

# Panel offers best practices for route ops

By Paul Tash, Georgia Amusement Journal "It's all about partnerships."

That was the core message during a panel discussion featuring five experienced route operators during the Amusement Expo International (AEI) in Las Vegas last month. The panelists discussed several techniques and best practices they



employ to create winning partnerships when establishing new locations as well as maintaining existing partners.

Panelists were united in expressing the importance of

building solid relationships with their customers, especially on a personal level.

"I make it a point when I'm out on a route to know (a customer's) personal stuff," said moderator Jim Tartal, from births to birthdays and from weddings to anniversaries. "It makes you part of their family."

#### AEI photos on Pages 10, 11

Tartal is owner and president of Scottdale Music

Service in Everson, Penn, which operates a typical street route with ATMs, jukeboxes, games, ticket redemption, pool and pinball.

"Your customer is your partner," added Tim Zahn, general manager of American Amusement Arcade, based in Bloomington, Minn., which operates in bars, restaurants, movie theaters, bowling centers, amusement parks, and family entertainment centers. "The people you're partnering

See PRACTICES Page 8



**SCOTT TWINE**, director of development for Winner's Marketing, poses recently with the company's

new redemption kiosk and twoperson upright fish game at the company's facility in Suwanee, GA.

# 'Now is the time'

#### Winner's Marketing relaunches fish game

#### By Paul Tash Georgia Amusement Journal

Surely feeling like they were swimming upstream at times, developers of the first true "fish game" certified in the Georgia market have shown incredible commitment to transform their game into one that not only meets fast-evolving regulations but embraces them. Winner's Marketing "relaunched" its fish game earlier this year with suggested hardware and software improvements gathered from master license holders (MLHs) during industry events and pilot programs.

"Over the past three years, we have made significant upgrades and im-

See WINNERS Page 14



## L&W buys Grover charitable-gaming assets

Game manufacturer Light & Wonder has made a \$1 billion purchase of North Carolina-based Grover Gaming's charitable-gambling assets, CDC Gaming has reported.

The purchase doesn't affect Grover's COAM business in Georgia, which operates under Banilla Games.

The bulk of the purchase price

consists of \$850 million in cash, due on closing, according to CDC Gaming. An additional fee of as much as \$200 million will be paid on the achievement of unspecified financial milestones.

Privately held Grover, owned by CEO Garrett Blackwelder, was founded in 2013. It has an electronic pull tab installed base of 10,000 units

in North Dakota, Virginia, Ohio, New Hampshire, and Kentucky. Grover is additionally licensed in South Dakota, Minnesota, Montana, Wyoming, West Virginia, Washington, Ontario, and Louisiana, according to Deutsche Bank.

The terms of the agreement include a four-year consultancy for

See PURCHASE Page 8





























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# Patel, Fellows named AMOA directors

#### Innovator Award, Operator's Choice Award recipients also announced

During its 2025 Annual Membership Meeting in Las Vegas, AMOA elected a new class of directors that includes two from Georgia – Paul Patel from Encore Amusement and Shawn Fellows from Diamond Amusements. In addition to Patel and Fellows, new directors consisting of eight operators and distributors from around the country are:

- Scott Ausmus, National Entertainment Network, Louisville, CO
- Chris Hale, Venco Business Solutions, Bland, VA
- Jamie Rust, Amusement Unlimited, Eugene, OR
- Maria Trent, Back Alley Lanes VrCade, Daytona Beach, FL
- Gage Whiteley, Pride Vending, Salem, OR
- Chris Pascaretti, Pascaretti Enterprises Inc., Troy, MI

In addition, the following 2025-2026 AMOA principal officers, elected at its Mid-Year Board Meeting in September 2024, took the helm for a one-year term at the conclusion of Amusement Expo International. They are:

- President Brian Brotsch of Knox Amusement, Rochester, NY
  - First Vice President Tommy



AMOA's RECENTLY ELECTED directors include two representatives from the Georgia COAM in-

dustry – Paul Patel, third from right, and Shawn Fellows, second from right.

Hendley of B & H Vending & Amusements, Indian Trail, NC

- Treasurer Scott John of Amuse-O-Matic, Frederick, MD
- Secretary Jim Tartal of Scottdale Music Service, Scottdale, PA

AMOA officers and directors whose terms expired at the close of the show were sincerely thanked and recognized for their dedication and service to the association and the industry. They will now join the illustrious AMOA Heart & Soul,

which consists of the generations of men and women that have served on the AMOA Board of Directors since 1948.

Also during the AEI 2025, AMOA presented its annual AMOA Innovator Awards and Operator's Choice Awards. The AMOA judging team reviewed an impressive lineup of 33 entries from 22 companies. This year's AMOA Innovator Award recipients are:

 AMI Entertainment for Phantom

- Amusement Source International for Case Pro
- S & B Candy and Toy for The Gateway

In addition, the following companies were awarded a 2025 AMOA Operator's Choice award:

- S & B Candy and Toy for The Gateway
- Team Play for Pixel Pix GEN4 The awards were presented at the AEI Beers & Cheers event on March 19 at the Las Vegas Convention Center in Las Vegas.

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# **COAM** calendar

**April 20:** Gross retail receipts for January, February and March are due. The gross retail receipts must be submitted electronically through the COAM website at www.gacoam.com. Failure to report on time may result in penalties.

#### — MEETINGS/OTHER —

April 15: COAM Advisory Board, GA Lottery headquarters, downtown Atlanta

April 17: GAMOA-led COAM redemption discussion, Hilton Atlanta Northeast, Peachtree Corners

May 15: GACS Southern Convenience Store and Petroleum Show, The Centreplex, Macon

May 22: GAMOA membership meeting, Hilton Atlanta Northeast, **Peachtree Corners** 

#### Write us

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## **Purchase**

#### from Page 1

Blackwelder "to help drive the continued success of the business," according to a company press release. A spring 2025 closing is anticipated.

Explaining the attraction of its newest asset, Light & Wonder CEO Matt Wilson said, "Grover Gaming is a leading player in charitable gaming, a category that has experienced significant growth in recent years. This transaction complements our position as the leading cross-platform, global games company by adding another compelling regulated adjacency to our profile."

Blackwelder said, "Light & Wonder is an ideal partner for us, given our similar company cultures and dedication to innovation and customer service."

"The real winners are the charities and fraternals in these markets because of the exciting game content L&W brings to the table," added Kevin Morse, Grover's chief development officer.

## **Practices**

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with, you want to know on a personal level."

He also urged route operators to train their employees in the importance of building relationships, especially the ones who are in locations regularly, including technicians and collectors.

"In a lot of cases, they can build relationships better than you can, because they're in there every week or two," he said. "Training your people to have that personal touch to get to know their customers I think is really important."

The personal touch is a part of good customer service, said Ryan Harris, president of Ellis Amusements, one of the largest operators in Idaho and Utah, serving a variety of locations including bars, restaurants, malls, bowling alleys, family entertainment centers, hotels, and gas stations.

The employees can make the difference in relationship building, he said. Building employees' skillsets to include good people skills is vital, he added, especially when the owner or other company leaders don't have the time to visit locations themselves.

Harris said he does try to "pop in" when he's near a location when he has time, even if it's "just saying hi."

"It is really nice to talk to your customers when they're not angry," he said.

Rich Del Vecchio, vice president of operations for Kids Quest and Cyber Quest, agreed that "checking in with folks when there's nothing bad going on" is important.

"Sometimes you just want to see how they're doing," he said, "and make sure your business is complementing theirs."

Often, Del Vecchio said, those conversations lead to more opportunities because "there's no agenda" and they're "more free-flowing."

"You get a chance to just network ... and then they'll tell you about a need, and you can figure out how to help them out."

Overall communication with locations is key, Zahn added, even if it's just providing updates on delivery for a part.

"Let them know what's going on," he said. "It goes a long way."

Communication during times of crisis is also important, he added. During the Covid pandemic, Zahn said, his company constantly sent emails updating locations on the "changing landscape" of rules and regulations.

"We tried to educate our cus-

tomers," he said.

Panelists also urged route operators to treat all the employees in their customer location well.

"You never know what waitress is going to move up to a leadership role," Harris said.

#### **New customers**

On another topic, panelists discussed their best practices for finding new customers.

Zahn said he's looking for locations that are as engaged in their business as he is in his, "so we can work together to be successful."

When looking for new locations, Del Vecchio said, "it's a long dance with development."

"Take your time to develop that relationship appropriately," he said. "Do your homework. Figure out if what they want to do matches with what your goals are. Look for winwins."

Research the location before pitching a potential customer, Zahn said, noting that social media can provide some information on the location. Bring information on your company and its products, and leave a brochure, he suggested.

Zahn added that transparency from the start is crucial, especially when discussing machine costs and expected revenue. An ideal partnership allows operators to openly dis-

(Story continued on next page)



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**AN AEI PANEL DISCUSSION** to help route operators develop successful partnerships with their lo-

cations included, from left, Tim Zahn, Rich Del Vecchio and Ryan Harris.

(Continued from previous page) cuss such challenges as the rising cost of equipment and other costs, so locations understand what they're paying.

When talking with potential customers, Zahn said, it's vital to understand what they're expecting in equipment and service, so the operator can propose a plan that fits their specific needs and offers realistic expectations.

New customers should understand that success "doesn't just magically happen," Harris said. The partners have to work together to successfully promote and grow business.

Perusing liquor license transfers and bankruptcy, which are both public records can generate leads for new customers, panelists said.

Jeff Prescott said continual networking with the "beer and pop guys," who know what's happening in the business, can produce leads, as well. Prescott is president of Valley Vending Service in Plattsburgh, NY, which operates games and ATM machines in bars, bowling alleys, and movie theaters.

Location managers also can be lead generators, Zahn added, so get to know them. Bar managers, for example, always know what's going on around town, he said.

"They will know before you do if a new location is opening up or needs a distributor."

#### Service calls

The panelists also discussed the best practices required for successful service calls. The most obvious practice is not always the most successful, they said.

"First, make sure your technicians solve the problem," Prescott said. "Make sure the pool table or whatever is working before they leave."

Also, follow up on service calls, Zahn said, to make sure "the solution is still working."

"And by the way," he said, "just unplugging the game is not a solution."

Be persistent, Del Vecchio added.

"Sometimes you have to work to find a solution."

Technicians should be trained to ask customers "what else can I do for you" after completing a service call before they leave, Tartar said. Besides being "great customer service," he said, the action can save time and money by avoiding a return trip for another problem.

#### Losing accounts

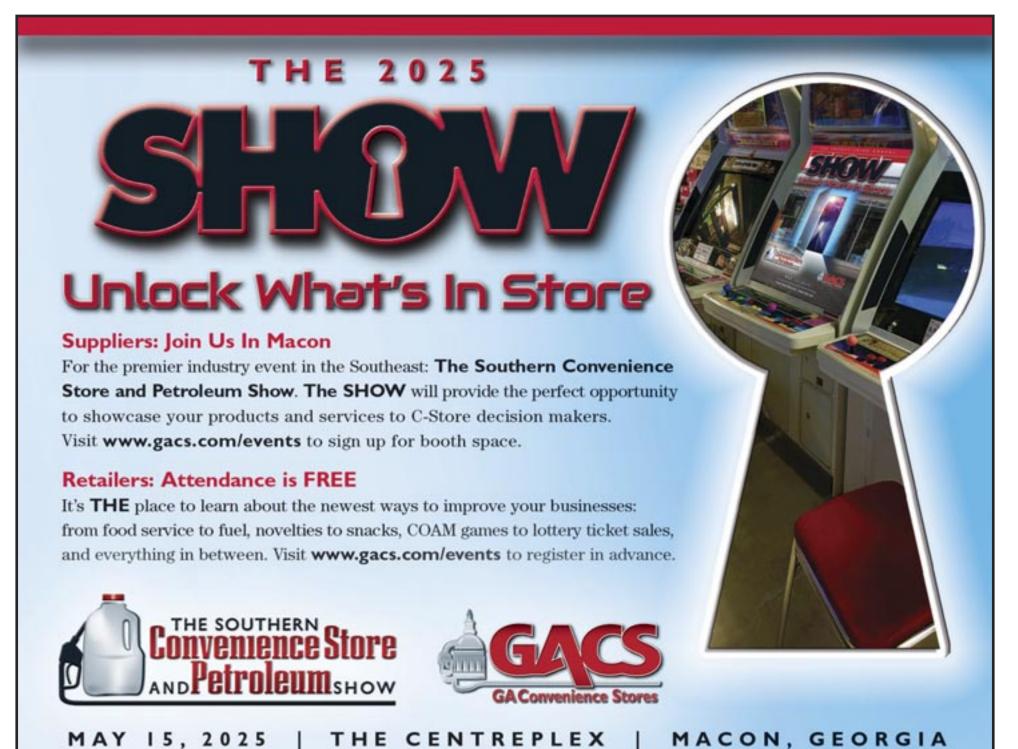
When a partnership doesn't succeed and route operators lose an account, "don't burn bridges," Tartal said, because the account could become available again. For example, the location could be sold down the line, providing an opportunity to pitch the new owner.

Good partnerships don't often fall apart, Del Vecchio said.

"If you're surprised you lost an account, you haven't been paying attention," he added.

That outcome is the result of a deteriorating relationship, he said, "and you totally missed the signs."

Prescott added that it's not the problems he knows about that he worries about, "it's the problems that I don't know about that keep me up at night."



# Huge AEI showcases innovation

Amusement Expo International 2025 successfully concluded last month after highlighting the latest innovations in games and business solutions for the out-of-home entertainment industry. The event March 17-19 at the Las Vegas Convention Center – the largest show to date – showcased a wide array of products, education sessions, hands-on workshops, and roundtables covering critical industry topics, including:

- Arcade games and virtual reality
- Family fun and entertainment centers
  - Restaurants and bars
  - Bulk vending merchandisers
  - ATMs and cashless systems
  - Independent route operations
  - Recreation centers and more

#### Key takeaways

Breakthrough Game Innovations: Developers and game tech giants unveiled hundreds of cuttingedge technologies and immersive experiences transforming experienced-based entertainment venues to meet modern tastes and tech trends, ensuring profitability in today's com-

petitive entertainment landscape.

Quality Audience: AEI show-cased impressive resilience in 2025, drawing a substantial crowd of over 5,500 high-quality participants. This remarkable turnout underscores the enduring appeal and relevance of AEI's educational programs and trade show offerings. The event's ability to consistently attract and retain a significant audience demonstrates its ability and the value it provides to industry professionals, even in the face of evolving challenges.

**Powerful Keynote:** Dana Monique, a finalist from The Voice, delivered an energizing keynote performance inspiring attendees with her unique approach to storytelling and powerful vocal talent.

Elite Connections: Numerous networking events such as the Beers & Cheers award party, industry gala, and keynote luncheon gave attendees ample opportunities to connect with all levels of professionals in the industry, ensuring that all attendees made valuable connections throughout the conference.



**SOUTHERN GAMING** Solutions staff stand with M3t folks at the M3t booth during the Amusement Expo International last month in Las Vegas. They

are, from left, M3t's Mike Carpenter, Phil Bowden and Dylan Waddle; Southern Gaming's Angela Whitman, Amber Carter and Bobby Walker.

Fun for a Cause: The atmosphere was further powered with excitement as participants helped to support the AEI Charity Fund drive generating over \$32,000 in contributions for Ronald McDonald House Charities of Greater Las Vegas® (RMHC®).

Co-Locating Events: The following co-located events helped maximize value for attendees and exhibitors alike by combining complementary audiences and resources.

- National Bulk Vending Association (NBVA)
- Billiard Congress of America (BCA)
  - Foundations
  - Virtual Reality
  - Laser Tag Summit

The strategy allowed for increased networking opportunities, shared knowledge, and a more comprehensive experience for participants across various industries.

Amusement Expo International 2026 is scheduled for March 18-19 at the Las Vegas Convention Center. The event will be preceded by educational sessions on March 16-17. Exhibitors who submit their booth space applications by Aug. 1, 2025, will be eligible for a discount rate. Resorts World has been designated as the new headquarter hotel for AEI.



**IVEY PROMOTION'S** Aleksy Garczynski, above right, discusses some features of a game

to an interested AEI attendee. Below, Gabe Stroup of ATi takes time for a photo at his AEI booth.







Eight Lounge in the Resorts World resort March 18 during AEI week. Attending that fun event, at left, were Felicia Collins, new AMOA President Brian Brotsch and Gaines Butler. Below left, Primero Gaming owner Mike Macke (center) stands with his daughter and new Primero employee Savannah Macke and Primero CEO Barry Rutherford on the AEI floor. Below right is Evgeny Bronnikov, who was busy showing Jenka Lab products at the Expo. At bottom left is David Vallari of Ryken Security and at bottom right is Ali (left) and Nasir Bhamani of NextGen Gaming – both companies have entered the Georgia COAM market this year.

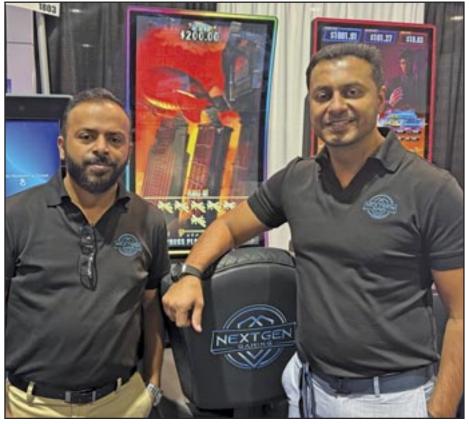
THE GEORGIA AMUSEMENT and Music Operators Association hosted a social at the











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## **Winners**

#### from Page 1

provements to the capabilities of the fish game that include integrations with leading RMS providers and kiosk manufacturer CountR," said Scott Twine, director of business development for Winner's Marketing.

Twine said the new fish game is certified by Axes for its player-card system and by EasyLinx for its TITO (ticket in, ticket out) system.

"We have also partnered with CountR as the authorized reseller of their gift card-issuing redemption kiosks in Georgia, which seamlessly integrates with both Axes and EasyLinx," he said.

The original game took nearly four years to develop, Twine said, but when it was released in 2022, company officials quickly realized the game didn't keep pace with the state's rapidly evolving technology and regulations.

"From the time that the original design of the fish game was completed to the time we entered the Georgia market with a certified fish game, things had changed significantly," Twine said. "We quickly realized that we needed to make upgrades to the design and capabil-



**LUKE LOWERY**, technical manager for Winner's Marketing, shows off the company's new redemp-

tion kiosk and three-person upright fish game recently at the company's facility in Suwanee, GA.

ities of the fish game in order for it to integrate with the emerging technology that had made its way into the COAM market."

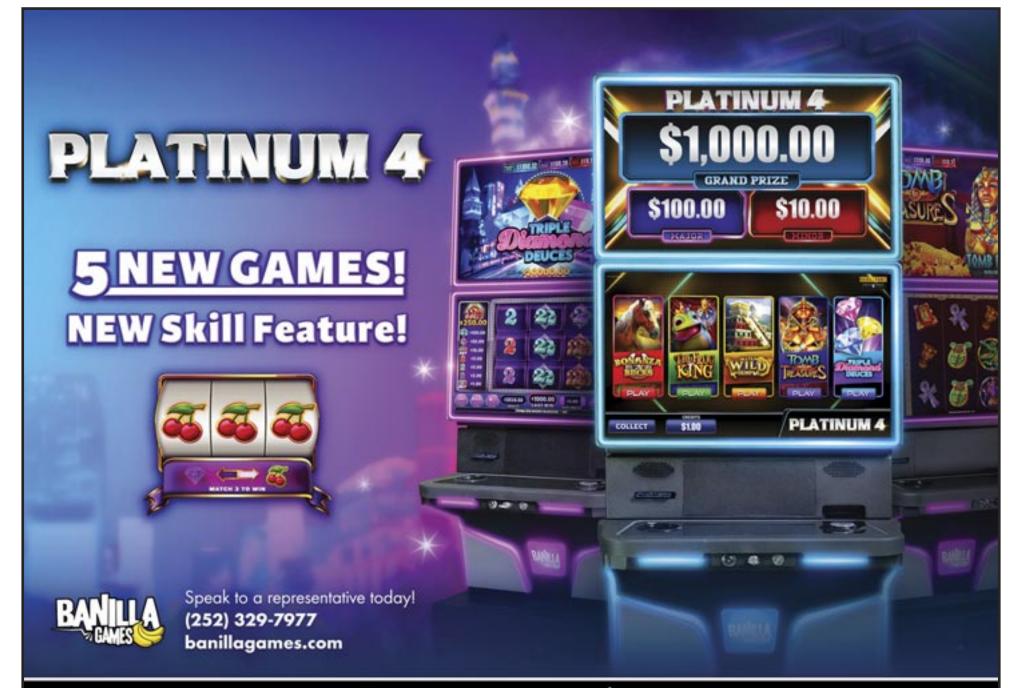
Specifically, the original game was only available in a four-player upright cabinet and a four-player table, he said, and it couldn't oper-

ate alongside traditional standup skill games in locations running player card or TITO technologies.

"We weren't ready," Twine acknowledges. "So we went back to the drawing board."

"Understanding and embracing the gift card program with the use of a card-issuing redemption kiosk," he said, was the focus of the second development effort. Additionally, aligning Winner's Marketing with successful systems providers operating in Georgia has allowed the company "to keep pace"

(Story continued on next page)













### (Continued from previous page) with technology," he said.

Twine said the company understands that operators have different spaces available for games and that every inch has to be utilized efficiently. To meet these needs, he said, Winner's Marketing has created "multiple player configurations to suit a wide variety of locations." The game is now available in two-player uprights, three-player uprights, four-player uprights, as well as the traditional four-player fish table.

"We can also work with MLHs to build a customized gift card kiosk solution for their existing route of standup skill games with the ability to include our fish game now or in the future," Twine said.

#### A Georgia history

The principal owners and directors of Winner's Marketing have a history in the Georgia COAM market. In 2013, shortly after the enactment of the regulations that now shape the Georgia COAM market, Twine and Stuart Jordan, president of Winner's Marketing, began what they describe as "mission impossible."

Jordan had recently purchased a hard-to-come-by master license, and the two set out to secure locations for the placement of skill games. Jordan and Twine spent 45 days straight driving across Georgia cold-calling and presenting skill games to every convenience store and bar they could find.

"It was like the equivalent of Opie and Gomer Pyle trying to convince operators that they needed to pay out winnings with lottery tickets and store merchandise and sign an agreement with a 50/50 split," Twine said with a laugh.

Over the next few years, Jordan and Twine – along with Kevin Frank, vice president of Winner's Marketing, and Britney Pridgen, director of finance – were able to build a small route of successful locations through their company, Planet Amusements. Though Jordan sold his master license in 2018, the early experience as a master licensee proved valuable.

While operating in Georgia as a master licensee, Jordan and Frank recognized the need for a Class B game that was not a slot-style game. They noticed that fish games were becoming very popular in other markets and that no one had attempted to design a fish game to meet the requirements of the Georgia COAM regulations. Thinking "outside of the box," Twine said, the company transitioned from distributor to manufacturer and em-

barked on the lengthy process of designing, developing, and testing a fish game for Georgia.

#### Time has come

Though that original effort earned a Georgia COAM certification from Intralot, it needed hardware improvements and software integrations. Winner's Marketing remained determined, though, and its team worked to develop what's now available in Georgia – a unique class B COAM game that utilizes the best technology available.

The adoption of the gift card has been especially helpful for the company's fish game enhancements. Twine said initially the game faced some challenges caused by redemption limitations, but the gift card program has solved those challenges.

"The coming change in the regulations that restricts the redemption of winnings to only lottery tickets, gift cards or replays is a great fit for the fish game," he said. "We have heard repeatedly at GAMOA meetings that the market needs to start adopting Class B games that are not viewed as 'slot machines.' The fish game creates a very good look for the industry with the potential to far exceed expected revenue."

"It's been a big evolution,"
Twine added. "But I believe now is the time."

#### **Training and support**

Winner's Marketing's local team, led by Technical Manager Luke Lowery, works with MLHs before the installation of a fish game to provide the initial training and field training on the day of the installation. For kiosks, they help MLHs understand the process of getting approved for the gift card program, if needed, and how to specifically get approved for the use of card issuing kiosks.

"We know firsthand that the pace of change can be difficult to navigate," Lowery said. "We use the knowledge and experience we have gained from this process when we work with MLHs. Many of them are experiencing the same challenges that we have already experienced."

Winner's Marketing is confident a place exists in the Georgia market for a fish game.

"Our game is an ultra-competitive per terminal cost opportunity that provides an exhilarating player experience that will attract new customers – translating into increased revenue share," Twine said.



# C-store trade show to roll May 15

The Southern Convenience Store and Petroleum Show returns to Macon for its 23rd year May 15 at The Centreplex in Macon.

The event's theme, "Unlock What's In Store," reflects the main purpose of the Show: to provide store owners, operators, and buyers information about the newest ways

to improve their businesses – from food service to fuel, novelties to snacks, and everything in between.

The Show's theme also reflects GACS' commitment to protecting the future of the industry, including the ever-present impacts of legislative activity on the convenience business. The Show provides an

opportunity for c-store suppliers to showcase their products and services to key decision-makers from across Georgia.

Show attendance is free for retailers, including a seminar. Preregistration is strongly encouraged at www.gacs.com, to avoid long check-in lines. Admission is by

badge only. For information about convenient hotels and special rates, visit www.gacs.com or contact the GACS office.

To ensure members understand the implementation and impact of the new bill allowing convenience retailers to enter the hemp-product market, GACS has organized a seminar called "All About Hemp." The meeting will cover:

- Changes to the hemp products landscape in Georgia after Senate Bill 494.
- Things to know for businesses new to the hemp product market.
- How convenience stores can achieve compliant participation.

A representative from the Department of Agriculture's legal team, which works on issues involving animals, food, fuel, plants, soil and hemp, will conduct the seminar.

#### Show schedule Wednesday, May 14

8 am-5 pm – Exhibitor setup 2-5 pm – Registration open 4-6 pm – Cocktail reception

#### Thursday, May 15

8-9 am – Department of Agriculture's "All About Hemp" presentation

8 am-3 pm – Registration open 9 am-4 pm – Trade show open









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- A change of master, change of ownership, or cancellation letter received by GLC;
  - A COAM game board swapped out with a different game;
  - A COAM malfunction.

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- 1. Call Intralot before disconnecting the COAMs from a location and removing those COAMs. The Master License Holder (MLH) needs to contact the Intralot Hotline at 877-261-6242 to properly decommission COAMs. The COAMs must be connected to the site controller at this time.
- 2. Intralot will let you know when the COAMs are decommissioned. The Intralot representative will perform steps on the Intralot system that prepares the COAMs for the decommission. Once the steps are complete, Intralot will notify the MLH the machines have been decommissioned.
  - 3. Disconnect decommissioned COAMs from the site controller.

## COIN OPERATED AMUSEMENT MACHINE LOCATION SWEEP AND MASTER PUSH CALENDAR



#### **JAN-JUNE 2025**



ACCOUNTING WEEK START	ACCOUNTING WEEK END	LOCATION SWEEP DATE	MASTER PUSH DATE
29-Dec-24	04-Jan-25	08-Jan-25	14-Jan-25
05-Jan-25	11-Jan-25	15-Jan-25	22-Jan-25*
12-Jan-25	18-Jan-25	22-Jan-25	28-Jan-25
19-Jan-25	25-Jan-25	29-Jan-25	04-Feb-25
26-Jan-25	01-Feb-25	05-Feb-25	11-Feb-25
02-Feb-25	08-Feb-25	12-Feb-25	19-Feb-25*
09-Feb-25	15-Feb-25	19-Feb-25	25-Feb-25
16-Feb-25	22-Feb-25	26-Feb-25	04-Mar-25
23-Feb-25	01-Mar-25	05-Mar-25	11-Mar-25
02-Mar-25	08-Mar-25	12-Mar-25	18-Mar-25
09-Mar-25	15-Mar-25	19-Mar-25	25-Mar-25
16-Mar-25	22-Mar-25	26-Mar-25	01-Apr-25
23-Mar-25	29-Mar-25	02-Apr-25	08-Apr-25
30-Mar-25	05-Apr-25	09-Apr-25	15-Apr-25
06-Apr-25	12-Apr-25	16-Apr-25	22-Apr-25
13-Apr-25	19-Apr-25	23-Apr-25	29-Apr-25
20-Apr-25	26-Apr-25	30-Apr-25	06-May-25
27-Apr-25	03-May-25	07-May-25	13-May-25
04-May-25	10-May-25	14-May-25	20-May-25
11-May-25	17-May-25	21-May-25	28-May-25*
18-May-25	24-May-25	28-May-25	03-Jun-25
25-May-25	31-May-25	04-Jun-25	10-Jun-25
01-Jun-25	07-Jun-25	11-Jun-25	17-Jun-25
08-Jun-25	14-Jun-25	18-Jun-25	25-Jun-25*
15-Jun-25	21-Jun-25	25-Jun-25	01-Jul-25
22-Jun-25	28-Jun-25	02-Jul-25	09-Jul-25*

\*Indicates sweep or push date has been changed to accommodate holiday Note: Holidays on a Thursday and Friday may delay the availability of the Location Period Accounting Report on the following Monday

### **Keep COAMs connected**

To ensure accurate reporting of financial data to the Central Accounting System, the Georgia Lottery Corporation (GLC) says it is imperative the Location License Holders (LLHs) ensure all equipment remains connected to the site controller and powered up at all times.

The GLC maintains a record of those LLHs that are repeat offenders of failing to ensure the continuous connectivity and operation of Class B COAMs.

Failure to comply with these procedures may result in fines up to \$50,000, suspension and/or revocation of the license.





