



# GEORGIA Amusement JOURNAL

Dedicated to serving the Georgia COAM industry  
Endorsed by the Georgia Amusement and Music Operators Association  
paul@tashcommunications.com (406) 491-0100



A Tash Communications publication

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## Makris to lead

# Board has new chair

By Paul Tash

Georgia Amusement Journal

The nasty winter storm earlier this month that closed many state and federal offices in Atlanta also forced the COAM Advisory Board to conduct its Jan. 17 meeting via conference call.

Despite those circumstances, the board conducted a good deal of business in about an hour, including the election of board officers. The board voted Gus Makris as board chairman,



GUS MAKRIS

Chris Pope as vice chairman, and CB Yadav as secretary. Other board members are Emily Dunn, Stewart Carswell, Jim Siskin and Natalie Jones.

In addition, board members welcomed the Georgia Lottery Corp.'s new President and CEO Gretchen Corbin to the board.

She replaces Debbie Alford, who retired as the Lottery's top official effective Dec. 31.

"I'm honored to be with you," Corbin told the board. "I'm thrilled to be with the Lottery and with this great COAM group."

In other business, the COAM Advisory Board recommended for adoption by the GLC

See BOARD Page 8



Paul Tash photo

A WINTER STORM did a number on Atlanta's flowers and shut down government offices earlier this month, including the Georgia

Lottery Corp. headquartered in the downtown building above. The closure changed a COAM Advisory Board meeting into a call.



## Banilla event praises industry techs

By Paul Tash

Georgia Amusement Journal

Participants who braved the cold to participate in Banilla Games' second annual Workshop and Technicians Appreciation Day Jan. 18 were rewarded with great information, a delicious lunch, and several chances to win cash and prizes.

The game manufacturer hosted the free event for operators and technicians

at the Marriott Gateway Center in Atlanta, with snow still on the ground from the previous day's storm.

"Thanks to everyone for coming out and braving the weather," said Banilla's Kevin Morse, who served as emcee.

The event was created, Morse said, "to show appreciation" for the hundreds of technicians who work in

the Georgia COAM industry.

"You are the front line of this industry," Morse would say later. "This event is to say, thank you."

A workshop provided an opportunity for technicians to receive specialized training from event co-sponsors VSR Industries, Goldfinger, and CPI/MEI. In addition, six \$500 prizes were raffled off for in-

See WORKSHOP Page 10



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# Journal Opinion

## GAMOA to monitor legislation

**By Shawn Fellows**  
**GAMOA President**

The 2018 session of the Georgia General Assembly is now under way, and GAMOA, as always, will keep a close eye on legislation that could impact our industry.

Our highly capable government affairs professionals work every day of the session to protect the gains we've made in recent years and look for opportunities to strengthen our partnership with the state.

The General Assembly is in session for 40 days each year, but the session can often stretch into April. This year, however, is an election year for all members of the House and Senate, so they'll be anxious to finish the session quickly so they can hit the campaign trail before the May 22 primary elections.

All statewide elected offices are also on the ballot this year and change is guaranteed. Gov. Nathan Deal – who signed into law the legislation that created our partnership with the state – is finishing his second term, and numerous Republicans and Democrats are actively campaigning for the job. One of them is Lt. Gov. Casey Cagle, meaning his current position will come open too. The lieutenant gover-

nor's race shook up the Senate leadership and the new Senate president pro tem is Butch Miller (R-Gainesville), a leader who understands the issues affecting our industry and the role we play in contributing toward the

close eye on bills that touch on gaming.

FanDuel and DraftKings are pushing legislation that would declare that their daily fantasy sports offerings don't qualify as gambling because they are

on this topic has failed to get out of committee the last few years, but with more than 40 lobbyists representing these companies, you can assume the issue will garner significant attention again this year.

Our organization isn't pushing any specific legislation this year, but we must stand guard anytime there are bills that directly or indirectly affect our business and our partnership with the state. The membership of the General Assembly constantly churns, so we must continually educate senators and representatives about our industry's contributions to the HOPE Scholarship and Pre-K, to our local county's tax base and to charitable causes, such as our donations to the Red Cross last year for hurricane victims.

While our highly effective government affairs specialists keep track of legislation moving through the legislative process, we all have a role to play in building relationships with our own local delegation. We have a good story to tell, and they would benefit from hearing it directly from us, their constituents.

**GAMOA's mission: "To Promote and Serve Georgia's Coin Operated Amusement and Music Industry."**



**Shawn Fellows**

**W**e have a good story to tell, and (legislators) would benefit from hearing it directly from us, their constituents.

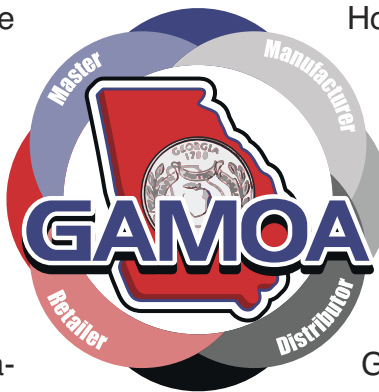
HOPE Scholarship and Pre-K.

All bills that were introduced last year are still alive this session, and bills that passed one house already only have to clear the other chamber to get to the governor's desk for consideration.

We obviously are keeping a

"games of skill." A bill to do that has already passed the House by a wide margin, but the Senate didn't take it up last year.

Casino interests are back again to push for a constitutional amendment that would allow them to operate in Georgia. Despite vocal supporters in both the House and Senate, legislation



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## COAM calendar

— REPORTING DATES —

**Jan. 20:** Each monthly report should be submitted by Location License Holders in electronic format via the www.gacoam.com website as required by the GLC by the 20th of each following month.

Changes in Monthly Sales Reporting requirements effective immediately. Master License Holders are no longer required to report any sales data. Location License Holders are required to report Gross Retail Receipts only.

— MEETINGS —

- Feb. 22:** GAMOA meeting, McDonough, Moose Lodge
- Feb. 28:** Amusement Expo, Las Vegas, Convention Center
- March 28:** COAM Advisory Board, Atlanta, GLC office

**Write us**

The *Georgia Amusement Journal* welcomes letters to the editor. Letters must include the writer's name and address. The word limit is 300. Mail to Georgia Amusement Journal, P.O. Box 4307, Butte MT 59702, or you can email us at paul@tashcommunications.com. The *Journal* reserves the right not to print letters it finds objectionable.



# Journal Opinion

## AMOA State Council meets in San Diego

**Lori Schneider**  
**AMOA Executive Director**

The Amusement and Music Operators Association (AMOA) will be hosting its annual State Council Meeting at the end of January.

The 2018 meeting will be held Jan. 25-27 in San Diego at the San Diego Marriott Mission Valley. The annual AMOA State Council Meeting is one of the most productive meetings on the industry calendar.

The 2018 program will feature an update from AMOA's legislative counsel along with sessions concentrated on the following areas:

- Gaming
- Legislation affecting ATM operators
- Taxes, Licenses and Fees

• Member engagement  
Each state is invited to send two leaders from their state, typ-



Lori Schneider

ically this includes a hired executive director, if the state has one, and the state association's

president or another state association leader.

In addition to its state meet-

The annual AMOA State Council Meeting is one of the most productive meetings on the industry calendar.

ing, AMOA is hard at work on putting the finishing touches to the AAMA/AMOA Amusement

Expo International. The event begins with Expo Education Day on Tuesday, Feb. 27, at the Westgate Las Vegas, followed by a two-day trade show on Wednesday, Feb. 28, and Thursday, March 1, at the Las Vegas Convention Center.

Keynote speaker Meagan Johnson will be kicking off Expo Education Day. Johnson, known as a "Generational Humorist," has an outspoken, take-no-prisoners Gen X attitude and challenges audiences to think differently and act decisively when dealing with multiple generations within the workplace.

For more AMOA information, contact the AMOA Headquarters at 1-815-893-6010 or info@amoa.com.





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**See us at the GMOA meeting Feb. 22 and learn more**



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## Tech Tips

# Keep your machines clean, working well

Well maintained and properly functioning COAMs are vital to ensure consistently strong play and the resulting healthy returns for licensees. Following are some "Best Practices" to help you keep your machines in their best revenue-producing condition:

- 1) Keep machines clean:
  - Compressed air for inside.
  - Ammonia-free glass cleaner for monitor, etc.
- 2) Check connections:
  - They can vibrate loose in transport.
- 3) Maintain bill acceptors:
  - ICT (International Currency Technolo-

gies) recommends that customers clean the bill acceptors with a soft cleaning cloth moistened with mild, non-abrasive and non-alcohol cleaning solution at least every four months.

- LED and sensor housings are the main components the need to be cleaned. They are the emitter and recipient of the light source and must be maintained properly and free of dust.

- Calibration is recommended if a decline in acceptance rate occurs. ICT has developed a calibration test tool that can be ordered from them. Visit [www.ictgroup.com.tw](http://www.ictgroup.com.tw) for more information.

*Southern Gaming Solutions offers free training and certification classes on its Prodigy Vu Unified gaming machines. This is a hands-on certification class that trains technicians how to remove and replace most parts on the unified cabinet. The class also covers programming the back office for connection with Intralot as well as programming for game play.*

*If you are interested in attending one of the certification classes, contact SGS office for times and dates for upcoming classes. Make sure that your tech brings their tools as they will be removing and replacing the parts in the training class.*

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# Board

from Page 1

Board a proposed rule amendment specifying the only means to file a motion for appeal or review of decisions from Lottery's administrative and arbitration hearings is through a specific email address, [appeals@galottery.org](mailto:appeals@galottery.org) (see sidebar for exact language).

Julie Barker, an attorney for the Lottery's COAM division, said the proposed rule amendment is designed to help the GLC "efficiently manage appeals."

The proposed rule states that motions to appeal must be sent to [appeals@galottery.org](mailto:appeals@galottery.org), the GLC's "properly managed email address" set up specifically for appeals, Barker said. Motions for review or appeal of hearing decisions submitted "by any other means" other than the specific email will not be accepted, the amended rule states.

Barker said the Lottery will "certainly work the COAM industry" to help with the change.

Other rule changes possible "down the road," Barker said, include one that would provide a timeline for the arbitration process to "ensure that they move along" in a timely fashion. No specifics have been developed yet, however.

## Industry regulation

John Heinen, senior vice president of GLC's COAM division, told board members that Lottery continues to work with its COAM partners to develop "enhanced" machine and operations standards to move the industry forward. Now called GLC 13.4, the new regulations are in the early development stage, Heinen said, with only an outline developed so far to generate discussion.

## Text of proposed rule amendment

The COAM Advisory Board endorsed a proposed rule amendment Jan. 17 stating that the only means to file a motion for appeal of decisions from Lottery's administrative and arbitration hearings is through a specific email address, [appeals@galottery.org](mailto:appeals@galottery.org). Specifically, the proposed language amends COAM Rule 13.2.5 to read (new language underlined):

(1) *The following two-step appeal procedure shall be the exclusive administrative remedy for appealing decisions entered pursuant to these rules.*

(b) *Step Two - Motion for Review:*

1. (A) *Provided a timely Request for Reconsideration was filed with the initial Hearing Officer, other than for an Order entered by a Hearing Officer appointed under O.C.G.A. §50-27-102 (d), a licensee or applicant shall have ten (10) days from the date of receipt of the Hearing Officer's Order on Reconsideration (or denial of request), to file with the President/CEO a written Motion for Review by electronic mail to [appeals@galottery.org](mailto:appeals@galottery.org). Motions for Review or appeals (by whatever name or however designated) submitted by any other means or to any other email shall not be accepted. Any responsive pleading to a Motion for Review or appeal must also be filed by electronic mail to [appeals@galottery.org](mailto:appeals@galottery.org).*

(B) *For an Order entered by a Hearing Officer appointed under O.C.G.A. §50-27-102 (d), a licensee or applicant shall have ten (10) days from the date of receipt of the Hearing Officer's Order, to file with the President/CEO a written Motion for Review by electronic mail to [appeals@galottery.org](mailto:appeals@galottery.org). Motions for Review or appeals (by whatever name or however designated) submitted by any other means or to any other email shall not be accepted. Any responsive pleading to a Motion for Review or appeal must also be filed by electronic mail to [appeals@galottery.org](mailto:appeals@galottery.org).*

Three meetings have been held with the industry – one in August with game manufacturers, one in October with industry attorneys, and one in November with master licensees – to get the industry's input on the new "global" regulations, Heinen said. A meeting is also planned soon with location licensees.

"The meetings have been very productive," Heinen said. "The message (for the industry) is don't panic," Heinen said. "We want to make sure (new regulations) make sense for the Georgia market."

He said the GLC 13.4 outline is serving "as a starting point" for dia-

logue with the industry. The Lottery has not set any target date for the new regulations.

## Record revenues

In other business, Heinen told the board COAM revenues continue to set records.

"Revenues have been great – the highest ever," he said.

The average per-machine revenue per day at the time of the meeting was \$85.84, he said, while total revenues were \$27.5 million more than the same period last year. In fact, he said, New Year's Day was the highest revenue day ever.

The number of machines remained at just under 22,000.

Mike Parham, vice president of the COAM division, reviewed for the board some licensing information regarding the number of licenses enabled (approved), as of Dec. 31, 2017:

- Class A Locations – 2,339 enabled;
- Class B Locations – 4,827 enabled;
- Class A Masters – 295 enabled;
- Class B Masters – 188 enabled;
- Manufacturers – 17 enabled;
- Distributors – 3 enabled.

Parham also noted that:

- Intralot's amnesty program for Master License Holders to return unused site controllers continues to be "very successful;"
- The COAM Division's latest newsletter is available online at [gacoam.com](http://gacoam.com);
- The COAM website has undergone an "overall refresh" to make it easier to read.

## Investigations

In another report, COAM's lead investigator Tony Williams said locations not filing the required gross retail receipts and fraudulent change of ownership remain two areas of focus for his department. He said the Lottery is making a concerted effort to uncover fraudulent ownership and is working with the Department of Revenue to "corroborate" ownership.

New owners, he said, don't always understand "this is a heavily regulated industry."

Williams also reported the COAM Division completed 5,322 inspections from July 1 through Dec. 31, resulting in 238 citations and 569 warnings. The warnings are valuable educational tools, he added.

"We want to make sure people understand the law," he said.

Also, John Papile, Intralot's general manager for Georgia COAMs, reported the GLC's call center received 10,023 calls last quarter, with a 98.8 percent answer rate.

"It's a busy place," he said.

He also mentioned the success of the amnesty program for return of site controllers, saying he "really appreciates" master licensees returning unused site controllers. And he had praise for other folks. In his 32 years with Intralot, Papile said, the current Lottery staff is "the best ... I've ever worked with."

"And that goes for the masters, as well."

The next COAM Advisory Board meeting is Wednesday, March 28, at the GLC offices, 250 Williams St. in downtown Atlanta.

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# Workshop

from Page 1

dustry technicians only.

About \$30,000 in prizes donated by the sponsoring manufacturers was given away, including a new \$9,000 Fusion 2 machine provided by Banilla as grand prize. Alan George of Southeast Billards was the lucky winner of the Fusion 2.

## COAM regulation

The event also included a short presentation by Georgia Lottery Corp. (GLC) officials. John Heinen, senior vice president of GLC's COAM Division, told the crowd that Gretchen Corbin will serve the industry well as president and CEO of the GLC. Corbin, who was commissioner of the state's technical college system, took over Jan. 1 for Debbie Alford, who retired. Corbin is very interested in learning all she can, as fast as she can, about the COAM industry, Heinen said.

"We had a conversation (scheduled for) an hour and a half that turned into six hours," he said. "She soaked everything up."

"She's one of the smartest people I've ever been in a room with," he added. "She knows state government like nobody's business. She wants to learn and is a hard worker. We're excited to have her."

Heinen also briefly discussed the developing "COAM 13.4" regulations for machine and operations standards. The Lottery has been meeting with industry groups for the last several months to obtain industry input on the future rules, he said. And he reiterated what he's said often during that time: "Don't panic" over the regulations.

In explaining COAM 13.4's desired result, Heinen paraphrased a quote from hockey Hall of Famer Wayne Gretzky, who once advised, "Skate to where the puck is going, not where it has been."

"13.4 is planning for the future," Heinen said, "and what makes sense for the Georgia market."

The new regulations are in the early development stage, he said, with only an outline developed so far to generate discussion. No target date has been set for adoption of those rules.

Heinen also thanked Banilla for organizing the workshop.

"It makes our job a lot easier (when we have) a big group to talk to," he said. "My thanks to Banilla for putting something like this on."

Mike Parham, vice president of the COAM Division, said "two-way communication is key" for success in the COAM industry, especially between Intralot and technicians.



Paul Tash photos



"We don't want to see those machines go down," he said. "Keeping those machines up and running is a priority."

## GAMOA advocacy

Also addressing the workshop was Shawn Fellows, president of the Georgia Amusement and Music

Operators Association (GAMOA). GAMOA Vice President Adam Foust and Secretary Mike Patel appeared with Fellows.

Fellows told the group that GAMOA has been advocating for COAM business for 36 years, "and that advocacy will continue." Currently, he said, the organization

**BANILLA GAMES** hosted its second annual Workshop and Technician Appreciation Day Jan. 18 in Atlanta's Marriott Gateway Center. At top, Brandon Smallwood, a technician for All Star Amusement, bounces a rubber mallet off a Goldfinger monitor after taking a mighty swing to try and break it, at the invitation of Goldfinger representatives. At left, Banilla Games' Brooks Lee presents \$500 to Altaf Kotadiya, a technician with Fun-time Amusement. The money was one of six \$500 raffle prizes awarded specifically for technicians. Banilla's Kevin Morse, bottom left, emceed the event, which included a live feed of the gaming manufacturer's facility in Greenville, NC (on screen in background). Banilla also has a Georgia office in Norcross.

represents about 80 percent of the Class B machines in the Georgia market.

He urged licensees to operate with "integrity."

"Think about how you operate," he said. "It starts with the integrity to do the right thing, even when nobody is looking."



# Expo ready to roll Feb. 27-March 1

## *Amusement show has grown since first edition in 2010*

It wasn't too long ago there were two major trade shows in the amusement sector – one in the spring, another in the fall. In 2009, the industry's two trade groups, the American Amusement Machine Association (AAMA) and the Amusement & Music Operators Association (AMOA), created a new venue: the AAMA-AMOA Amusement Expo. It has been adapting and expanding to embrace the changes in the marketplace ever since.

When the ninth edition of Expo opens in Las Vegas in late February, its footprint will hardly resemble the event that made its debut there in March 2010. While the core focus of amusements is still solidly intact at Expo, many features have been introduced since its inception. Among them:

- A colocation with the National Bulk Vendors Association;
- A format change that resulted in one full-

day of education and two days of exhibits;

- A substantially greater focus on education;
- A growing emphasis on the family entertainment center (FEC) sector;
- A name change to Amusement Expo International, to reflect the increasingly global nature of the business; and
- A colocation with the Laser Tag Museum, bringing this affiliated segment into event.

In 2018, another new dimension will be incorporated, when the Amusement Expo targets the emerging virtual reality component as part of its education lineup and exhibitor audience.

Overseeing the strategic direction of Expo are leaders from the two co-sponsoring trade organizations: the American Amusement Machine Association ([www.coin-op.org](http://www.coin-op.org)) and the Amusement & Music Operators Association ([www.amoa.com](http://www.amoa.com)).

The 2018 version of Amusement Expo Inter-

national is set for February 27-28, 2018 in Las Vegas, NV USA. Expo Education Day will be conducted Tuesday, Feb. 27, at the Westgate Resort & Casino, the official headquarters hotel for the show. On Wednesday, Feb. 28, and Thursday, March 1, exhibits will be open in the South Hall of the Las Vegas Convention Center, which is adjacent to the hotel.

And in between, on Tuesday evening, Feb. 27, the thousands of buyers and sellers assembled for the Amusement Expo will gather for the All-Industry Gala Reception at the Westgate Hotel

Visit Expo's official website [www.amusementexpo.org](http://www.amusementexpo.org) to register, exhibit at the show, to reserve a hotel room or to find the most updated information about this year's Expo.

Questions? Contact Brian Glasgow, Amusement Expo show manager, at 708-226-1300 or [brian@wtglasgow.com](mailto:brian@wtglasgow.com).



*Amusement Expo photo*

## *Security seminar part of Amusement Expo's Education Day*

In the world we live in today, there is virtually no immunity from random acts of violence, no safe havens from security threats.

In this age when phrases such as terror alerts, active shooters and lockdown have become all too common, what can business owners do to proactively protect their patrons, property and brand?

During this year's Amusement Expo International, Officer Charles Huff of the Las Vegas Police Department will share ways that Family Entertainment Center (FEC) managers can assess risk at their facilities, implement steps to minimize threats and develop response protocols in such situations. The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) aims to enhance preparedness through a "whole community" approach by providing products, tools, and resources to help FECs prepare for, and respond

to an active shooter incident.

Huff, a member of the MAC-TAC (Multi Assault Counter Terrorism Action Capabilities) training section has first-hand experience in managing crisis situations.

The title, "Run, Hide, Fight" focuses on options in response to a threat: run if you can; hide if you cannot run; and fight if all else fails. He will cover these and other ideas recommended by law enforcement, Homeland Security and other related security agencies.

This session is set for 12:45 pm, Feb. 27, at the Westgate Las Vegas Resort and Casino, adjacent to the Las Vegas Convention Center, site of the Amusement Expo International trade show.

The seminar is part of this year's Expo Education Day, an immersive, full-day program on a range of timely, key topics covering the FEC, amusement, virtual reality,

bulk vending and laser tag areas.

The Amusement Expo International is the annual North American gathering of the coinoperated and revenue generating amusement, music and family entertainment industries. In its 9th year, it is the largest trade show in the region focused on pay-to-play entertainment for family entertainment centers, arcades, bars and restaurants, and other locations where people seek out fun diversion out of home. The Amusement Expo International is sponsored by industry trade associations AAMA and AMOA.

### **About AAMA**

The American Amusement Machine Association (AAMA) is an international, not-for-profit 501(c)6 trade organization representing the manufacturers, distributors, suppliers and location owner/operators for the coin-operated amusement in-

dustry. Our mission is to preserve, protect and promote our industry through legislative advocacy, education, events, networking and member programs.

### **About AMOA**

The Amusement and Music Operators Association (AMOA) is a national not-for-profit 501(c)6 trade association. Since 1948, AMOA has been the voice of, and advocate for, those individuals and companies engaged in the currency-activated amusement, vending, music and family entertainment equipment business.

For more information on the Amusement Expo International, contact Show Manager Brian Glasgow at 708-226-1300 or [brian@wtglasgow.com](mailto:brian@wtglasgow.com), or visit the show's official website: [www.amusementexpo.org](http://www.amusementexpo.org).





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## Retail Matters

# C-STORE FORECASTS

## Retailers optimistic about food service this year

# 2018

By Angela Hanson  
Convenience Store News

Convenience store retailers show enthusiasm for the food-service category, according to the 2018 *Convenience Store News Forecast Study*.

A whopping 77.4 percent of surveyed retailers expect their average per-store food-service volume – which includes prepared food and hot, cold and frozen dispensed beverages – to increase in 2018, and a matching 78 percent predict their average food-service dollar sales per store will also increase. Only 2.2 percent expect a volume decline and 4.3 percent expect a dollar sales decline.

The most repeated word when retailers discuss what will have the biggest impact on the food-service category in 2018 is "healthy" – healthier products, healthier alternatives, and consumers' health-conscious eating habits.

Higher food quality, new flavors and menu additions are also expected to play sizeable roles as consumers seek out new food experiences.

At the same time, retailers are clear that enhancing their food-service programs means investing in more than the food itself. Today's consumers demand convenience on their terms, which c-store operators see as expanded grab-and-go options, an increased online presence (including delivery and loyalty programs), and quick trips in and out of the store.

"More people expect quick (service)," said one retailer. "They're not wanting to wait."

Some c-store operators have more tempered expectations for the category, noting that strong competition from free-standing fast-casual restaurants and other c-stores can cut into profits even as the market expands. Consumers may also be less willing to try food at a single store

than they would at a larger, established chain, according to some respondents.

Overall, retailers expect to see food-service category growth of 5.7 percent for volume and 6 percent for dollar sales this year.

The 16th annual CSNews Forecast Study includes a Retailer Forecast and Supplier Forecast, both based on the results of a survey fielded in November 2017. Participants were asked to predict 2018 sales per store for a variety of product categories, as well as to share their opinions on overall business, economic and consumer trends.

The Forecast Study also provides dollar and unit volume projections in key c-store product categories based on data from various sources, including Nielsen for category sales history; TDLinX for store counts; and government sources for motor fuel volume and pricing data.

## Outlook for fuel sales not as upbeat as '17

By Angela Hanson, Convenience Store News

Although there is still optimism in the fuels category, last year's upbeat attitude about fuel sales has dimmed somewhat, according to the results of the 2018 *Convenience Store News Forecast Study*.

Less than half of convenience store retailers (46.6 percent) expect their average gallons sold per store to increase in 2018, while just over half (52.4 percent) expect their average fuel dollar sales per store to increase. This is a notable slump from last year, when more than six in 10 operators expected their per-store fuel volume to rise in 2017.

The higher percentage of retailers who expect their gallons sold to decrease compared to last year reflects the general feeling that Americans will drive less and use less fuel as more efficient cars hit the road and as young millennials eschew car ownership for ride-sharing services.

Still, negative expectations are in the minority considering 37.2 percent of retailers expect their fuel gallons sold to stay the same and 34.2 percent expect fuel dollars to hold the line.

Surveyed retailers most frequently cited price as a significant factor facing the motor fuels category in 2018. However, those who predict that both their fuel dollars and gallons will rise pointed to trends aside from price as having a big impact. For these operators, competitive pricing and the use of mobile apps to find the best price, increased travel and tourism, and new methods of payment are among the top trends they are anticipating.

For those who expect a static performance this year, the factors they pointed to as likely to offset the category's positives include the uncertainty of price fluctuations, increase in the number of fuel-efficient vehicles on the road, and challenges from alternative fuels. Taxes, too, are keeping many c-store operators from feeling overly optimistic about the fuels business.

"In our markets, we do not expect any big changes. Alternative fuels have not taken hold in our areas as of yet," said one retailer. "The factor that could cause this opinion to change would be if the Oklahoma budget deficit causes our legislature to impart large taxes to fuel."



## Tobacco business looks a little unclear

By Angela Hanson, Convenience Store News

Long a stalwart of the convenience store industry, the tobacco business is expected to be a mixed bag in 2018, according to the annual *Convenience Store News Forecast Study*. Retailers did not come to a clear consensus on what the year will bring.

"A tensed and stressed-out society smokes more," noted one retailer.

Predictions for the cigarettes category are somewhat evenly divided: 37.8 percent of operators expect their cigarette volume per store to decrease, 34.5 percent expect it to stay the same and 27.7 percent expect it to increase. Retailers are less gloomy about dollar sales in the segment, as 26.1 percent expect a decline, 30.7 percent expect the same and 43.2 percent expect an increase.

However, there's no doubt that dollar increases will come from higher state and local taxes and manufacturer price hikes.

Retailers express concern over the growing trend across the nation of raising the legal smoking age to 21 on the city and state levels. Increased tobacco regulation and taxes are also

affecting smokers, who may turn to alternative products or less-than-legal options.

"Contraband sales of tobacco continue to increase due to higher taxes and pricing," one retailer commented.

Operators see a rosier future for the other tobacco products (OTP) category, which includes cigars, smokeless, electronic cigarettes, vapor products and more. More than half of retailers expect both their OTP volume and dollar sales to increase in 2018, at 53 percent and 57.6 percent, respectively. Less than 10 percent expect either to decline, while 38.7 percent expect volume to stay the same and 34.5 percent expect dollar sales to be the same.

Overall, retailers expect OTP net growth to hover around 2 percent this year.

"Consumers are moving to alternative tobacco products," one store owner surmised.

Heat-not-burn products and new entrants to the vaping marketplace are considered factors likely to have an impact on the business in the coming year. Cigars are also viewed as being on an upswing.



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# Cashierless C-store a 'Go' for Amazon

**The Wall Street Journal**

Nearly a year after it was promised, Amazon.com Inc.'s cashierless convenience store was slated to open to the public Monday, Jan. 22.

The new Amazon Go store, located in the base of Amazon's main headquarters in Seattle, uses computer vision and machine-learning algorithms to track shoppers and charge them for what they select, thereby eliminating checkout counters.

In an interview the week before the opening, Dilip Kumar, vice president of technology for Amazon Go and Amazon Books, said testing with employees has trained the technology to work in the store, an experiment that is part of the company's broader effort to reinvent how consumers shop.

Amazon announced the new Go store with fanfare in December 2016, and said it would open to the public in early 2017. The opening was delayed, however, as the technology proved more difficult to master than expected, with glitches occurring when too many people

were in the store or were moving too quickly, *The Wall Street Journal* reported in March 2017.

The Go experiment shows how Amazon is trying to transform shopping in physical stores after decades of pioneering retail online. Since 2015, the company also has added more than a dozen Amazon Books stores, which encourage customers to pull out their phones to scan covers for prices. In August, Amazon completed a \$13.5 billion deal to buy 470 Whole Foods grocers.

Amazon Go's technology uses cameras throughout the store to track shoppers once they are inside, though it doesn't use facial recognition, Kumar said. A customer entering the store scans his or her phone and then becomes represented internally as a 3-D object to the system. Cameras also are pointed at the shelves to determine interactions with goods.

Among the challenges for the technology was telling the difference between similar looking products – say containers of vanilla and regular yogurt.




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