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# GEORGIA Amusement JOURNAL

Dedicated to serving the Georgia COAM industry  
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A Tash Communications publication

March 2020

Vol. 3, Number 11

## GAMOA benefit ... Good start for health insurance program

By Paul Tash

Georgia Amusement Journal

Members of Georgia Amusement and Music Operators Association (GAMOA) are already experiencing significantly lower premiums for health care insurance through the association's partnership with National General Insurance announced in June 2019.

"We're off to a very good start," said Phil Vance, an agent for National General, which is offering preferred underwriting for the association. "I'm proud to be a part of GAMOA."

Vance said joining the GAMOA health-insurance program is a "specific way" to lower health-care expenses and control overall business costs to improve bottom lines, "without compromising your coverage."

Mike Patel, of Ultimate Amusement, provided a testimonial at the recent GAMOA meeting Feb. 20 at an Eagles club in

See **BENEFIT** Page 6



Paul Tash photo

**TWO PLAYERS** give the virtual reality motorcycle game Ultra Motor a run during the Amusement Expo International's vendor exhibit March 10 in New Orleans.

## Amusement Expo wraps up

By Paul Tash

Georgia Amusement Journal

The 2020 Amusement Expo International (AEI) in New Orleans wrapped up March 11, just as the coronavirus pandemic began forcing closures of nearly all such large gatherings.

The Expo took place March 9-11 with the Hilton New Orleans Riverside Hotel acting as headquarters for the Expo and hosting its Education Day. The huge vendor exhibition took place at the Ernest N. Morial Convention Center next to the hotel March 10-11. Since its debut in 2010, AEI has established itself as the major spring event for the out-of-home entertainment industry. The show has grown to encompass a variety of segments, including coin-operated amusements, music and



Paul Tash photo

**GAINES BUTLER**, right, shares a laugh with keynote presenter Larry Johnson during the opening session of the Amusement Expo International's Education Day March 9 in New Orleans.

games; family entertainment centers; bulk vending; laser tag and virtual reality.

Kicking off the Expo was its

Education Day March 9, which featured over 20 seminars and 35 presenters and panelists. The

See **EXPO** Page 8



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# Take steps to deter COAM theft

## Georgia Lottery Corp.

In light of recent reports of thefts involving Class B coin-operated amusement machines (COAMs), the Georgia Lottery Corporation (GLC) is reminding its COAM licensees to remember to remain attentive to the operation of COAMs within locations to curtail theft.

Theft involving COAMs can occur through fraudulent acts, including stringing that tricks the COAM into recording cash that is not retained by it. As a reminder, steps can be taken to deter theft, including adhering to sound cash management practices, verification of redemption amounts and reliable security measures.

More specifically, COAM licensees should consider:

- Placement of COAMs in visible areas within locations where they can be easily observed by employees;

- Removal of cash daily from the COAMs by the location licensee and deposit of the funds daily in the location's COAM designated bank account (as required by the COAM law);

- Installation of security cameras throughout the location, including the area in which the COAMs are placed;



- Routine inspection of the COAMs for any signs of tampering or misuse, especially the integrity of the bill acceptors; and

- Verification of any large redemption amounts against the hand count that is required to be displayed on the video screen of each COAM to determine if there are any irregulari-

ties among the plays and the amounts being redeemed.

When theft of COAM revenue occurs, the licensee is still responsible for the COAM revenue amount recorded by the central accounting system. Any theft should be reported to law enforcement for further investigation.

Many of these suggestions are in the GLC Location License Holder Guide in an effort to provide beneficial information to make your COAM environment less likely to be exposed to theft or minimize the liability of locations due to theft.

Licensees should be familiar with the operation of the COAMs and familiar with all manufacturers' specifications for the Georgia COAM market. Please review the Location License Holder Guide, as well as the other useful information available at website under the Documents tab.

## Banilla postpones its Technician Day

### Georgia Amusement Journal

In the wake of the coronavirus pandemic, Banilla Games has postponed its fourth annual Workshop and Technician Appreciation Day that was scheduled for April 2 at Sonesta Gwinnett Place in Duluth.

The company said it would reschedule the



popular event for "our valued operators and technicians" at an appropriate time. The event has built a great reputation in the COAM industry and brings together about 200 operators and technicians.

For more information, contact Banilla at (252) 329-7977.

COIN OPERATED AMUSEMENT MACHINE LOCATION SWEEP AND MASTER PUSH CALENDAR 2020							
ACCOUNTING WEEK START	ACCOUNTING WEEK END	LOCATION SWEEP DATE	MASTER PUSH DATE	ACCOUNTING WEEK START	ACCOUNTING WEEK END	LOCATION SWEEP DATE	MASTER PUSH DATE
29-Dec-19	04-Jan-20	08-Jan-20	14-Jan-20	28-Jun-20	04-Jul-20	08-Jul-20	14-Jul-20
05-Jan-20	11-Jan-20	15-Jan-20	22-Jan-20*	05-Jul-20	11-Jul-20	15-Jul-20	21-Jul-20
12-Jan-20	18-Jan-20	22-Jan-20	28-Jan-20	12-Jul-20	18-Jul-20	22-Jul-20	28-Jul-20
19-Jan-20	25-Jan-20	29-Jan-20	04-Feb-20	19-Jul-20	25-Jul-20	29-Jul-20	04-Aug-20
26-Jan-20	01-Feb-20	05-Feb-20	11-Feb-20	26-Jul-20	01-Aug-20	05-Aug-20	11-Aug-20
02-Feb-20	08-Feb-20	12-Feb-20	19-Feb-20*	02-Aug-20	08-Aug-20	12-Aug-20	18-Aug-20
09-Feb-20	15-Feb-20	19-Feb-20	25-Feb-20	09-Aug-20	15-Aug-20	19-Aug-20	25-Aug-20
16-Feb-20	22-Feb-20	26-Feb-20	03-Mar-20	16-Aug-20	22-Aug-20	26-Aug-20	01-Sep-20
23-Feb-20	29-Feb-20	04-Mar-20	10-Mar-20	23-Aug-20	29-Aug-20	02-Sep-20	09-Sep-20*
01-Mar-20	07-Mar-20	11-Mar-20	17-Mar-20	30-Aug-20	05-Sep-20	09-Sep-20	15-Sep-20
08-Mar-20	14-Mar-20	18-Mar-20	24-Mar-20	06-Sep-20	12-Sep-20	16-Sep-20	22-Sep-20
15-Mar-20	21-Mar-20	25-Mar-20	31-Mar-20	13-Sep-20	19-Sep-20	23-Sep-20	29-Sep-20
22-Mar-20	28-Mar-20	01-Apr-20	07-Apr-20	20-Sep-20	26-Sep-20	30-Sep-20	06-Oct-20
29-Mar-20	04-Apr-20	08-Apr-20	14-Apr-20	27-Sep-20	03-Oct-20	07-Oct-20	14-Oct-20*
05-Apr-20	11-Apr-20	15-Apr-20	21-Apr-20	04-Oct-20	10-Oct-20	14-Oct-20	20-Oct-20
12-Apr-20	18-Apr-20	22-Apr-20	28-Apr-20	11-Oct-20	17-Oct-20	21-Oct-20	27-Oct-20
19-Apr-20	25-Apr-20	29-Apr-20	05-May-20	18-Oct-20	24-Oct-20	28-Oct-20	03-Nov-20
26-Apr-20	02-May-20	06-May-20	12-May-20	25-Oct-20	31-Oct-20	04-Nov-20	10-Nov-20
03-May-20	09-May-20	13-May-20	19-May-20	01-Nov-20	07-Nov-20	10-Nov-20*	17-Nov-20*
10-May-20	16-May-20	20-May-20	27-May-20*	08-Nov-20	14-Nov-20	18-Nov-20	24-Nov-20
17-May-20	23-May-20	27-May-20	02-Jun-20	15-Nov-20	21-Nov-20	25-Nov-20	02-Dec-20*
24-May-20	30-May-20	03-Jun-20	09-Jun-20	22-Nov-20	28-Nov-20	02-Dec-20	08-Dec-20
31-May-20	06-Jun-20	10-Jun-20	16-Jun-20	29-Nov-20	05-Dec-20	09-Dec-20	15-Dec-20
07-Jun-20	13-Jun-20	17-Jun-20	23-Jun-20	06-Dec-20	12-Dec-20	16-Dec-20	22-Dec-20
14-Jun-20	20-Jun-20	24-Jun-20	30-Jun-20	13-Dec-20	19-Dec-20	23-Dec-20	30-Dec-20*
21-Jun-20	27-Jun-20	01-Jul-20	08-Jul-20*	20-Dec-20	26-Dec-20	30-Dec-20	06-Jan-21*

\*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

## Connect, power up machines

To ensure accurate reporting of financial data to the Central Accounting System, the Georgia Lottery Corporation (GLC) says it is imperative the Location Li-



cense 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.



# Journal Opinion

## Industry enjoys seven years of growth

**By Shawn Fellows  
GAMOA President**

The world of COAM seems to be evolving and changing at an exponential rate. For example, April 10 will mark the 7<sup>th</sup> anniversary of HB 487 – the COAM bill that placed the industry under the regulatory control of the Georgia Lottery. Yes, you read that correctly – seven years. I'm sure we all have our opinions about how successful or unsuccessful the past seven years have been for your individual businesses related to COAM here in Georgia, but I can guarantee you with a high level of certainty that your business is markedly better today than it was April 2013.

Through regulations and oversight, we have seen our COAM industry grow every year and contributions to state educational programs, such as Hope and Pre-K, are rapidly approaching the \$100M mark annually. Are there areas that we hope to continue to improve the industry? Of course. Will the business environment we know today change over the next five years? One would have to believe so. While I cannot predict the future, I can tell you that change is inevitable, and the faster we learn to embrace that fact as small business owners the sooner we can begin to

modify and even prepare our businesses, our employees and our customers for change.

**Earlier this year** at the February meeting of the COAM Advisory Board, members discussed the Lottery gift card program and the next steps in the process. Once the process has been completed, many be-



**Shawn Fellows**

lieve the Lottery-sponsored gift card will provide a clear alternative to unlawful redemption, stabilize the marketplace and create an accountable form of redemption that will not only generate money for Lottery but capture sales tax revenues around the state.

The net benefit of this gift card should be increased rev-

enues to Hope and Pre-K with very little cost to the Lottery. As a Master Licensee, you should look at opportunities to engage corporate clients and other small businesses that previously expressed little interest in COAMs due to the restrictions on gift-card redemption. As a Location Licensee, you should have a high level of confidence

**T**he net benefit of this gift card should be increased revenues to Hope and Pre-K education programs with very little cost to the Lottery.

in the system and the products you redeem at your business.

This gift card will make it easier for the multiple-store owner to ensure strict compliance with all regulations related to COAM. Your ability to audit the redemption of prizes for the Lottery gift cards and products will save you time and provide for transparency and ease of accountability. In addition, the Lottery gift card will build player confidence and brand awareness along with player loyalty.

The potential for a gift card has been a topic of discussion since the passage of HB487. It is welcomed by all in the industry and will help provide a clear path for future retailers seeking a simple method of redemption with a focus on both transparency and accountability.

The Lottery has issued a Request for Information (RFI),

which is available on the COAM website at [www.gacoam.com](http://www.gacoam.com), where you can select documents, then scroll midway down the page to COAM Communications. The first item is the COAM gift card RFI.

The RFI is the next step in Lottery selecting the proper vendor to provide the proposed services related to a gift card. Once the RFI has been completed, the whole process will move to a Request for Proposal (RFP) that will ultimately be the instrument to guide the Georgia Lottery Corp. in its award of a contract to the final vendor.

While none of the regulations have been published surrounding a Lottery gift card, we are certain that once the GLC has produced these regulations, they will be made available via the COAM website. The COAM Division of the Lottery has done an amazing job keeping the COAM industry informed via the website and emails. If you are not receiving emails from the COAM Division of the GLC, you should login immediately and verify your email that is on file and make changes accordingly.

**The coronavirus** is really having a major impact on the world and even here in Georgia. Businesses have been modifying hours, reducing staff, and some are even closing their doors. Schools are closing and the day-to-day life we have all grown accustomed to has dramatically been impacted. As a member of the COAM community, I would urge you to follow the health care guidelines being delivered by the federal and state health care organizations. While this remains a severe and fluid situation, information is a powerful tool. For your safety

See **FELLOWS** Page 5

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A Tash Communications publication

PO Box 4307 Butte MT 59702

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Ad Production • [production@tashcommunications.com](mailto:production@tashcommunications.com)

Reprints of articles and back issues are available at a cost of \$10.

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Postmaster: Please send address change requests to  
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## COAM calendar

### — REPORTING DATES —

**March 20:** Each monthly report should be submitted by Location License Holders in electronic format via the [www.gacoam.com](http://www.gacoam.com) website as required by the GLC by the 20th of each following month.

### — MEETINGS/OTHER —

**April 30:** GAMOA meeting – Location to be determined.  
**Aug 26-28:** Southern Amusement and Entertainment Expo – Infinite Energy Center, Duluth, GA

## Journal Opinion

# Young professionals forum a big success

By Sharon Shuford

### GACS Membership Strategy

This month's column is short, but important. Late in January GACS held a young professionals forum. Invitations were extended, but no one knew if or how many would actually participate.

GACS young professionals showed up and showed out! Fifteen young members joined the meeting in Atlanta for a day of learning and sharing. Nine of the group were 2nd, 3rd, or 4th generation convenience store operators.

They grew up in their parents' offices, distributorships and stores.

The day started with an ice breaker. Partici-



Sharon Shuford

They grew up in their parents' offices, distributorships and stores.

More than a dozen topics were identified overall, providing GACS with a good picture of what education opportunities should be explored further in 2020 and 2021.

Shortly after the event, GACS President Angela Holland received an unsolicited thank you note from one of the participants, who stated "if that was the only event of the year for me, it made our GACS membership worth every penny."

As GACS staff looked around the room and listened to the conversations, it became clear that

GACS and the C-store industry have a very promising future.

At least two more young professional events are slated for 2020. If you are interested in receiving an invitation to participate, please email [sshuford@gacs.com](mailto:sshuford@gacs.com).



Participants were asked to write down at least three issues that keep them awake at night. They then exchanged their notes with one another, and identified top-tier issues that warranted a deeper dive that day. Discussion groups were formed, and conversation flowed.

# AMOA welcomes new leadership team

By Lori Schneider

### AMOA Executive VP

A new group of directors was elected during AMOA's Annual Membership Meeting in New Orleans on March 11. The Class of 2023, consisting of eight operators and distributors from around the country, are:

- Ricky Bailey, Bailey & Son Music Co., Inc., Leesville, SC
- Mark Cumming, ATM Merchant Services, Alvin, TX
- John Farmer, Broadway Music, Hernando, MS
- Ernie Jolly, Capital City Games & Music, Topeka, KS
- Angel Portugues, All Brands Tampa Bay, LLC, Tampa, FL
- Derek Sanders, DAS Variety Vending, Lino Lakes, MN
- Conrad Storz, Storz Amusements, LLC, Jeffersonville, IN
- Jim Tartal, Scottsdale Music Service, Mt. Pleasant, PA

In addition, a new set of officers takes



Lori Schneider

A heartfelt thank-you to all the AMOA officers and directors, whose terms expired at the show, for all their years of service ....



over to lead the 2020-2021 Board of Directors. The one-year terms of the association's "Top Four" began at the conclusion of the

Expo. They are:

- President Greg Trent of Beyer & Brown, South Daytona, FL
- First Vice President Sam Westgate of J & J Ventures, Effingham, IL
- Treasurer Tim Zahn of American Amusement Arcade, Bloomington, MN
- Secretary Luke Adams of Pioneer Vending Company, Cincinnati, OH

A heartfelt thank-you to all the AMOA officers and directors, whose terms expired at the show, for all their years of service to the

Board, as well as to the industry. They will now join AMOA's Heart & Soul, which includes generations of men and women that have served on the AMOA Board of Directors since 1948.

For more information on AMOA visit [www.amoa.com](http://www.amoa.com) or reach out to AMOA Executive Vice President Lori Schneider at (815) 893-6010 or [lori@amoa.com](mailto:lori@amoa.com).

## Fellows

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and those around you, stay aware and check in daily for changes on policy and best practices being suggested from the Georgia Department of Public Health (DPH) and CDC to name a few.

**Nominations** for the GAMOA Board of Directors will close on March 30, 2020. If you, or someone you know, would like to submit their information to the Nomination Committee to serve on the Board of Directors for the next three years, please do so no later than March 30. Based on our bylaws, you must be a valid Master Licensee or hold a key management posi-

tion within a Master Licensee company. You must be willing to work and attend five meetings per calendar year. Please submit your bio and the name of the Master Licensee you're associated with and how you can benefit the Board of Directors to [Christina@gamoa.org](mailto:Christina@gamoa.org).

If you have previously served on any committees or volunteered within GAMOA,

please include details in your bio. All nominations will be submitted to the Nomination Chairman and Chairman Butch Foshee for consideration. The approved list of nominees will be presented to the membership at the Annual Meeting April 30 to be voted on by the membership. We look forward to seeing our members at the Annual Meeting.



# Benefit

from Page 1

north Atlanta. He told those attending that he saved about \$1,500 in premiums.

“It’s worth getting a quote,” Patel said.

The premium savings, he said, covered his GAMOA dues, and the coverage was even better than he had before, with a Health Savings Plan (HSA) option.

Patel said Vance and his staff were “extremely patient” and the process to join the program was hassle-free.

## Gift-card redemption

GAMOA President Shawn Fellows updated GAMOA members on the renewed effort by regulators and industry to create an option for gift-card redemption. Lottery officials announced at a COAM Advisory Board meeting last month that they were prepared to move forward on the industry-supported idea initially discussed over a year ago.

Fellows said the Lottery’s COAM Division has already developed and distributed a Request for Information (RFI) to potential gift-card vendors to get an idea of the cost and feasibility. Vendors are then expected to provide information back by late April, and a gift-card framework developed sometime after that.

“We should have real good clarity by summer,” Fellows said. “It has been a lot of work, but we’ve never been closer to a gift card.”

Gift-card redemption is an opportunity to boost industry’s revenue and its contribution to the HOPE and Pre-K education programs, the needs of which increase every year, industry representatives and regulators have said. Another potential benefit is an increase sales-tax revenue, as gift cards promote spending.

## Industry involvement

In other business, Fellows urged those in the COAM industry to get involved and stay informed on industry issues by joining GAMOA. He then reminded those already in GAMOA of more ways to participate in the association by joining association committees or running for the board of directors. Elections are coming up in April, and board members serve alternating three-year terms.

Committee and board involvement “is a good opportunity” to participate more in GAMOA, Fellows said. In addition, several GAMOA members are serving or have served on the statewide



Paul Tash photos

**GOLDFINGER’S** Evan De Vine, top left, discusses the company’s new cashless card system at the GAMOA Board of Directors meeting Feb. 20. Listening are Daljeet Singh of Bright Star, Rahim Noorni of Southern Amusement Group, and Da-

wood Kapasi of East West Amusement. David Villari, bottom left, a new sales executive for Banilla, and Michael Pino, bottom right, Banilla’s new director of operations in Georgia, introduce themselves at the meeting.

COAM Advisory Board, he added, where they help to “influence issues” and “bridge the gap” with regulators.

Besides supporting and developing “the advocacy that we do” in the legislature and other places, joining GAMOA makes “economic sense,” as well, Fellows said. Benefits, such as the health-insurance program available only to members, can save enough money to at least pay the dues, he said.

Fellows also reminded GAMOA members of the “Voter’s Voice” area on its website that links members to legislators in their area.

“It’s a very sophisticated piece of software,” he said.

Go to [www.GAMOA.org](http://www.GAMOA.org), click on the Resources, then Action

Center and fill out the form to find legislators. Users can also sign up for alerts on industry issues by providing emails, which GAMOA can also use for “grassroots” efforts when necessary to notify those on the email list to contact their legislators for action on legislation.

“It’s another method to keep you informed on legislative issues,” he said. “We’re here for your benefit.”

Sponsoring February’s GAMOA meeting were parts distributor Betson, parts manufacturer Goldfinger and gaming manufacturer Banilla. Betson/Goldfinger used the meeting to showcase a new cashless card system.

Goldfinger’s Evan De Vine, director of sales and marketing, told

the GAMOA group that the card system is a successor to Really Killer System’s goose and gaggle system. He said the system achieves “greater operational efficiency” and provides “a superior guest experience.”

Banilla introduced additions to its sales team in Georgia at the meeting, including Michael Pino, director of operations, and David Villari, sales executive. Banilla continues to expand, said Michael “Smitty” Smith, and the gaming manufacturer is “building a team” to provide great customer service to the Georgia market.

Fellows thanked the companies for their sponsorship.

“We appreciate everything you all do.”





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# Customers should love you, speaker says

By Paul Tash

Georgia Amusement Journal

“How many customers are telling stories about us?”

A whole bunch, asserts Larry Johnson, who keynoted the opening session of the 2020 Amusement Expo International in New Orleans earlier this month. Wearing black glasses and his trademark red beret, Johnson entertained an audience of about 200 in his presentation titled “Turning Customers into Outrageously Loyal Fans.”

He talked about avoiding the “solemn vow” of customers – “I ain’t never coming back to this place” – and even gave attendees 10 minutes or so to pair off and discuss their own “solemn vow” experiences.

“It feels good to tell the story,” he said. “And every time you tell it, the story gets better. You enhance it, start adding things that didn’t even happen.”

“Customers talk,” Johnson said.

In fact, he said, research from the ‘90s shows people retell a story about good customer experiences an average of five times, while unhappy customers retell a story about a poor customer experience 11 times.

More current research shows that number is even higher now with social media and “customer complaint” websites so prevalent. Johnson told the story of an unhappy customer who built and circulated a 17-slide PowerPoint presentation to complain about a hotel in Houston.

But Johnson is a fan of that particular hotel.

“I think it’s great,” he said, “but perception is reality.”

The key, he said, is to ensure that customers are saying good things about you.

“You want customers to love you,” he said. “Good is not good enough.”

Love equals loyalty, he said,



## KEYNOTE SPEAKER

Larry Johnson, left, discusses the proper distance to keep during a conversation with Luke Adams of Pioneer Vending in one of several audience-participation segments of his presentation. Below, Johnson tells a seminar that businesses should work to get their customers to love them because “love equals loyalty.”

Paul Tash photo

and told a personal story about a clerk in a Nordstrom’s department store going out of her way to bring him shoes when he forgot his, just minutes before he was to take the stage for a presentation. He’s been a lifelong Nordstrom customer since.

“Love is consistently connected to loyalty,” he said.

He urged business staff to form relationships with customers by practicing successful bonding behaviors, such as smiling, being approachable, remembering names,

and engaging in eye contact and leaning forward (but not too forward) when talking to a customer.

“Talk about them and respond to them,” he said.

He also advised business owners and staff to “keep yourself up” and remember the “happiness formula.” Unhappy employees can do one of three things, Johnson said.

They can be “proactive” and work to change and improve the situation, they can “accept and embrace” the situation, or they can leave the situation.

If they don’t work in any of the three environments, they’ll be unhappy employees who are more apt to “wine, moan and groan” and provide poor customer service.

He finished by saying, “leadership counts,” and urged business owners and managers to give their employees something good to say about you.

“When you become someone’s boss, you become a famous person. People talk about you.”

Johnson is co-author of the top-selling book “*Absolute Honesty: Building a Corporate Culture That Values Straight Talk and Rewards Integrity.*” He speaks about leader-



ship, change, customer service, project management and honesty in business. His varied work experience includes eight years as manager in the private sector health care industry, three years in city government administration and 26 years as president of his own consulting firm.

## Expo

from Page 1

seminars were a blend of presentations, panels and workshop-style roundtables, and two keynote presentations to open and close the day.

The opening keynote featured Larry Johnson, co-author of the top-selling book: “*Absolute Honesty: Building a Corporate Culture That Values Straight Talk and Rewards Integrity.*” (See the *Journal’s*

story on Johnson’s presentation on Page 1).

The final session of the day was the closing keynote presented by Ed Rensi, former president of McDonald’s of 13 years. Starting as a grillman for minimum wage in the mid-1960s, he became an operations executive and eventually served on the company’s board of directors. (See the *Journal’s* story on Rensi’s presentation on Page 10).

In between the start and finish, the lineup was filled with timely

topics, directed by a “who’s who” of the marketplace. A sampling of subjects covered: valuating/selling routes, creating marketing plans, pinball, inspired leadership, cyber security, escape rooms, small footprint FECs, card-stored/cashless systems, unique promotions, FEC and operator roundtables, hiring/retaining employees, ATM best practices, the “Infinite Game;” and rewards/membership programs. A separate track on the spectrum of virtual reality topics was also con-

ducted. (See the *Journal’s* coverage of several education sessions on Pages 8-10.)

Just after the close of the AEI Education Day, the All-Industry Gala Reception took place at the hotel, providing a festive, relaxing transition between education and the exhibition program.

AEI was co-sponsored by the American Amusement Machine Association (AAMA) and American Music Operators Association (AMOA).



# Make the right VR choices for you

By Paul Tash

Georgia Amusement Journal

Virtual reality has been around for over 20 years, but better technology and lower price has pushed VR to the forefront of entertainment consciousness, an expert in the field said during an Amusement Expo seminar last month in New Orleans.

“VR is everywhere,” Danny Gruening said. “It’s kind of to the point where (FEC owners) are saying, ‘how many should I do, not should I do.’”

Gruening is the vice president of marketing for Creative Works, a global VR company. He presented a seminar titled “How to Make the Right VR Choices for Your Venue” during Education Day that kicked off the 2020 Amusement Expo International in New Orleans earlier this month.

Visual reality, loosely defined as a “fully digital environment experienced through a headset,” occurs in three main categories – arcade, hybrid and free roam. Each has advantages for specific purposes.

The arcade model is relevant for small- to mid-sized FECs, he said, because it doesn’t require staff and has the smallest footprint. Following are some specifications:

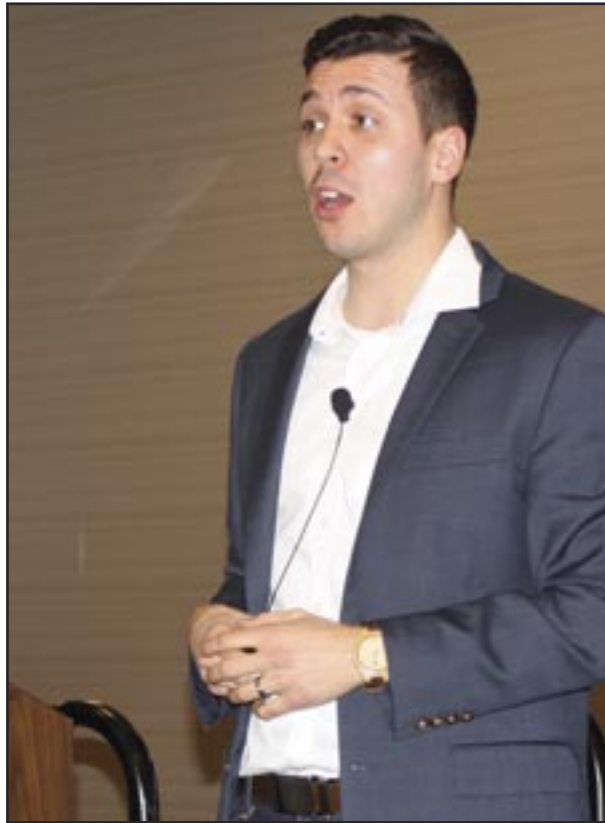
- Space required – 36-60 square feet;
- Game length – 1-4 minutes;
- Number of players – one or two;

Investment – \$35,000-\$75,000;

Cost to play – \$2 to \$6 per play.

Some of the VR games in the arcade category include Virtual Rabbit and Beat Saber.

The hybrid model is a bit more spendy and requires more space to operate, but it also earns more revenue. It is appropriate for a larger ar-



DANNY GRUENING

cade or lobby. Following are some specifications for the arcade-style VR games:

- Space required – 200-3000 square feet;
- Game length – 3-7 minutes;
- Number of players – two to four;
- Investment – \$50,000-\$130,000;
- Cost to play – \$5 to \$13 per play.

Examples of the hybrid VR model are Hologate and Omniverse.

The free-roam model requires the highest investment, Gruening said, and also the highest per-play cost, which could be a “barrier to entry” for players who have never played VR games to try VR. However, he

said, “the immersion is really fantastic.” Following are some specifications:

- Space required – 1,500-2,500 square feet (designated room);

- Game length – 45-60 minutes;
- Number of players – six to 10;
- Investment – \$200,000-\$500,000;
- Cost to play – \$25 to \$40 per play.

Though free-roam is a high-end format, Gruening said it’s a good example of what VR can be.

So which one to choose?

FEC operators have to ask themselves what their VR goals are, whether the game will be a primary or complementary game in the entertainment center, how much space can be dedicated to the game, and if staff is available to operate it correctly.

Gruening urged operators to play a perspective game themselves (great opportunities to do so exist at the Expo) and get a feel for it.

He also urged operators “to avoid site-prep mistakes.” Know that the location of windows and sunlight can affect the game, as can floor reflections, he said. Strong signal strength, good power supply, and good customer site-lines are also important, he said.

Hybrid and free-roam games need “dedicated employees,” he said. Don’t put a sign on the game that says, “see us at the front desk,” he added. Also, schedule the right employees to work the game, ones who well-trained and understand the game.

“Priming the pump,” or having employees play the game in down times, is important, Gruening said.

“Seeing people play generates more interest and buzz,” he said.

Gruening also provided other tips for successful VR play, including:

- Creating a game schedule;
- Keeping the controllers charged, and;
- Cleaning the equipment well.

“Do the little things,” he said. “Cleanliness is very important. Wipe down the headsets between every play.”



# Dedication needed to make money on Esports

By Paul Tash

Georgia Amusement Journal

Though Esports is “the biggest phenomenon no one quite knows about,” it takes some effort for Family Entertainment Center (FEC) operators to make money on it, an Esport executive told a seminar during Education Day prior to the Amusement Expo in New Orleans earlier in March.

“Monetizing Esports has proven to be hard,” said Jan Goetgeluk, CEO of Virtuix, an Esports and VR game manufacturing company.

To be successful, an operator has to “build a community around Esports,” he said.

“It can work for your FEC,” he said. “It takes a lot of work.”

To successfully run Esports leagues and tournaments, which typically feature such popular games as League of Legends and

Overwatch, operators should:

- Maintain a connected leaderboard from several sites;
  - Offer prize pools “with real money;”
  - Develop a player community.
- “Esports can attract a new audience to your venue,” Goetgeluk said, “if done properly.”

Esport players can be quite serious, he added, using Excel spread-

sheets “to track strategies” and they might even “film themselves” playing to find ways to improve.

Esports drives repeat play like no other FEC game, he said, because players are constantly working to improve their score and climb the leader board.

“Repeat play is critical to your success,” he said. “Ignore the wow factor. It wears off.”



JAN GOETGELUK

Esport leagues are “hit and miss,” Goetgeluk said.

“You have to be consistent,” he said, and really work to establish a player community, which caters to the “social aspect” of Esports.

Player tracking data can be captured, he added, to provide player rewards and generate replays. He also urged operators to seek sponsors to help with prizes.

Goetgeluk said even popular FEC games such as Big Buck Hunter, Golden Tee and Dance Revolution that have a “big following” can provide operators an opportunity to create competitions around.

Whatever level the operator chooses, Goetgeluk had the same advice.

“Be fully committed,” he said.





# Grow employees, former CEO says

By Paul Tash

Georgia Amusement Journal

In a wide-ranging, full-throttle presentation as closing keynote speaker for Education Day as part of the Amusement Expo International, former McDonald's CEO Ed Rensi talked mostly about empowering employees to be the best they can be.

Employers need to be "in a constant state of training" for their employees, Rensi said. And they need to trust them "to make new mistakes."

Continual training and mentoring programs need to be in place to grow employees, he said. "They got to know what you want them to do."

Employees also should know "who we are" and "what is our mission," he said. Employees are "brand assets," he added, which "is what people feel about your brand." For example, when people order a Big Mac, or visit an always clean McDonald's restroom, "they know what they're getting."

Rensi urged employers to establish "a personal relationship" with their workers.

"Hire people who smile easily," he added, "because they care about people."

Rensi is a huge believer in technology in all facets of business.

"If you don't embrace it, it's going to bite you in the butt," he said.

Technology, he added, helps "employees to be the best they can be."

Good employees can help businesses provide "uncompromising quality," "passionate customer care," and "fearless innovation."

"Value your employees," he said. "Push the ordinary to the



Paul Tash photo

**ED RENSI**, former CEO of McDonald's USA, discusses the importance of developing good employees during his closing keynote address at the

Amusement Expo International's Education Day March 9. The Expo ran March 9-11 in New Orleans.

extraordinary."

He also wasn't buying a common perception that young



people these days aren't the greatest employees.

"There's nothing wrong with the kids today," he said. "They're no more stupid and unprepared than you were."

Helping employees succeed takes effort, he said. Employers should continually ask each worker "how can I help you" do your job and "what do you need from me" to do your job better? he said.

Asked how best to fire an employee, Rensi said, "They'll usually give up on themselves before you give up on them." "They're generally self-flushing."

On the subject of family entertainment centers, Rensi was very complementary.

FECs "have a higher purpose,"

he said, because they provide a place for families to play together.

"We need to have high-quality family entertainment," he said. "We need wholesome, holistic family entertainment."

Rensi started working for McDonald's in 1966 as "a grill man and part-time manager trainee" in Columbus, OH, rising to restaurant manager within a year. He worked his way up, and became president and CEO of McDonald's USA from 1991 to 1997. He is credited with development of chicken McNuggets and numerous other innovations.

## Marketing takes commitment, expert advises

By Paul Tash

Georgia Amusement Journal

Before talking about what marketing is, Herman Pool talked about what it isn't.

"It's not bragging. It's not a magic button. It's not a single tool."

You're not bragging if you're able to make the truth "fascinating," he said, and provide all the evidence and experiences "that make you special."

There's no magic button, he said, because marketing takes effort. For marketing to work, business owners need to show investment and commitment, develop a simple, effective message, measure the results, and follow up on the entire plan.

You also need to utilize a combination of

tools, from traditional media to social media, to succeed, he said.

"You are always marketing," he added. "Be calculating about what you're doing."



Pool presented a seminar titled "How to Increase Business and Transform your Life with Marketing" during the Education Day that kicked off the 2020 Amusement Expo International in New Orleans earlier this month.

Investment and commitment to advertising through a specific time period is a must, he said, adding that occasional advertising "is a waste." An effective message, he said, depends on successfully defining your target audience, which

wants to know, "what's in it for me?"

Measurement shows how well a marketing plan is working using such things as special-offer codes or coupons and Google analytics.

Follow-up includes such actions as thank-you calls and gifts and loyalty programs, Pool said.

A marketing plan is useful, and it could be simple, Pool said. It needs to define what action you want customers to make, and its goals must be specific, time-related, measurable, realistic and achievable.

The more specific the plan the better, he said. For example, an FEC owner might define his target audience for a campaign as corporate clients with over 10 employees. A more specific target

See **MARKETING** Page 13



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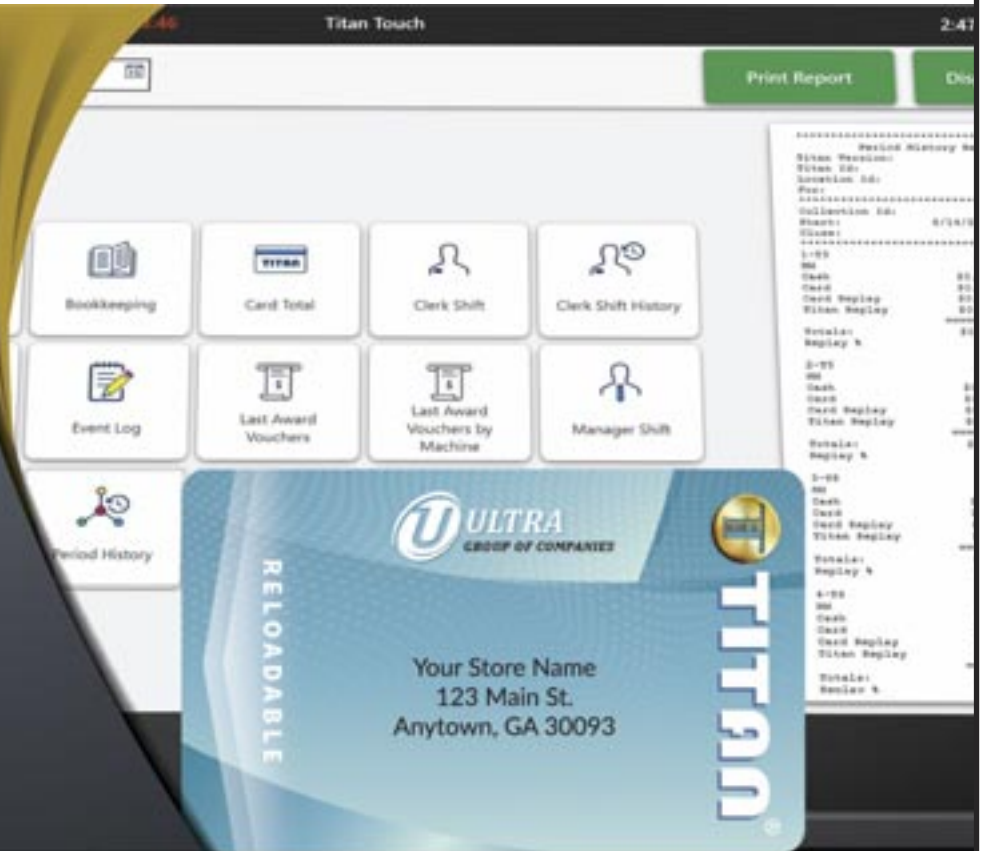
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**NORMAN POOL** asks a question during his seminar on marketing during AEI's Education Day March 9 in New Orleans. *Paul Tash photo*

# Marketing

from Page 10

would be corporate clients with teams of 20 within a 20-mile radius looking for team-building events.

How do you know what makes you special?

“Ask your customers about the problems you have helped them solve,” Pool suggested. “Address how they feel (their emotions) about the problem.”

Then business owners and managers can take the answers to those questions and devise a mission statement that makes sense, Pool said. For example, “We help parents of tweens who are concerned about the stress of finding age-appropriate birthday entertainment ... in a fun and safe environment.”

Pool urged attendees to use a variety of marketing tools, “anything you can use to reach your audiences.”

Along with traditional media,

such as print, TV, and radio, Pool said websites, blogs, social media (Facebook, Google, You-Tube), and email marketing can be effective. He urged business owners to teach their staff to collect email addresses for marketing purposes.

In the end, he reminded business owners and managers that four ways exist to make more money – raise prices, increase sales, customer referrals, and customer returns. Marketing can influence all four.

Though many business owners and managers see marketing as traditional advertising, it's more than that, he said. Marketing includes all contact with people with the office, he said.

“Receptionists need to know how to answer the phone properly,” he said.

Pool is an FEC owner and founder of the marketing firm Vertical Axion. He wrote a Wall Street Journal best-seller titled, "One Hour Marketing: The entrepreneurs guide to simple effective marketing."





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