



GEORGIA Amuse

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Dedicated to serving the Georgia COAM industry
Endorsed by the Georgia Amusement and Music Operators Association
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JOURNAL

Board hears Intralot complaints

*Improvements
are coming,
company says*

By Paul Tash

Georgia Amusement Journal

Complaints that Intralot isn't providing adequate service to the state's COAM industry surfaced during a COAM Advisory Board meeting last month.

Board member Hemal Petal outlined several of those complaints, including slow installation times, machine commissioning difficulties, technicians leaving before machines are commissioned, technicians who are late for appointments or don't show up at all, and call center technicians not trained well enough.



Paul Tash photo

COAM ADVISORY BOARD member Hemal Patel, left, outlines some complaints he is hearing about Intralot's customer service during a board meeting

April 15. Next to him is board member Shawn Fellows. At right at the table is Terry Patterson, Intralot's new chief operations officer.

“Based on all the feedback and everything we hear, I don’t think you are doing justice to the state of Georgia. The state does not deserve

this,” Petal said. “I really think something needs to be done quickly.”

Intralot manages lottery prod-

ucts and services, including COAMs, for the Georgia Lottery Corp. (GLC). Several Intralot rep-

See BOARD Page 8

New Aristocrat games coming this summer

By Paul Tash, Georgia Amusement Journal

As the exclusive distributor for Aristocrat Gaming in the Georgia COAM market, Skill Master Pro has made a huge impact in the state in a very short time.

Adam Foust, Skill Master Pro's chief executive officer, and Afshaad Patel, its chief operating officer, told the Georgia Amusement Journal recently that over 1,300 Aristocrat machines have been installed in Georgia with

more purchased and awaiting installation. The company sold the first of those machines just 14 months ago after earning Aristocrat's distribution rights in 2023.

Skill Master Pro introduced six popular Aristocrat Gaming titles in March 2024: Bao Zhu Zhao Fu, Big Fu Cash Bats, Buffalo Gold, Midnight Train, Mighty Cash, and Sun



& Moon Cash Eclipse. The games, which have gained notable popularity upon release, are featured on the new Mid-KnightX dual screen cabinet, modeled after the award-winning.

ning Helix cabinet.

“The games are performing over three times the market average in win per unit per

See ARISTOCRAT Page 7



COAM licensing window open for 2026

By Paul Tash

Georgia Amusement Journal

The COAM licensing application process is now open for the 2026 licensing period, which runs July 1, 2025, through June 30, 2026, on the Georgia Lottery Corp.'s COAM website, www.gacoam.com.

Class B licensees can now apply for a multi-year license that allows them to extend their license for an additional one or two years upon renewal or issuance. To begin the multi-year ap-



plication process, licensees must have already submitted their 2026 application online. The multiple-year license application is available for each license type under the Documents/Forms section of the website. Licensees who are applying for just the 2026 licensing year are not required to use the multiple-year license application.

The COAM Division has begun to email reminders to 2025 licensees to renew for the 2026 year. Following are the important dates for licensees to remember:

See LICENSING Page 7



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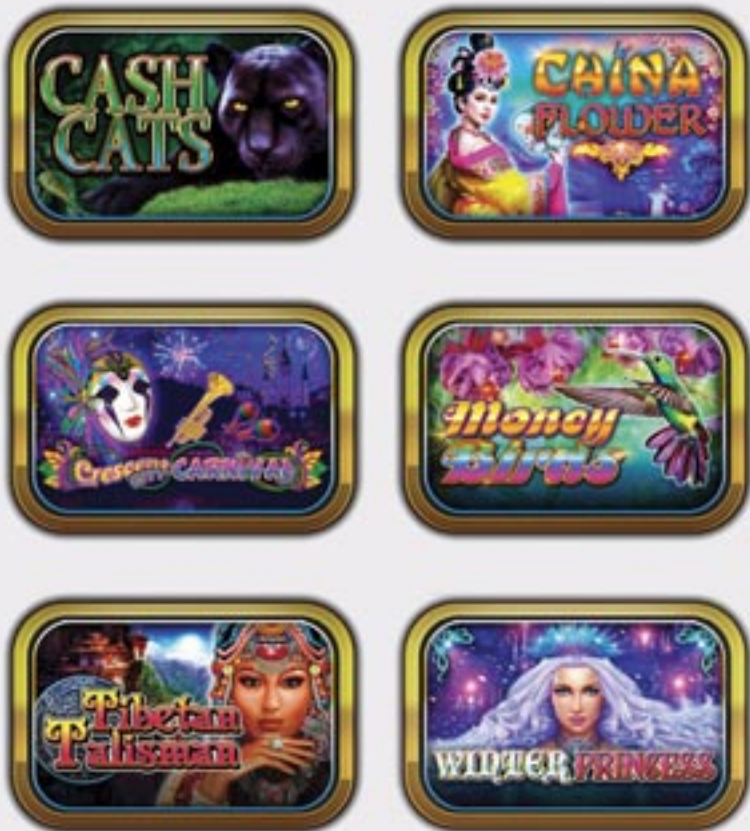
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Journal Opinion

Journal grows with COAM industry

By Paul Tash
GAJ Editor and Publisher

As the Georgia Amusement Journal marks its eighth anniversary with this May issue, we’ve never been more excited about the future of the industry we cover.

Georgia’s COAM industry has made strides few could have imagined in 2013 when the initial COAM legislation that created the regulated and stable market we enjoy today. The Georgia market now boasts over 40,000 Class B COAMs in about 7,200 locations. And with the 2024 passage of House Bill 353, which among many reforms clarifies the use of a gift card for redemption, the COAM industry is poised for even greater heights.

As the industry grows and matures, the Journal will continue to play its important role. We will continue to serve the state’s COAM industry and its related businesses with the same unwavering dedication our readers now expect and appreciate across Georgia and beyond. Licensees can count on us to deliver the information they need to run their businesses in the most cost-effective, compliant and profitable



Paul Tash

The Journal exists solely on the advertising dollars it earns and thanks its outstanding advertisers for their partnerships.

way possible. The Journal is also proud to work with an industry that contributes so significantly to the state’s Hope Scholarship and Pre-K education programs – about \$800 million total through Fiscal Year 2024.

The Georgia Amusement Journal would not be the respected trade journal it has become without the support of the Georgia Amusement and Music Operators Association (GAMOA). It has been a Journal advocate from the start.

“When industry news needs to be delivered to the entire industry GAMOA relies heavily on the trade journal for its inde-

pendent and comprehensive reporting,” former GAMOA President Shawn Fellows has said. “The Journal’s statewide distribution and ability to reach all licensees within the COAM industry is one of our most valuable tools.”

The Journal is mailed free of charge to thousands in the COAM industry, including Class A and B master and location licensees, vendors, regulators, and others. With the endorsement of GAMOA, the Journal works diligently to provide industry-related news and features to help all licensees navigate state regulation and run their businesses more effectively and efficiently.

The Journal provides regular coverage of the GAMOA membership meetings and COAM Advisory Board meetings. The publication also features stories on industry leaders and regularly introduces new companies in the Georgia market place, as well as new products and services by the many successful firms already established here.

Wherever an industry-related event occurs, the Journal

will be there covering it, from the Amusement Expo International in Las Vegas in March to GAMOA’s Southern Amusement & Entertainment Expo in Atlanta in August to Global Gaming Expo in Vegas in October. The Journal also offers regular columns from the Amusement and Music Operators Association (AMOA) and the Georgia Association of Convenience Stores.

The Journal relishes its role as the industry’s voice and takes every opportunity to highlight the benefits the COAM industry provides for the Georgia economy and especially for state education.

The Georgia Amusement Journal is able to perform its industry role thanks solely to the advertising dollars it earns. An independent publication, the Journal receives no funding from any association and survives on the tremendous support of its advertisers. We thank all of them for recognizing its tremendous value as the outlet for companies to promote their products and services to those in the COAM industry. It’s heartening to know our advertisers believe that marketing in the Journal consistently is a worthy investment.

Finally, I’d like to thank the many dozens of individuals, from Lottery regulators to industry insiders, who continually provide the Journal staff their expertise in understanding Georgia’s unique COAM industry. You all are greatly appreciated.

And to our readers, thank you for your loyalty – we look forward to another year together.

GEORGIA

Amusement

JOURNAL

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COAM calendar

- July 20:** Gross retail receipts for April, May and June 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 —
- May 15:** GACS Southern Convenience Store and Petroleum Show, The Centreplex, Macon
- May 22:** GAMOA membership meeting, Hilton Atlanta Northeast, Peachtree Corners

Journal Opinion

AMOA to host ‘D.C. fly-in’ in June

Lori Schneider,
AMOA Executive Director

AMOA will be conducting a fun and engaging association fly-in to Washington, D.C., June 9-11. We invite you to join us for any, or all, of the fly-in events! Here is the agenda:

Monday, June 9 – Legislative briefing dinner with AMOA Legislative Counsel, DGA Group.

Tuesday, June 10 – Visits to Congressional offices on Capitol Hill – topics to include tariffs, tax reform and debanking.

Wednesday, June 11 – Morning visits to Capitol Hill, then an afternoon reception hosted by AMOA/AAMA for members of Congress and their staff, and finally the annual Congressional baseball game at Nationals Park in the evening.

For more information or to register, contact me at (815) 893-6010 or lori@amoa.com.

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AMOA is proud to subsidize this training and make it available for member companies at an exceptional rate. Be sure to visit amoa.com to find out how you can take advantage of this huge opportunity.

Tech schools 2025

The AMOA Regional Tech School is set to take place twice in 2025. The first one is June 24-25 in Philadelphia at the Sheraton Suites Philadelphia Airport. The second will be scheduled in the early fall.

The one-and-a-half day school features tech sessions by both TouchTunes and AMI on

the jukebox as well as sessions on pinball, cranes, ATMs, payment systems and more! Visit amoa.com for a full synopsis on each tech session and registration information.

Save the date!

AMOA On Campus Program
Oct. 22-24, 2025
Westin Chicago Northwest
Itasca, IL

AMOA on the Road Program
Oct. 22-23, 2025
Westin Chicago Northwest
Itasca, IL

AMOA State Council Meeting
Jan. 28-30, 2026
Orlando, FL

Amusement Expo International
March 16-19, 2026
Las Vegas – Resorts World
is the new AEI headquarter hotel in 2026


For additional details visit www.amusementexpo.org. Be sure to engage with AMOA at www.amoa.com for details on these and many other AMOA programs.

C-store trade show May 15 in Macon

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. Pre-registration 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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Aristocrat

from Page 1

day,” Foust said.

Solid partnerships with master licensees have greatly aided the company’s growth, Patel added.

“They have been great to work with,” he said.

The company is now gearing up to launch a new suite of games in the state this summer.

“These games are fit for the market and the player and showcase the ongoing commitment Aristocrat Gaming has to the Georgia COAM market,” Patel said.

“The product Aristocrat Gaming is creating for this market is going to be tremendous,” Foust said. “We’ll have a new product that players will be excited about.”

The company’s success, Faust added, can be attributed to “great customers” and “superior service” by warehouse manager Marshall Haff and his team, as well as the powerful synergistic relationship Foust and Patel have developed. Foust’s decades-long experience in the amusement industry has meshed perfectly with Patel’s payment-processing background to create a dynamic operations team.

The Skill Master Pro leadership team markets Aristocrat Gaming products from the master licensee’s point-of-view, not as a distributor.

“I look at things like, how would I want my distributor to treat me,” said Foust, a former master licensee himself.

Skill Master Pro works hard to accommodate master licensees in every aspect to create a dynamic relationship with the master licensee.

“And that perspective has been working tremendously for us,” Foust said.

Service is very important to the company, as well, Patel said.

“It’s not only about the sales,” he said, “it’s also about the service



SKILL MASTER PRO COO Afshaad Patel, left, and CEO Adam Foust are thrilled with the impact the Aristocrat games are having on Georgia’s COAM market.



SKILL MASTER PRO’S warehouse manager Marshall Haff, left, and Aaron Harrison are part of the team that the company depends on to provide to superior “one-call” customer service.

that’s available.”

Patel said technicians like working with Skill Master Pro because just one call “puts them in touch with Marshall,” and he and his team take care of everything from service to delivery.

“We want to be number one in service,” Patel said.

Foust added that having an Aristocrat game-development studio in Atlanta “has been a huge

help.” For example, he said, Aristocrat game developers can provide valuable insight to help illustrate the advantages of their games “in a way we can explain to the customer.”

Licensing

from Page 1

06/30/2025 (Monday)

Deadline for master licensees to purchase additional Class A and Class B decals or location licensees to add Class A and Class B machines for the 2025 licensing period (07/01/2024 - 06/30/2025). **This deadline only applies to 2025 COAM licenses.**

07/01/2025 (Tuesday)

Date a \$1,000 late fee will be assessed to master and location Class B licensees and manufacturer and distributor licensees that have

not renewed for the 2026 licensing period (07/01/2025 – 06/30/2026). An existing COAM licensee will not be allowed to apply for a new license to avoid payment of a late fee. Class A master and location licensees face a \$100 late fee for not renewing on time.

9/29/2025 (Monday)

Last day to submit a renewal location Class A and Class B license, master Class A and Class B license and manufacturer and distributor license for the 2026 licensing period (07/01/2025 – 06/30/2026). If a holder of a 2025 COAM license fails to renew their license, or their license application is not approved on or before this date, the person or entity will no longer be allowed to operate COAMs.

Master licensee’s role

Master licensees can play an important role in helping their locations through the licensing process by reminding them to:

- Pay their taxes and other state financial obligations.
- Apply for the correct license (Class B).
- Pay attention to licensing deadlines.
- List all the officers and shareholders listed on the license application.
- Take time to enter information correctly.

The licensing application process covers the following licenses:

- Master Class A – New and renewal
- Master Class B – Renewal only
- Location Class A – New and renewal
- Location Class B – New and renewal
- Manufacturer – New and renewal
- Distributor – New and renewal

The Lottery is not accepting any new Class B Master License applications. New Class B Master licenses are only available through an auction process for prequalified participants.



Paul Tash photo

INTRALOT STAFF participating in the COAM Advisory Board meeting April 15 are, from left, Terry Patterson, chief operations officer;

John McCormick, outgoing general manager; George Zazanis, vice president of COAM; and Shayne Heap, senior service manager.

Board

from Page 1

representatives attended the meeting – including Terry Patterson, chief operations officer; George Zazanis, vice president of COAM for Intralot in Georgia; and Shane Heap, senior service manager – and they responded with assurances that the company is working to improve its service in a variety of ways.

Zazanis said Intralot has beefed up its staff of technicians from 10 to 13 with three more on the way, which should improve the installation process.

“I believe staffing is good,” he said.

He also said new software to be introduced soon to automate some call center operations will improve its efficiency, especially in routing calls. In addition, he said, Intralot will review current operations and report back to the board at the end of the year.

Advisory Board Chair Emily Dunn questioned whether a report from Intralot once a year is enough. She suggested quarterly updates at the COAM Advisory Board meetings, saying it would help alleviate “the frustration and angst” that operators are feeling.

Zazanis agreed that Intralot would provide quarterly updates to the board.

Regarding technicians showing up late or not at all, Patterson said that isn’t acceptable and encouraged licensees to contact Intralot if that happens.

“We need to know that,” he said.

He also noted an APN (Access Point Name) issue with Horizon earlier this year limited for a time the number of locations that Intralot technicians could visit.

“We worked with them to get it fixed as fast as possible,” Patterson said, but that issue “threw us behind” in both service calls and installations.

The complaints surfaced as Intralot restructures its management team. John McCormick, general manager for Intralot in Georgia, is stepping away, while Patterson and Zazanis take on larger roles. McCormick attended the April 15 meeting and provided input.

Dunn also said that while she appreciates Intralot staff for attending the April 15 meeting, “it’s long overdue.”

“I need a commitment that you will come back in October,” she said, so that the board can provide additional input and receive a customer-service update.

“You’ve said a lot of good things today,” she said, “and it sounds like you have some good plans. But actions speak louder than words.”

Zazanis assured the board that Intralot will attend the Oct. 7 meeting of the COAM Advisory Board.

“We really value the contract and relationship we have with the COAM group and with the Georgia Lottery,” Patterson added. “The only thing I can ask is, if there are issues, to call us right away. We’re happy to address them.”

John Heinen, COAM senior vice president, said that the COAM Division is meeting every other week with Intralot to address some of the challenges the industry has encountered. Members of the COAM Advisory Board and other industry representatives also have attended some of the meetings.

“We appreciate ... your input,” Heinen said. “You guys see what’s going on every day.”

Patel said he appreciated the COAM Division for facilitating those meetings “to address some of these concerns.”

Heinen said those meetings will continue.

Record numbers

Earlier in the meeting, Heinen provided the latest COAM statistics as of March 31, reporting that the

Georgia market enjoyed “record numbers” of machines and locations. At the end of the third quarter of Fiscal Year 2025, the state had 40,459 Class B COAMs in 7,201 locations, compared to about 37,000 machines in 6,700 locations at the same time last year.

He noted that Feb. 28 marked the “single highest net revenue day” for Georgia COAMs, which totaled \$6.51 million and broke a four-year record. Also, the highest net revenue month ever recorded was March 2025, breaking the previous record set five years ago, he added.

In his report to board, COAM Vice President Mike Parham provided some licensing statistics. The number of enabled licenses as of March 31 were:

- Class A master licenses – 295
- Class A location licenses – 2,258
- Class B master licenses – 198
- Class B location licenses – 7,690
- Manufacturers licenses – 34
- Distributors – 6

Parham also noted the industry’s climb past the 40,000 machine total. The number of COAMs in the field following the industry’s regulation in 2013 was about 15,000, he added, “so that’s huge.” Also, he said, net revenues were about 7.5 percent higher at the end of the third quarter than the same time a year ago.

Installation of new G2S site controllers that promise more functionality and fewer complications continues, Parham said. As of March 31, Intralot has completed migration to new site controllers in 4,479 locations, he said, adding that about 2,703 locations remain to be upgraded.

Parham said the GLC is still working to update the online licensing system to handle the multi-year licensing option that was part of sweeping COAM legislation that passed the 2024 General Assembly.

He said due to the “extensive software development and effort” involved in updating the online licensing system, the product won’t be available for testing until Oct. 1. The new system will hopefully be ready to go “by this time next year,” he said.

For those licensees who have applied for a multi-year license, an email will be sent out to notify them about “the next steps will be for them” to get their updated license for the next year and how to order machine decals.

Joe Kim, GLC general counsel, provided an overview of the result of legislative passage this year of House Bill 74, which placed the GLC under the Administrative Procedures Act. The bill provides additional oversight and “public notice and opportunity” regarding the GLC’s rule-making process. Among its requirements, he said, the new law mandates that proposed rules receive a 30-day public notice, that anyone who requests a copy of the proposed rule receives one, and that the office of Legislative Counsel share any proposed rules with the appropriate House and Senate oversight committees, “so they have an opportunity to weigh in.”

In another report to the council, COAM’s lead investigator Andrew Pippin said his office has conducted 6,554 inspections this year, which is about 1,100 more inspections than the previous year. He said a new case management system implemented last September that has streamlined reporting and provided other efficiencies has allowed more time for inspectors to meet with licensees, increasing the number of inspections.

“It makes our job more efficient,” he said.

Pippin added that 228 citations and 849 warnings were issued so far this fiscal year and 54 law en-

(Continued on next page)

(Continued from previous page) enforcement actions were taken. He also updated the council on an investigation into criminal activity where people had broken into some games, gaining access to gift card terminals and the machine itself. He said his investigators identified the perpetrators “within two hours” of the crime. With help from a district attorney, his team linked these individuals to similar crimes in four or five other locations.

“Last month they were all indicted under the RICO statute,” he said.

COAM Advisory Board member Shawn Fellows commended Pippin and his staff for their effort on the case.

“That’s tremendous work,” he said. “I know that, as they identified those (offenders), the fact that it came from COAM (investigators) was very impressive.”

Technology regulation

In other business, Fellows, the chairman of a subcommittee tasked with developing “regulatory modernization” for the COAM industry, said the group is making progress. The subcommittee is reviewing the potential impacts of new COAM technology, such as gift cards, kiosks, and other automated systems, and whether that technology requires

new regulations for the industry. The goal, Fellows said, is to work with Lottery and other stakeholders “to establish definitive language that would be proposed regulation.” That proposal would then be submitted to the COAM Advisory Board and GLC for approval, Fellows said, and it would go through the APA process. “It’s going to take some time,”

he said. The subcommittee’s effort will help guide evolving gift card kiosks, player reward systems, and ticket vouchering into the Georgia COAM market. The subcommittee is discussing several topics, including consumer protections, dispute resolution, data security and integrity, kiosk and gift card protocols, licensee accountability and

potential penalty structures. Fellows said “input from all parties” is encouraged and added that the subcommittee and the GLC have enjoyed “great collaboration” throughout the process. Dunn added that the “open discussion” with the Lottery is “beneficial” for the subcommittee’s efforts. The next COAM Advisory Board meeting is July 15.



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Retail Matters

Susy Q’s honored as top independent

Convenience Store News

Susie Q’s, based in Thomasville, GA, has been named one of the convenience store industry’s 20-best single-store owners and small operators in the United States in the Convenience Store News’ inaugural Outstanding Independents Awards program.

The awards were created to “celebrate the tenacity and perseverance of independent operators and recognize a select few single-store owners and small chains (2-20 stores) that are making a big impact in the industry despite their smaller size and more limited resources,” the Convenience Store News said.

Founded in 1999, Susie Q’s has locations in Georgia, Florida and South Carolina. Susie Q's has established its position in the marketplace as a brand known for exemplary customer service, operational excellence and a commitment to its communities and beyond. While Susie Q's 12 locations range from large-footprint convenience stores to smaller offerings, the sites regardless of size are easy to spot thanks to the brand's logo: a yellow and green "Q" with a quail nested inside. When customers see that logo, they know they can expect fast, friendly service and high-quality products.



Credit for that partly goes to the chain's store managers, many of whom measure their tenure in decades rather than years. One store manager who has been with the retailer for more than 20 years points to corporate's willingness to let managers make decisions at the store level as a reason for her long-time affiliation with Susie Q's.

"Corporate gives me latitude to make decisions and allows me to try different approaches within my store," she said.

Susie Q's stands out among independent operators in the convenience channel for more than just its stores – the brand has become an integral part of each community it serves. During emergency situations and disasters, Susie Q's is often seen delivering water, food, batteries and other essential items. This dedication even goes beyond its footprint. Following the fall 2024 storms that battered North Carolina, Susie Q's management sent trucks loaded with supplies to the affected communities and arranged fuel deliveries so that residents could use generators – despite not having a single store in North Carolina. When asked why Susie Q's pitched in to help, co-owner Tommy Patel said simply, "In America, we stand together."

According to its website, Susie Q’s “founders made service a priority that we pride ourselves

on in every Susie Q’s Foods store.”

“We uphold these values in our beautiful hometown and surrounding communities with our goal to serve and provide the best service and products to our customers.”

Nominations were submitted to Convenience Store News by c-store industry retailers, distributors and suppliers. Nominators were asked to describe how the business is unique and stands out in its market, in what ways the retailer delivers exceptional customer service and embraces innovation, and how the operator contributes to the betterment of their community, among other attributes.

The 20 winners were recognized at an awards ceremony held during the inaugural Outstanding Independents Summit on April 25. The virtual event is dedicated to educating and celebrating the convenience channel’s single-store owners and small operators. The quick-hitting four-hour agenda tackled today's biggest pain points for small operators, and provide valuable insights, expert advice and actionable knowledge that attendees can immediately implement to upgrade their operations.

The 2025 Outstanding Independents Awards program is sponsored by Altria Group Distribution Co., NRC Realty & Capital Advisors LLC, and Premier Manufacturing Inc.

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Retail Matters

Stores lean into kitchen technology

Innovative equipment aids foodservice

Angela Hanson
Convenience Store News
It's no surprise that convenience store operators are searching for ways to make their prepared food and beverage operations better, faster and smoother. The importance of foodservice as a category, combined with ongoing difficulties around hiring and retaining employees and the emergence of innovative technology, is pushing retailers to explore new ways to enhance their foodservice operations – many of them involving some form of automation.

However, increased investment in automation does not mean customers should expect to see robots flipping burgers any time soon. In fact, some of the most useful advances may never be seen by customers at all.

When La Crosse, WI-based Kwik Trip Inc. launched its fried chicken program, it also embarked on a partnership with Mendota Heights, Minn.-based Restaurant Technologies' Total Oil Management (TOM) system, which automates the volume and quality of oil – including managing oil delivery, recycling, filtration and usage. Over the last five years, the solution has contributed to safety and efficiency in Kwik Trip's kitchens, while easing the demand on employees.

"With the help of Restaurant Technologies, our kitchens stay cleaner, we have less spilled oil, and our coworkers appreciate that they do not have to manually dump oil in the fryer and haul out waste oil," said Paul Servais, retail foodservice director at Kwik Trip, which operates 800-plus convenience stores. "We hire many people from the food industry and as soon as they get into the kitchen and see our oil management system, they are instantly happy."

Kitchen advances aren't limited to fryers. Overall, the state of automation and operational assistance is "promising," according to Danielle Fantasia, marketing manager at MTI Products, an equipment manufacturer based in Hudson, Mass. "Equipment today

is more reliable, user-friendly and designed to address key challenges such as limited space, labor shortages and the need for consistent quality," she said.

The c-store industry is increasing its demand for more advanced features, she added. "They want equipment that integrates seamlessly into their operations – think connectivity with inventory systems, real-time monitoring and predictive maintenance," Fantasia reported.

Retailers looking to invest in automation and related tech should proceed with some caution, though, according to Mathew Mandeltort, a foodservice veteran and founder of ChefWorthy, an online platform for rating and reviewing equipment, products and services.

Following initial activity by early adopters, the mainstream foodservice industry has slowed its integration of automation, robotics and artificial intelligence (ARA), he noted. After experiencing the

help them do what they already do – but better. These specialized solutions can enhance existing foodservice programs.

"Often, groups try to use enterprise resource planning software not designed for foodservice, or develop internal tools centered around checklists and excel spreadsheets. While these solutions are a good first step to understanding execution, the disconnected tools mean network reporting is laborious and clunky, and in-store execution needs to be physically observed," said Wynne Barrett, co-founder and vice president of business development for Hopkinton, Mass.-based Supplyit by Jera Concepts, a fresh food management platform that helps retailers run their operations more efficiently.

Addressing pain points

Industry experts say c-store operators looking to invest in kitchen automation will get the most bang for their buck if they seek out equipment and solutions that enhance consistency.

"Without a doubt, the area that stands to gain the most from automation is consistency in high-demand dayparts and popular food items. Convenience stores operate in fast-paced environments where speed and reliability are critical, especially during

peak times like breakfast, lunch and late-night snacking," Fantasia said. "Automation ensures that food quality remains consistent, while reducing labor requirements and operational complexity."

She also sees retailers prioritizing practical attributes in kitchen equipment, such as:

- Speed: This is valued above almost everything else as kitchen equipment needs to keep up with the demand of customers who visit c-stores for fast service.
- Ease of use: Operators need equipment that is simple to learn and operate, even for employees with minimal training.
- Ability to clean: Cleanliness is a non-negotiable.
- Compact & ventless design: Equipment with a small footprint fits the space constraints of most c-stores, and ventless units avoid the

complex installation of ventilation systems.

- Versatility: Retailers want equipment capable of handling a variety of menu items, with the ability to switch seamlessly between product types without major adjustments.

Kitchen equipment that cuts down on the number of necessary tasks is already available and useful, even if it doesn't reinvent the wheel, Mandeltort noted. Barrett cautions retailers to stay vigilant after implementing new equipment or solutions because even if they make the best possible decision for their program, the human element can be a wild card.

"In-store execution of the plan is probably the biggest [issue]," Barrett said. "Employees often believe they know better than the data being delivered to them, so even well-crafted production plans are not followed."

Employees also have personal preferences or biases upon which they act. For example, they might not follow recipes or make items they think will sell well because they like them better.

Choosing right tools

The retail foodservice market is likely to collectively grow its use of automation and advanced kitchen tech, but individual needs will differ. Operators must carefully consider what equipment and solutions will realistically do for them, rather than assume newer is better.

"ARA/smart equipment is a tool to be used in furtherance of a business objective or solving a pain point," Mandeltort advised. "Are you experiencing a consistency issue? Are you experiencing a quality issue? Can you legitimately lower labor costs? Will you enhance your customer service and customer experience? Will you achieve operational efficiencies? Will you save money? Will you make more money?"

The relative newness of most forms of foodservice automation means that it is imperative for retailers to do their research and due diligence to determine whether equipment and solutions will be genuinely helpful to them, or will not prove as effective as advertised.

"Don't succumb to the hype. Showroom demonstrations are insufficient," said Mandeltort. "Talk to the people that have to actually operate it or interact with it."



KWIK TRIP'S FRIED CHICKEN program is supported by an oil management system.

technologies' real-world challenges and limitations, potential users are waiting for the next generation of innovation to address them. He cited McDonald's pulling back from an AI-powered voice ordering system due to problems with accuracy and order identification as an example.

Ongoing costs, not just the cost of the initial investment, are also important to consider.

"Currently, the ARA technology providers are the ones that provide the service and maintenance [S&M]," Mandeltort said. "Not only does this make availability of S&M an issue, but pricing as well. There are no competitors to help with pricing."

Instead of adding an all-new form of assistive technology, retailers may benefit from turning to food management platforms that



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Decommission COAMs correctly

The proper procedure to decommission coin-operated amusement machines (COAMs) can be found on the COAM Division website, www.gacoam.com. The COAM decommission procedure should be followed when there is:

- 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.

To proceed with the decommissioning:

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.

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.

COIN OPERATED AMUSEMENT MACHINE LOCATION SWEEP AND MASTER PUSH CALENDAR			
COAM JAN-JUNE 2025 COAM			
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

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