and informed, Memphis Shell joined the Midwest Independent Retailers Association (MIRA). For Mo and the ownership team, the decision was about more than business—it was about joining a network of independent retailers who face similar challenges and share similar goals.

Through MIRA, the station has gained access to rebate programs, industry updates, networking opportunities, and advocacy efforts that support small operators across the region. “MIRA helps level the playing field,” the team noted. “Their lobbyist gives us a voice at the state capital and the *BottomLine* magazine and *Insider e-Newsletter* allows us to stay connected and informed, while their rebates help us stay competitive. We do really well on the Borden Dairy and Team Sledd programs.

FUEL TRENDS AND CUSTOMER BEHAVIOR

Like many retailers, Memphis Shell has seen customers become increasingly price-conscious. Rising fuel costs influence not only what people spend at the pump but also how they shop inside the store. Convenience has become a driving factor, with more demand for grab-and-go items and quick service.

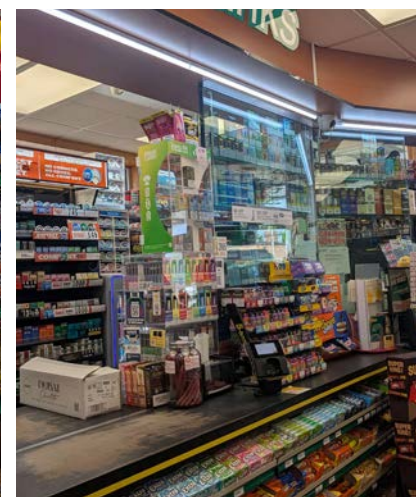
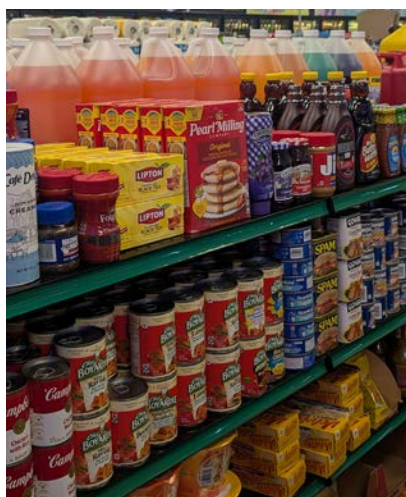
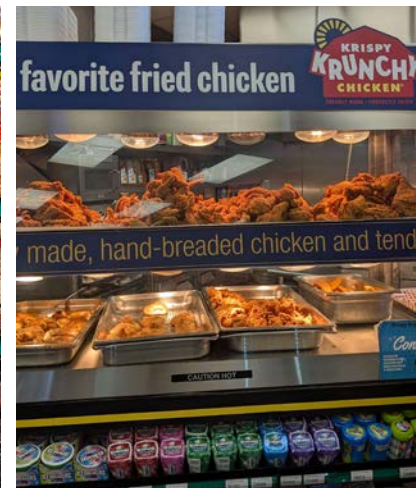
Balancing fuel sales with in-store performance is essential. While fuel brings customers in, it's the in-store experience—cleanliness, product selection, and friendly service—that drives profitability.

LOOKING AHEAD

For Mo Salem and the ownership team, the mission remains unchanged: serve the community with integrity, consistency, and care. Whether it's offering a friendly greeting, keeping the store spotless, or navigating the unpredictable world of fuel pricing, Memphis Shell continues to stand as a reliable presence in the lives of its customers.

“We're proud to be here,” Salem said. “And we're grateful for the people who choose to stop in every day. Supporting independent businesses matters—and we're honored to be part of this community.”

Memphis Shell is one of 13 stations the ownership team operates across the Cleveland area. They recently hosted the MIRA board of directors meeting at their La Centre Banquet Hall in Westlake, Ohio, bringing industry leaders together right in their own community. ■



MEMPHIS AVENUE POP N PLACE SHELL

Location: Cleveland, OH

Founded: 2019

Employees: 11

MIRA Member Since: 2009

www.facebook.com/MemphisPopNShell



RepRally

RepRally: Strengthening Retailer–Supplier Partnerships Across the MIRA Community



In the fast-moving world of independent retail, strong relationships between retailers, suppliers, and sales reps are essential. RepRally—a platform built specifically for the convenience, grocery, and independent retail sectors—is transforming how those relationships work.

For MIRA members, it offers something the industry has needed for years: a simple, modern way to communicate, collaborate, and keep business moving.

RepRally replaces the scattered mix of emails, texts, paper sell sheets, and missed messages that often slow down the ordering process. Instead, it brings everything into one clean, organized digital space where retailers and reps can connect with clarity and efficiency.

"We built RepRally because the independent retail channel deserved better infrastructure. The relationships were already there—between retailers, reps, and suppliers—we just needed to give those relationships a platform that

could keep up with the pace of modern commerce," said George Z, Head of Growth at RepRally.

For retailers, RepRally functions as a live digital showroom. New products, active promotions, and rep communications are always current and easy to navigate—no more digging through inboxes or reconstructing which rep shared which deal. Retailers can browse, compare, and respond on their own schedule, which means fewer missed opportunities and more confident buying decisions.

For suppliers and reps, the platform provides structure where there often isn't any. Products can be presented professionally and consistently, retailer engagement is trackable, and follow-up becomes purposeful rather than guesswork. Just as importantly, every store—regardless of size or order volume—gets the same quality of attention and access to new opportunities.

The result is accountability that runs in both directions. Retailers have a clear record of what was presented and what they ordered. Reps develop a sharper picture of store needs and buying patterns over time. Better information leads to better planning, stronger relationships, and more productive visits.

"As an emerging brand, you're fighting for shelf space and mindshare at the same time. RepRally gave us a way to show up professionally in front of independent retailers without needing a massive sales team behind us. That's a real competitive advantage for brands at our stage," noted a Brand Partner.

As the retail landscape becomes more competitive, tools that strengthen communication and streamline operations are no longer optional. RepRally gives MIRA members a modern advantage—helping retailers, suppliers, and reps work smarter, stay connected, and grow together.

MIRA

ENDORSED BUSINESS PARTNER
DISCOUNT PROGRAM



RepRally

RepRally

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Get 1 Free



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25% off your
first order



Red Bull 8.4oz

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52% margin

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stores 🔥



Muddy Bites

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50% margin

25% off your
first order

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Store Portal



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*Rewards shown are examples and may vary by customer.

EXCLUSIVE MIRA MEMBER DEALS!

- 2 FREE samples on any order over \$300
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- 5% "Welcome to RepRally" discount (one-time only, applied at checkout via sales rep)
- \$50 discount on your first order of \$500
- \$50 cash back for every \$1,000 ordered per month

This is a great opportunity to explore new products, earn ongoing rewards, and take advantage of meaningful savings designed specifically for MIRA members!

FOR MORE INFO ON THIS PROGRAM, CONTACT MIRA PRESIDENT BILL WILD AT
(248) 671-9600 OR BWILD@MIDWESTRETAILERS.ORG.



COMMUNICATIONS CORNER

VANESSA DENHA GARMO
FOUNDER, EPIPHANY COMMUNICATIONS:
COACHING & CONSULTING

Retail Culture Starts With You: How Strengths and Weaknesses Influence Every Interaction

“ Culture is created by conversations. And every conversation you have—today, tomorrow, and next week—creates the culture you lead.”

If you could describe your business culture in one word, what would it be? Engaging? Energizing? Calm? Or maybe... chaotic or tense?

Every business owner, manager and executive is creating culture — whether they mean to or not. And it's not happening in the big moments. It's happening in the smallest interactions: the quick email, the rushed morning huddle, the brief check in, even the silence you didn't realize you communicated. Your culture isn't written on a poster; it's written in your conversations.

Most leaders assume culture comes from strategy, retreats, or mission statements. But the truth is far more personal: your strengths and your weaknesses are speaking every day. Your team feels both sides of you long before you notice them yourself.

Developing your leadership style means leaning on your strengths but not to the point they create blind spots, and they can. For example:

- The decisive leader can become dismissive.
- The relational leader can avoid hard conversations.

- The analytical leader can overwhelm people with details.
- The visionary leader can leave people unsure of what to do next.

Leaders don't fail because they don't care. They struggle because they're unaware of how their natural style is landing on others.

AWARENESS IS THE TURNING POINT

Let's look at real examples in the workplace including the retail and supplier world.

Here is the Over-Communicator. One leader prided herself on clarity. Her long, detailed emails were meant to help—but her team felt micromanaged.

A simple shift to bullet points and one key question—"What's the one thing you need from me?"—changed everything.

Then you have the silent leader who believed silence meant trust. His team interpreted it as disinterest. When he began offering 90-second check-ins, engagement soared.

SMALL SHIFTS—BIG IMPACT

When leaders ask where to start, I always return to three anchors:

1 Consistency: Your team shouldn't have to guess which version of you is walking in to work that day. Consistency builds psychological safety.

2 Clarity: Say what you mean. Say it simply. Say it in a way people can act on. If you don't tell your story, others will—and that's when gossip fills the gaps.

3 Connection: People don't follow titles. They follow leaders who see them, hear them, and value them.

Culture lives in your daily conversations. Culture isn't abstract. It's not a mission statement. It's the lived experience of your people—shaped by the conversations you have every day.

As I write in my book: "Culture is created by conversations. And every conversation you have—today, tomorrow, and next week—creates the culture you lead."

You don't need to become a different leader. You simply need to become more intentional with the strengths you already have more aware of the weaknesses that might be getting in the way.

Self-awareness is the beginning of strong relationships and thriving retail cultures. And it starts with the next conversation you have. ■

Vanessa Denha Garmo is MIRA's Communications Consultant. She is a certified Leadership Coach. Founder of Epiphany Communications, and trains clients in professional development. She is the author of the book Conversations That Create the Culture available on Amazon.



MIRA

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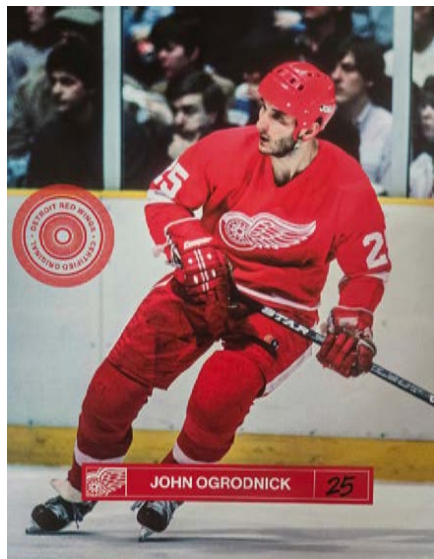


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As the "official publication" of MIRA "The Voice of Independent Retailers", members look to the BottomLine to help them grow their market share and outpace the competition. This popular bi-monthly magazine features members on every cover, the latest business and marketing trends, legislative issues impacting the industry, plus updates on MIRA activities, member benefits and new opportunities for success.

To learn more, contact Michele Halis, Director of Membership Sales & Engagement at mhalis@midwestretailers.org

From NHL Star to Prudential Retirement Planner and Fiduciary: The John Ogrodnick Story



■ BY EIPHANY COMMUNICATIONS:
COACHING & CONSULTING

John Ogrodnick's story begins long before his career in financial services. A prolific NHL left-winger from 1979 to 1993, he became one of the most recognizable goal-scorers of his era. As a five-time All-Star and former Detroit Red Wings standout, he set a then-team record with 55 goals and 105 points in the 1984–85 season. Known for his dangerous slapshot and relentless drive, Ogrodnick built a reputation as a premier sniper who consistently rose to the moment.

Yet despite his remarkable NHL career, he often reflects on the lessons learned earlier in his journey. "I never won a Stanley Cup," he said, "but I won Memorial Cups, minor league hockey's top prize — and those championships taught me everything about what it takes to succeed." Those formative years in junior hockey shaped his understanding of discipline, teamwork, and resilience — qualities that now define his work as a financial advisor and fiduciary with Prudential in Farmington Hills, Michigan, where he specializes in life insurance, retirement strategies, and 401(k) plans.

For Ogrodnick, hockey was more than a sport; it was an education. "Hockey is a team sport. You're only as strong as your weakest link," he explained. "You need all 20 guys — the goalies, every forward and every defenseman. It's the combination of the team that wins championships." Even the greats, he notes, rely on the strength around them. "When NHL Hall of Famer Wayne Gretzky went to the L.A. Kings, he improved the team, but he credits his teammates for the club's success."

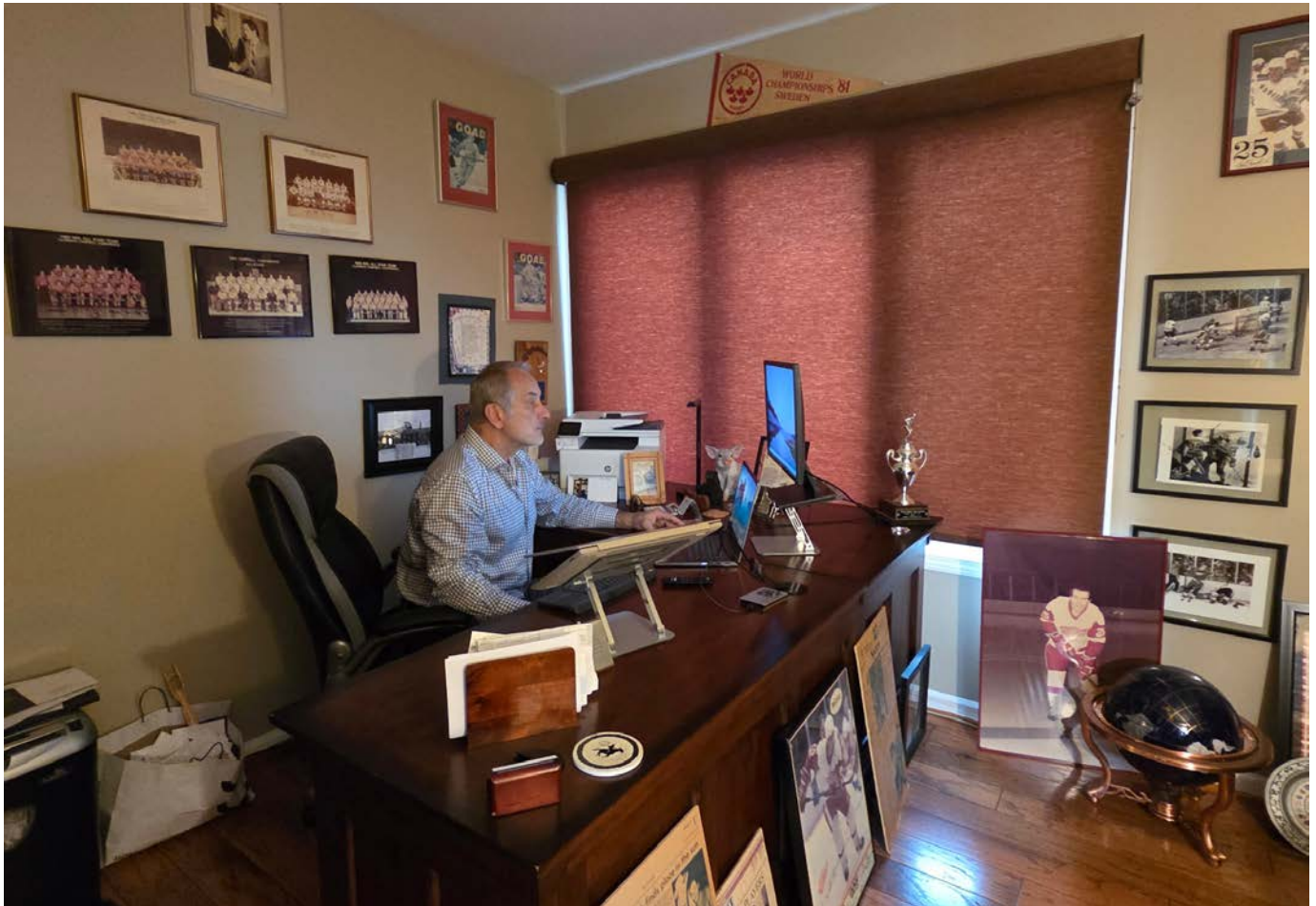
That same philosophy now guides how he serves his clients. "Retirement planning isn't a solo effort," he said. "It's about trust, preparation, and working together toward long-term goals." He approaches every client relationship with the same mindset he brought to the ice: show up, work hard, and do your job with integrity. "On an individual basis, you work hard at it and do your job out there," he said. "In life, you have your ups and downs, and when things aren't going well, your work ethic kicks in."

Ogrodnick believes that preparation is just as essential in retirement planning as it was in hockey. He recalls sage business advice from NHL Hall of Famer Ted Lindsay: "Hockey will get you in the door with clients, but once you're in, you have to know what you're talking about." Ogrodnick carries that with him today. "You can't take anything for granted. You have to be knowledgeable and confident in what you're presenting to clients."

Grounded, relatable, and deeply committed to his business — something he attributes to staying connected. "A lot of people don't hear from their advisor and they get frustrated," he said. "I try to establish a personal relationship and make sure their portfolio is serviced. Staying in touch matters." With more than 20 years of experience, he emphasizes that service is the heart of his work.

Ethics, too, play a central role. "That's why being a fiduciary is so important to me," he said. "I'm obligated to look out for the best interest of my clients. That's part of doing things the right way."

He also values the collaborative environment at Prudential. "Teamwork is important. We have a group here that works



together to meet clients' needs," he said. "Just like in hockey, you rely on your team."

As for his connection to MIRA, Ogrodnick appreciates the relationships and community. "It comes down to developing relationships and networking with the association," he said. "I applaud CEO Bill Wild, who has skated with our alumni team a few times—he has built his own great team at MIRA. He runs the association well and he runs it the right way. I enjoy participating with the other former athletes and retailers at the annual celebrity golf outing, and MIRA is growing and expanding. I'm confident I can help individual MIRA members with their business and retirement planning."

He and his wife, BettyAnne, have been married for 44 years and are the proud parents of two daughters, Breanne and KelseyAnne, who now live out of state. John and BettyAnne make their home in Farmington Hills.

From the rink to the business world, John Ogrodnick's message remains the same: championships — and strong financial futures — are built one disciplined decision at a time.

If you would like to schedule a free consultation, please call (248) 866-4438 or email john.ogrodnick@prudential.com. ■

Beyond the Business is a new feature in BottomLine highlighting MIRA members whose passions extend beyond their day-to-day work. It's a reminder that our members are multidimensional, enriching both their communities and our industry.

“ I'm confident I can help individual MIRA members with their business and retirement planning.”



JOHN O OGRONICK WITH MIRA CEO BILL WILD

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MIRA's 108th Annual Gala: A Night of Celebration, Community, and Networking

■ BY EPIPHANY COMMUNICATIONS:
COACHING & CONSULTING

With DJ Emilio Shina's jazzy tunes setting the vibe as guests arrived at Shenandoah Country Club in West Bloomfield, the 108th Annual MIRA Black Tie Gala promised to be a winning night—and it delivered.

MIRA welcomed nearly 500 members, partners, and supporters on March 7th for an evening filled with fine dining, dancing, interactive photo booths, games, cigars, spirits, and a lively afterglow party. Guests enjoyed a champagne reception, complete with Las Vegas showgirls to kick off the evening's festivities.

A new highlight this year was the high-energy Live Auction featuring autographed and framed jerseys of Detroit Lion, Aiden Hutchinson, and Detroit Tiger, Tarik Skubal; a VIP experience with Charlie Puth at Detroit's heralded Fox Theatre; 3 custom Cicchini men's suits; a Grand Traverse getaway package; a Grand Hotel experience on Mackinac Island; and the ultimate Detroit Lions 50-yard-line suite experience. MIRA Foundation board member George Holton, an attorney at MIRA member Miller Canfield, served as the auctioneer. Proceeds from the auction benefited the MIRA Foundation's Annual Scholarship Program.

CELEBRATING LEGACY AND LEADERSHIP

In his welcome remarks, MIRA CEO, Bill Wild, reflected on the association's long history and its deep roots in the Midwest's independent retail community. "For 116 years, MIRA has been the voice of independent retailers," Wild said. "Tonight isn't just about celebrating our industry—it's about celebrating the people and partners who strengthen and support our association every single day."





Among the evening's more notable political guests was former congressman and current U.S. Senate candidate Mike Rogers, who emphasized the essential role independent retailers play in Michigan's economic landscape. "These independent retailers are the backbone of our Michigan economy," Rogers said. "When you combine all their employees, they're the largest employer in this state."

He noted that small retailers face the same pressures families do—rising costs and economic uncertainty. "Standing up for people who are in business and struggling with high prices... that's why we're here." Despite the challenges, Rogers was energized by the entrepreneurial spirit in the room. "This is a group that understands risk and reward. I'm an optimist, and I think Michigan is ready to grow again."

HONORING PARTNERS IN SERVICE

Wild also highlighted the organizations that help bring MIRA's mission of service to life, especially through the association's foundation MIRA and the Annual Turkey Drive. He offered special recognition to the Detroit Capuchin Soup Kitchen and United Community Family Services—Chaldean American Ladies of Charity (UCFS-CALC), inviting their leaders to stand as the room applauded.

"These MIRA foundation partners ensure that every turkey, every donation, and every act of generosity reaches families who truly need it," Wild said. "They are on the ground, serving with compassion—not just during the holidays, but all year long."

UCFS-CALC President/CEO Melanie Duquesnel expressed gratitude for the partnership. "It's an honor to be here and not just because of the gift that MIRA gave us," she said. "To be among people who love to give—that's special." She also embraced the festive atmosphere with a smile: "And to be a little bit fancy tonight is kind of fun... and the showgirls were like whoa!"

Brother Gary Wegner of the Capuchin Franciscan Province reflected on the deeper meaning behind the evening. "It's a wonderful event," he said. "We couldn't do what we do without collaboration and partners. That's been our history from the beginning, and MIRA and its members have been great partners over the years."

■ GALA RECAP continued on page 46



A NIGHT OF FUN, FRIENDSHIP, AND TRADITION

For many guests, the Gala is an annual tradition. “We really like the MIRA gala. It’s a fun night out. We enjoy the casino games and have a good time,” said Nagham Attisha. “It’s a beautiful event. The food is always great,” added Tanya Karana.

BMC President, Bobby Bauer, attended for the first time, though his company has been a member for more than two decades. “Our shared value is caring for the independent retailer,” he said. “The networking is the number one reason we’re here.” Looking around the ballroom, he added, “It’s beautiful. They’ve done an excellent job putting it on.”

Attorney Ron Acho, a longtime member and attendee, summed up the spirit of the night simply: “The festivity—it’s always a happy affair. People come, look—they’re all smiles,” he said as he scanned the room.

Northville Mayor, Brian Turnbull, a first time attendee, echoed that sentiment, calling the event “outstanding.” He noted the strong concentration of decision-makers from across the region and emphasized the importance of independent retailers to his community’s popular downtown. “Without a strong downtown business area, you can’t have a strong community,” he said. “We appreciate the independent retailers.”

For new MIRA member, James Leigh, of Leigh’s Glass, who joined just three months earlier, the Gala was a warm welcome. “The venue is so beautiful. Everything’s incredible,” he said. “I’ve already met a few contacts tonight.”

A NIGHT MADE POSSIBLE BY OUR MANY SPONSORS

A heartfelt thank-you goes to *DBusiness Magazine* for capturing the energy, elegance, and excitement of this year’s celebration. Special thanks to our sponsors for helping make this extraordinary night possible. And to every guest, member, and partner who joined us: “This support fuels everything we do,” said Wild. ■



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Trade Show Season: A Season of Flavor, Innovations and Strengthened Partnerships

■ BY EPIPHANY COMMUNICATIONS: COACHING & CONSULTING

MIRA hit the road this trade show season, making its presence known at some of the industry's most influential events – from the high-energy Lipari Food Show in Novi to the Team Sledd ProShow in Pittsburgh, the MPA/MACS Show in Grand Rapids and the MPact Show in Indianapolis. Each stop offered a unique window into the trends, challenges and opportunities shaping today's food, fuel and convenience retail landscape.

LIPARI FOOD SHOW : A PASSPORT TO FLAVOR

NOVI, MI

This year's Lipari Food Show invited attendees to "discover the world, bite by bite," as it transformed the Suburban Collection Showplace into a global marketplace. The theme, Passport to Flavor, came to life with a flight attendant, airplane pilot and immersive travel-themed décor that set the tone for a culinary journey around the world.

Thousands of store owners, managers and buyers traveled to the Vibe Credit Union Showplace with their "tickets" in hand, ready to explore the world's most craveable cuisine. Open-air market booths, brand showcases and international vendors created a vibrant atmosphere where "global taste meets retail opportunity."

"I'm proud of our team, this is a big show and it takes a lot of work to pull it off," stated Matt Montgomery, Territory Vice President of sales for Lipari Foods. "There's a lot of energy, a lot of deals and a lot of connections happening across every category we offer."

He added that Lipari values its long-standing relationship with MIRA. "We've been partners with MIRA for a long time, and the only thing that's changed is how much more engaged our reps are with MIRA and with the end customers," Montgomery said. "It's a strong partnership all the way around."

Ferris Coffee and Nut Company President, Mark Van Tongeren, arrived with high expectations. "This is our



first Lipari show, and we've heard a lot of amazingly positive things," Van Tongeren said. "But being able to experience it firsthand makes it that much more real to us."

The 102-year-old, family-owned business based in Grand Rapids, was met with enthusiasm from both long-standing partners and new prospects. "The retailer engagement, the support from all the Lipari reps – it's been remarkable," he said. "This is a

very special show, and we're honored to be a part of it."

By the end of the day, he was already looking ahead. "We'll be back," Van Tongeren said with a smile. "We're super excited about the partnership. It exceeded our expectations – very much."

The show drew a diverse mix of retailers – from seasoned operators to first-time attendees. Lindsay Sokana, who recently purchased a nostalgic penny candy store in Romeo, Michigan said

the event was eye-opening and ties into her new business. "Our store is a nostalgic place," she said of her shop. "It's like taking a step back into the last century when you walk through the doors."

New to the industry, she found the show invaluable. "There is so much here," Sokana said. "Someone who is just starting out in the food retail world — there is everything in one place. It's great to talk to people in every category of food."

Jimmy Lousia of Waterford Michigan based Lakeview Party Store attends every year. "I'm a one-stop shop, and I always find something new to add to our store," he said.

Ann and Bashar Raban, owners of Ypsilanti Michigan based Sav-A-Lot, said they enjoyed the interactive elements. "It's amazing this year," Ann said. "They have a lot of interactive engagements like the passports. It's a fun event. and we love the nostalgic candies," Bashar said.

Pete Seman is with Inkster Michigan based Food Max Market today but has been a Lipari customer since 1960, and said this year's show was the best yet. "There are so many new items here, especially in pastries and desserts that caught my attention," Seman said. "The vendors are from out of state and around the globe. It's such an improvement and great opportunities to grab-and-go items."

MIRA's presence at the show was stronger than ever, as CEO Bill Wild and the entire MIRA staff was on hand. "The booth was buzzing all day long," said Michele Halis, MIRA's director of membership sales and engagement, as attendees lined up to ask about the staff's shirts that read: "Ask me how to get a 1.5% Lipari rebate."

This was the first year MIRA created a booth built around marketing Lipari's rebate program at the show — and it paid off. "We signed up 23 new members from across the Midwest at the show, renewed two memberships and created leads with hundreds of other stores that we will follow up with."

She credited the momentum to collaboration with MIRA Board Member Matt Montgomery and his regional sales managers. "It's a true partnership, Lipari's salespeople help MIRA gain new members, and MIRA supports their sales through aggressively marketing their growth based rebate program, and promoting the Lipari brand to our members."



MPA/MACS SHOW GRAND RAPIDS, MI

Wild and Halis were on-site engaging with current and prospective members in Grand Rapids, Michigan, at the Annual Michigan Petroleum Association/ Michigan Convenience Store Show. With fuel prices and industry challenges top of mind, the event provided meaningful conversations and timely insights across the petroleum and convenience sectors.

Wild applauded MPA President, Mark Griffin, for continuing to deliver an exceptional show. "Mark and his team delivered another great, business building, educational show. MIRA and MPA frequently work together in Lansing on petroleum issues and small business legislation that affects both of our organization's members."

"Being present at trade shows like this is essential and strategic for us," Wild said. "It allows MIRA to connect directly with members, vendors and gives staff the opportunity to learn more about the industry and issues facing our members. It's a chance to listen to their needs and strengthen the partnerships that keep independent retailers competitive."

Halis added, "This event let me put a face with several of the vendors I talk to all the time, vendors like Coca Cola, Pepsi, Frito Lay, Spartan Nash, SAS, OWL and Rhino Air, to name just a few."

TEAM SLEDD PROSHOW

PITTSBURGH, PA

MIRA continued its outreach at the Team Sledd ProShow, with Wild joining CEO Rob Sincavich and the entire Team Sledd organization by manning a booth at the annual event. The event is a private show open only to Team Sledd customers and vendors.

MIRA's booth offered Wild the opportunity to meet members, build new relationships and gain deeper insight into the evolving convenience store industry, while promoting a special Team Sledd rebate program MIRA members can qualify for.

"MIRA currently has 91 members in Ohio that are Team Sledd stores and as the association's footprint in the state continues to grow, and more c-stores and petroleum stations are adding food service options, this number is going to continue to grow," stated Wild

Wild also added, "The MIRA booth was right next to long time member and Endorsed Business Partner, Novelty Inc. I couldn't help but notice the long lines at their booth and the excitement around their new Fun Doh and USA's 250th products. After reconnecting at the show, Wild stated, "MIRA will soon announce a new Novelty Inc program for members built around discounts on their popular profit boosting products."



IMPACT SHOW

INDIANAPOLIS, IN

Wild, along with MIRA board members Paul Elhindi and Brent Jamil attended the three day show at the Indiana Convention Center in Indianapolis. The large annual petroleum show delivered 300+ exhibitors and had over 3,000 registered fuel and convenience professionals. The annual event is hosted by trade associations of Kentucky, Illinois, Indiana and Ohio.

Elhindi, whose popular Corner Market store in Lyndhurst Ohio was recognized by Convenience Store News in 2025, served on an educational panel focused on c-store Leadership for Independent Operators.

Jamil, who attends the annual show is in the process of rebranding their family's petroleum stores, creating a Mexican themed restaurant and looking to grow their chain of stores. "My father Ronnie and I have always attended this show, because it gives us a chance to meet the petroleum brands and fuel distributors, face to face. There is a lot of cutting edge technology coming into the marketplace and I like to be their first in our area to implement it. I also spend some time at this event talking to retailers and vendors about the value of being a MIRA member."

Wild spent time with the other association officials and met with potential donors for MIRA's new 501(c)(4), the MIRA Impact Fund. "There is a lot of potentially harmful legislation at the state level in Michigan and Ohio centered around tax increases for small businesses, additional tobacco and alcohol regulations, and important political races. MIRA will be aggressively advocating to protect our members interests with the new c4," added Wild. ■


 sedgwick[™]

Selling or Buying a Business? What You Need to Know!

■ BY SEDGWICK

“Successorship” or “successors in interest” are terms describing the takeover of one employer’s business by another, generally resulting from a change in ownership due to a purchase, acquisition, or merger.

Both the predecessor (seller) and successor (buyer) must notify BWC of a transfer in operations. The BWC will transfer the employer’s claims experience when a new owner wholly assumes the former employer’s business. If the new owner assumes only a portion of the business, the BWC only transfers that part of the former employer’s experience to the succeeding employer.

SUCCESSOR EMPLOYER

If you’re the successor and a new employer without Ohio workers’ compensation coverage, you must complete an *Application for Ohio Workers’ Compensation Coverage (Form U-3)*. If you already have Ohio workers’ compensation coverage, you

only need to submit the *Notification of Business Acquisition/Merger or Purchase/Sale (Form U-118)*. All forms can be found at www.bwc.ohio.gov.

If you wish to maintain the predecessor employer’s policy, and the predecessor’s coverage is active, you may submit a *Request to Transfer Existing Coverage to Succeeding Employer (Form U-115)*. You cannot use the U-115 if you have an active policy or if the former policy was canceled. You must submit form U-118.

OBTAINING EMPLOYER AND POLICY INFORMATION ON A POTENTIAL SELLER

To learn about the predecessor employer’s experience or outstanding financial obligations before you acquire a business, complete the *Request for Business Transfer Information (Form AC-4)*. Both seller and potential buyer MUST sign this form. The BWC encourages any entity considering the purchase of another entity to use this form to help discover any potential issues with the seller’s policy before purchase.

PREDECESSOR EMPLOYER

After notifying the BWC of the transfer and a request to cancel coverage, the predecessor employer has 45 days from the date of cancellation to report the final payroll, also known as true-up. Your policy must be in a canceled status to access the Payroll true-up report.

Important: If you have additional locations covered under the policy for which a portion of the business was transferred, do not complete a cancellation request. Complete the U-118 instead. More information about workers’ comp and selling or buying a business here in Ohio can be found at: <https://info.bwc.ohio.gov/for-employers/workers-compensation-coverage/getting-coverage/selling-or-buying-a-business>. ■

For more information, contact our Sedgwick program manager, Julia Bowling at julia.bowling@sedgwick.com or (513) 218-4062.

MIRA ON THE ROAD

Connecting with Members Across the Midwest



At MIRA, our members are the backbone of the communities we serve. Each month, we hit the road to connect with retailers—learning their stories, celebrating their successes, and sharing how they make a difference in their neighborhoods. From longtime family-owned businesses to new additions to the MIRA family, our members exemplify the dedication, innovation, and community spirit that define independent retail.

Michele Halis, MIRA Director of Membership Sales & Engagement, will be on the road visiting MIRA members and sharing their stories on social media and in MIRA's award winning publications. If you would like Michele to visit your store, please contact her at mhalis@midwestretailers.org.



BORDEN DAIRY

3068 WEST 106TH STREET, CLEVELAND, OH 44111

Michele Halis joined MIRA Board Member Jim Evans for a day on the road visiting member locations. The team connected with retailers, spotlighted their stores, and assisted with on-site sign-ups for the Borden Milk Rebate Program—helping members add a trusted brand to their shelves while maximizing savings.



DTE ENERGY

2026 DETROIT TIGERS OPENING DAY

MIRA connected with Corporate Sponsor, DTE Energy, on Opening Day, strengthening relationships with partners who help power our communities and support local businesses. On Opening Day, Michele visited the DTE Energy tent and spent some time learning more about DTE's community involvement.



FERNDALE ELECTRIC

31750 SHERMAN AVENUE, MADISON HEIGHTS, MI 48071

Ferndale Electric has built a strong reputation for delivering innovative, high-quality electrical services across a wide range of industries. Their commitment to safety, reliability, and community support sets them apart. We're proud to welcome Ferndale Electric to our growing community!



FOX 2 DETROIT

2026 DETROIT TIGERS OPENING DAY

MIRA's Michele Halis made a special appearance on Fox 2 Detroit during Opening Day festivities, highlighting the excitement of the season while representing MIRA and its members on air. She had multiple stops on her Detroit journey including the Hollywood Casino networking event, the DTE Energy tent, and the Mini Melts station.



HESS EXPRESS

32911 WARREN ROAD, WESTLAND MI 48185

MIRA hit the road with a visit to Hess Express in Westland—our go-to spot for reliable service, even for the MIRA-mobile. From full-service oil changes to brake and engine work, their team delivers quality care with a personal touch (and even snacks while you wait). We're proud to welcome Hess Express as a new MIRA member.



JONNA'S MARKET AND RESTAURANT

1455 N MICHIGAN AVENUE, HOWELL, MI 48843

Jonna's Market is a neighborhood grocery known for fresh produce, quality meats, and deli favorites, plus an attached bar and grill that makes it more than just a quick stop. With a mix of everyday essentials and a casual spot to grab a meal, it's a go-to in the Howell community.



MIDTOWN 7-ELEVEN

5145 ANTHONY WAYNE DRIVE, DETROIT, MI 48202

7-Eleven Midtown is a go-to convenience stop in Midtown Detroit, offering quick snacks, drinks, and everyday essentials. With its easy location and extended hours, it's a reliable spot for locals, students, and anyone needing something fast on the go.



MINI MELTS

5231 ANTHONY WAYNE DRIVE, DETROIT, MI 48202

Mini Melts in Midtown Detroit serves up a fun twist on ice cream with its signature beaded treats that are as playful as they are delicious. A go-to spot for a quick, cool pick-me-up, it brings a burst of flavor and nostalgia to the heart of Midtown.



MUGG & BOPPS

763 S MICHIGAN AVENUE, HOWELL, MI 48843

Mugg & Bopps is a convenient neighborhood stop for fuel, snacks, and everyday essentials. Known for its quick service and easy grab-and-go setup, it's a reliable pit stop for people on the move.



R & J'S BEST CHOICE MARKET

8982 OLD US HWY 27, HOUGHTON LAKE, MI 48629

R & J's Best Choice Market is a friendly neighborhood grocery store offering everyday essentials, fresh items, and a convenient shopping experience. Known for its approachable feel and practical selection, it's a reliable stop for quick, no-fuss errands.



REMAX PLATINUM

6870 GRAND RIVER AVENUE, BRIGHTON, MI 48114

Michelle Herrst of RE/MAX Platinum is a dedicated real estate professional known for guiding clients through every step of the buying and selling process with ease. With a strong grasp of the market and a personable approach, she helps turn real estate goals into smooth, successful outcomes.



TANK TRADERS®

7010 KIES ROAD, JEROME, MI 49249

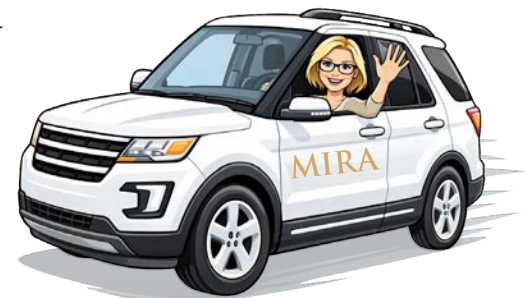
MIRA welcomed Tank Traders® to our office for an informative visit where Cbyrd Lucas, and MIRA Operations Manager, Kelli Gyori, explored how the program enables retailers to expand their offerings, enhance customer convenience, and drive additional revenue—without the complexities traditionally associated with propane services.



TAORMINA OF ITALY

6459 INKSTER ROAD, BLOOMFIELD HILLS MI 48301

MIRA is proud to welcome new member, Taormina of Italy in Bloomfield Hills! Known for their fresh, delicious pizza, pasta, salads, and catering options, they deliver quality and service for any occasion. We're excited to have them as part of the MIRA family.



MEMBERSHIP: MARCH & APRIL 2026

Welcome these new and recently renewed MIRA members!

COMPANY
CITY, STMEMBER SINCE

8 Mile Foodland
Southfield, MI5/21/98
A & A Food Market
Jackson, MI 2/2/18
AGFA Gas Inc. – BP
Northville, MI.2/28/17
Al-haramain Food Center
Hamtramck, MI.4/24/18
All Seasons Market
Ann Arbor, MI8/24/16
Alpine Marketplace
Linden, MI6/24/09
Amal Food Mart
Cleveland, OH3/13/26
Ballville E-Z Shop
Fremont, OH.4/24/18
Bay Food Mart
Bay Village, OH.1/5/07
Bel-Morr Market
Belmont, OH.10/28/11
Better Made Snack Foods, Inc.
Detroit, MI11/23/93
Big J Market Inc.
Detroit, MI7/20/90
Blue Cross Blue Shield of MI
Detroit, MI10/18/80
Boarman's Meat Market
Highland, MD3/25/26
Bondi's Beverage & Deli
Willoughby, OH.3/13/26
Boomers Party Store & Pizza
Brighton, MI7/19/04
Boulevard Convenient #4003
Garfield Heights, OH.7/11/13
Boyne Marathon
Boyne City, MI.9/20/00
Bozek Meat Market
Hamtramck, MI.4/24/18
Bozek Meat Market
Sterling Heights, MI4/24/18
BP Gas
Cleveland, OH4/27/26
Brighton Market
Brighton, MI11/23/11
Broadview Gas Mart
Cleveland, OH7/7/99
Browns Beverage
Cleveland, OH5/1/24
Buk's Party Store, Inc.
Ovid, MI.3/11/16
Buscemi's
Saint Clair Shores, MI . . .3/25/19
Buscemi's Market
Livonia, MI9/13/11
Bushnell Store
Conneaut, OH.8/11/05
C-D's Quik Mart
Hopkins, MI4/29/03
Capital Sales Company
Hazel Park, MI2/17/92

COMPANY
CITY, STMEMBER SINCE

Capuchin Services
Detroit, MI3/23/26
CARES In Farmington Hills
Farmington, MI3/23/26
Carl's of Dimondale, Inc.
Dimondale, MI5/2/07
Carnival Market
Pontiac, MI.2/5/13
Cask & Keg LTD
St Johns, MI11/15/18
Cattlemans Meat & Produce
Taylor, MI.5/27/10
CB Discount Bay City
MI7/25/09
Cherry Street Market
Kalkaska, MI.3/25/26
City Market
Detroit, MI5/23/12
Clear Pest Pros
Ann Arbor, MI6/5/25
Cleveland Deli & Beverage
Cleveland, OH10/24/08
Colasanti's Express
Howell, MI4/9/26
Comcast
Plymouth, MI2/1/10
Conifer Insurance Company
Troy, MI3/5/13
Convenient Food Mart #3065
Cleveland, OH8/27/21
Corner Spirits
Macomb, MI.4/21/20
County Fair Market
Warren, MI.9/30/09
Coventry Food Mart & Fine Wine
Cleveland Heights, OH .10/24/08
Danny's Fine Foods
Monroe, MI.5/8/14
Darrell's Market and Hardware
Mason, MI9/19/14
Dealpoint Wholesale
Waterford, MI3/25/26
Dearborn Italian Bakery
Dearborn, MI4/15/16
Deer Park Delicatessen Inc.
Cincinnati, OH4/20/16
Detroit Metro Ice Cream
Rochester Hills, MI3/3/26
DKL Petroleum LLC
Ottoville, OH.2/26/26
Dominick's Market
Taylor, MI.5/9/12
Duebbers Auto Service Center
Cincinnati, OH12/18/12
Duebbers Carry Out
Cincinnati, OH12/18/12
Eastman Party Store
Midland, MI4/29/11
Eastport Market
Eastport, MI9/7/99

COMPANY
CITY, STMEMBER SINCE

Ebels General Store
Falmouth, MI6/28/12
Eikenberry's IGA
Greenville, OH.3/25/26
Eleven Star LLC
Parma, OH.5/14/21
Etna Shell
Pataskala, OH.1/9/00
Euclid Gas Money Mart Corp
Euclid, OH2/29/16
Euclid Superior Shell
Cleveland, OH3/26/09
Express Food Mart
Cleveland, OH11/17/20
Express Food Mart II
Cleveland, OH8/6/08
EZ Go Food Mart #1
Painesville, OH1/9/17
EZ Go Food Mart-Richmond
Painesville, OH6/2/25
Ferndale Electric
Madison Heights, MI. . . .3/20/26
Food Town Fresh Market
Toledo, OH.4/29/25
Forgotten Harvest
Oak Park, MI3/19/26
Four Seasons Gas & Go
Roseville, MI7/25/23
Frank's Express Stop
Cleveland, OH12/8/04
Franklin Liquor & Deli
Southfield, MI6/27/08
Fresh Coast Market
Traverse City, MI3/25/26
Garden Fresh Market
Mundelein, IL3/31/16
Grace Food Market
Detroit, MI8/30/13
Grafton Convenient Express
Grafton, OH12/11/20
Greenfield Super Market Inc.
Detroit, MI2/23/12
Guastello's Village Market
St. Clair Shores, MI.6/24/21
H & H Mobil
East Lansing, MI6/1/71
Hansen's BP
Fond Du Lac, WI3/30/22
Harper's Brew Pub East
Lansing, MI.9/25/97
Hi Lite Fresh Market
Monroe, MI.5/13/13
Hills Fine Wine & Spirits
Bloomfield Hills, MI.7/21/08
Holden's Party Store
Milford, MI5/7/99
Honeytown Market
Fredericksburg, OH4/3/26
Hungry Howie's
Detroit, MI3/20/26

COMPANY
CITY, STMEMBER SINCE

Imperial Fresh Market
Detroit, MI8/14/09
Imperial Supermarket #2
Southfield, MI8/14/09
Jabco Petroleum
Cleveland, OH11/26/12
Jack's Service Center
Grand Rapids, MI.8/1/76
Johnny Pomodoro's Fresh Mkt
Farmington Hills, MI4/1/15
Joslyn Petroleum
Pontiac, MI.4/9/26
Junction Party Store
Detroit, MI4/18/25
Kassab Law Group, PC
Farmington Hills, MI4/17/15
Ken's Farm Market, LLC
Ionia, MI4/29/13
Ken's Fruit Market
Grand Rapids, MI.6/14/13
Ken's Fruit Markets
Grand Rapids, MI.6/14/12
Kings Cove Party Store
Holland, MI.6/19/03
La Paloma Supermarket
Pontiac, MI.8/16/12
Lakeville Market
Chesterfield Twp., MI3/11/26
Lakewood One Stop
Lakewood, OH.9/27/19
Lanver Inc. / Mobil Express
Ray, MI7/13/10
Leon International Foods
Atlanta, GA4/17/26
Liberty Food Center
Detroit, MI1/30/12
Lipari Foods LLC
Warren, MI.10/31/84
Lost Nation Convenient
Willoughby, OH.9/28/21
Luxury Lanes & Lounge
Ferndale, MI.3/31/15
Main Party Store
Ann Arbor, MI9/13/11
Manhattan Life
Houston, TX4/30/26
Marathon Food Mart –
Georgesville
Columbus, OH5/1/06
Marco's Fine Wine & Deli
Westland, MI5/10/11
Market Square of Woodward
Birmingham, MI1/0/00
Mary's Kountry Korner
Sterling, MI.4/1/88
McAuliffe's Meats
Addison, MI2/28/14
Mega Liquor
Detroit, MI7/7/11

MEMBERSHIP: MARCH & APRIL 2026

Welcome these new and recently renewed MIRA members!

COMPANY
CITY, STMEMBER SINCE

Memphis Corporation
Cleveland, OH 8/4/22
Mert's Specialty Meats
Lansing, MI. 5/31/17
Metropolitan Baking Co.
Hamtramck, MI. 3/17/10
Mike's Fresh Market
Detroit, MI 3/20/06
Mike's Party Store
Dearborn, MI 3/10/06
Milan City Market
Milan, MI 5/21/15
Miles Supermarket
Cleveland, OH 1/26/21
Miller Canfield Paddock & Stone,
PLC
Detroit, MI 2/10/25
Mobil X
Almont, MI 7/13/10
Mocha Gas Inc. – Sunoco
Livonia, MI 2/28/17
Monnette's Market
Toledo, OH. 3/23/18
Monnette's Market LL
Toledo, OH. 3/23/18
MSTD Management LLC
Atlanta, GA 3/25/26
Mugg & Bopps #1
Howell, MI 3/20/14
Mugg & Bopps #2
Howell, MI 3/20/14
Mugg & Bopps #3
Pinckney, MI. 3/20/14
Mugg & Bopps #4
Stockbridge, MI. 3/20/14
Mugg & Bopps #5
Dexter, MI 3/20/14
Mugg & Bopps #6
Holly, MI. 8/17/16
Mugg & Bopps #7
Gregory, MI 3/20/14
Mugg & Bopps #8
Grass Lake, MI. 3/20/14
Mugg & Bopps #9
Howell, MI 8/17/16
Mugg & Bopps #10
Brighton, MI 8/17/16
Mugg & Bopps #12
Perry, MI 3/20/14
Mugg & Bopps – #13
Morrice, MI 3/20/14
Mugg & Bopps – #14
Howell, MI 8/17/16
Mugg & Bopps – #15
Whitmore Lake, MI. . . . 3/20/14
Mugg & Bopps – #16
Munith, MI 11/23/16
Mugg & Bopps – #17
Hartland, MI. 4/28/17

COMPANY
CITY, STMEMBER SINCE

Mugg & Bopps – #18
Howell, MI 8/8/12
Mugg & Bopps – #19 Fowlerville,
MI 3/29/88
Mugg & Bopps #20
Chelsea, MI 10/26/20
My Town Mobil
Waterford, MI 6/10/10
Natural Food Patch
Ferndale, MI. 3/2/23
Nino Salvaggio of Livonia LLC
Livonia, MI 3/30/26
Noble Gas Money Mart
East Cleveland, OH . . . 1/27/24
Norm's Market
Taylor, MI. 5/14/13
Norm's Market & Catering
Richville, MI 2/17/81
Norman's Market
Westland, MI 3/30/26
North Ridgeville Convenient
Sunoco
North Ridgeville, OH . . . 4/14/26
Northside Market
Ludington, MI 5/17/02
NuVu Fuels–Manistee
Manistee, MI. 3/26/25
Ohio Lottery Commission
Cleveland, OH 1/29/10
One Se7en BP IMC
Sterling Heights, MI . . . 4/3/26
Palm International Market
West Bloomfield, MI . . . 6/30/25
Parkwood Drive Thru
Cleveland, OH 12/24/07
Pellicanos Marketplace
North Tonawanda, NY . . 3/25/26
Pepsi Beverages Company
Mason, OH. 1/1/67
Petruzello's Banquet &
Conference Center
Troy, MI 11/1/70
Pickle Barrel
Clarrington, PA 3/25/26
Plain City Village Market
Plain City, OH 1/24/11
Planet Propane
West Bloomfield, MI . . . 3/30/21
Plymouth Donut Inc.
Plymouth, MI 1/20/17
Prince Valley, Inc.
Detroit, MI 10/30/02
Proximo Spirits
Port Huron, MI. 9/30/15
QIF Full Stop LLC
Cleveland, OH 5/30/25
Quick Stop Beverage
Parma, OH. 10/7/13
R & J's West Shore Marketplace
Houghton Lake, MI. . . . 1/30/15

COMPANY
CITY, STMEMBER SINCE

Rahilly's IGA Inc
Newberry, MI 5/7/99
Real Producers (Ann Arbor)
Detroit, MI 3/30/26
Red Wagon Shoppe
Troy, MI 5/14/13
Redford Mini Mart
Detroit, MI 5/9/12
Reyes Coca-Cola
Flint, MI 1/1/67
Richardson Farms
White Marsh, MD 3/25/26
Riverside Market
Durand, MI. 4/18/03
Riverside Market
Montrose, MI. 8/18/97
Royal Fresh Harper #3
Detroit, MI 6/7/12
Royal Fresh Market #4
Detroit, MI 7/10/23
Saddle Up Grocery
Bear Lake, MI 6/22/12
Saroki Vehicles LLC
Farmington Hills, MI . . . 4/23/15
Savi @ Star Metal
Atlanta, GA 3/25/26
Savi Midtown 988 LLC
Atlanta, GA 3/25/26
Savi Provisions of TN LLC
Nashville, TN. 3/25/26
Seaway Cash–N–Carry
Cleveland, OH 6/6/14
Seaway Marketplace
Toledo, OH. 8/17/11
Sedgwick
Cincinnati, OH 12/10/09
Shoppers Supermarket Inc.
Warren, MI. 5/28/10
Snappy Gas Mart
Cleveland, OH 11/14/12
Soergel Orchards
Wexford, PA 3/25/26
Spagnuolo's Party Store & Deli
Bath, MI. 4/22/15
SpartanNash
Grand Rapids, MI. 1/1/66
Speedy Grub Shack
Middleburg Hts, OH 7/7/99
Speedy's Gas Station
Cleveland, OH 4/24/19
Sun Valley Supermarket
Redford, MI 6/28/19
Sunes DM Goods & Grocery
Drummond Island, MI. . . 6/13/17
Sunrise Market
AuGres, MI 6/27/12
Tailgaters Okemos
Okemos, MI 3/10/15

COMPANY
CITY, STMEMBER SINCE

Team Sledd
Wheeling, WV 9/3/14
The Crunchy Pickle
Howell, MI 3/25/26
The Goody Nook Inc.
Circleville, OH 7/7/05
The Vintage Depot
Stockton, MO 3/25/26
Thumb Meat Market
Caro, MI 4/3/26
Town Center Market #290
Mount Vernon, OH. . . . 3/27/15
Town Center Market #291
Mount Vernon, OH. . . . 3/27/15
Town Center Market #801
Mount Vernon, OH. . . . 3/27/15
Town Center Market Drive Thru
Mount Vernon, OH. . . . 3/27/15
Trombleys Country Market
Emmett, MI 3/25/26
Tyrone Party Store
Fenton, MI 12/4/15
UBCR LLC
Wixom, MI 2/9/15
United Community Family
Services (CALC)
Troy, MI 3/23/26
Upson Shell
Euclid, OH 10/29/12
Village Market Leroy, LLC
Leroy, MI 6/27/01
Vintage Market
Westland, MI 4/18/13
Vreeland Market
Woodhaven, MI. 5/20/92
Wagon Wheel Outlet
Guthrie, KY. 3/25/26
Warren Wood Market
Warren, MI 12/10/09
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Lake City, MI. 2/25/99
Wholesale Store Fixtures
Detroit, MI 3/6/26
Wild Bill's Tobacco – Corporate
Troy, MI 3/24/26
Williams Marathon, Inc.
Levering, MI 5/10/11
Willow Creek Market
Belleville, MI 3/25/26
Ypsi Convenience Inc.
Ypsilanti, MI 6/1/16
Ypsilanti Food Co–Op
Ypsilanti, MI 3/31/87
Zackary Inc.
Cleveland, OH 9/28/21
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SEDGWICK WORKERS' COMPENSATION **O**

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(313) 706-3010

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MIRA Coupon Redemption
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(248) 866-4438

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Manhattan Life
(985) 377-6260

SER Metro Detroit
(313) 945-5200

ENVIRONMENTAL ENGINEERING

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INSURANCE SERVICES: COMMERCIAL

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Cleveland (216) 252-7377

Twinsburg (330) 963-5300

Reyes Coca-Cola

Metro Detroit (313) 868-2008
Belleville (734) 397-2700

Flint (810) 237-4000
Cleveland (216) 690-2653

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RNDC of Michigan
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2026

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NOVEMBER 2026

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**FOR A COMPLETE LIST OF ALL MIRA EVENTS VISIT
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