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Paul Tash photos

MIKE PACE, left, comes up to receive GAMOA's Lifetime Achievement Award from GAMOA President Shawn Fellows during the awards banquet at the Southern Amusement and Entertainment Expo

in Atlanta Sept. 12. At right, Jim Siskin offers his thanks to GAMOA after receiving its Operator of the Year award as his wife, Dianne, watches.

GAMOA honors two at Expo

By Paul Tash

Georgia Amusement Journal

An energetic, entertaining, and, at times, emotional awards banquet capped the first full day at the Southern Amusement and Entertainment Expo Sept. 12 in Atlanta, as the Georgia Amusement and Music Operators Association (GAMOA) honored two of its stalwarts.

Mike Pace, an industry innovator and founder of Pace-O-Matic, based in Duluth, received GAMOA's Lifetime Achievement Award, while Jim Siskin, longtime owner of Amusement Sales and Service, based in Savannah, was

named Operator of the Year. Banilla Games received the Cutting Edge Award, which honors the developer of a top new product or service, for its new Fusion 4 game.

"This means a lot," an emotional Pace said after receiving his award and a standing ovation from the packed banquet. "Thank you."

Pace has spent "a lifetime in the industry," said GAMOA President Shawn Fellows in his introduction.



A self-taught programmer who has been "described as a genius," Pace is the "father of the countertop (videogame)," Fellows said, as the developer of the first countertop video game, the classic Little Casino. Pace later developed Pot-O-Gold, the first video-based electronic pull-tab machine, which was sold all over the country.

In 2001, Pace was a star witness in a "hugely

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COAMs have come a long way – regulator

By Jorie Tash

Georgia Amusement Journal

The Georgia Lottery Commission (GLC) wrapped up the Southern Amusement and Entertainment Expo Sept. 13 with a presentation by Mike Parham, vice president of the GLC's COAM Division.

"I'd like to thank Georgia Amusement and Music Operators Association (GAMOA) for inviting us to see the new devices and answer questions," Parham said.

He noted the coin-operated amusement machine in-

dustry and its regulators have come a long way since the Georgia General Assembly placed COAMs under GLC regulation in 2013.

"I can't believe it's been six years," he said. "We've learned a lot in that time and we're just amazed ... where we are now."

The COAM industry was responsible for \$66 million in contributions to Georgia's Hope and Pre-K education programs in fiscal year 2019, Parham said, an increase of

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Expo

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important case” in Georgia, Fellows said, that “solidified the legality of the skill-based games.”

In describing Siskin in his introduction, GAMOA attorney Les Schneider said he embodies the true nature of a mensch, a Yiddish term for a person of “integrity and honor” and “high character.”

Even that term doesn’t describe Siskin fully, Schneider said.

Siskin’s a “super mensch,” he said, adding that he has an “exhaustive” work ethic, is “loyal to the core,” and offers “thoughtful deliberation” with a “blend of humility.”

A veteran of the amusement industry in Georgia for 30-plus years who served on the COAM Advisory Board, Siskin is “committed to his work and this industry,” Schneider said, and has a “desire to get things done.”

Siskin enjoys ballroom dancing (even marrying his ballroom dancing instructor) and has a passion for fast cars, particularly Corvettes, Schneider said.

Schneider said Siskin may be “the last of the real gentleman operators” and an “all-around good guy.”

The banquet crowd stood and enthusiastically applauded as the popular Siskin came to the podium to receive his Operator of the Year award.

“It’s such an honor,” he told the large crowd. “It’s an honor to work with so many good people.”

Innovation honored

In a very close vote, GAMOA chose Banilla Games as its Cutting Edge winner for its development of the new Fusion 4 game (for more on the new game, see next month’s *Georgia Amusement Journal*).

“Thank you to Georgia,” said Michael “Smitty” Smith, Banilla’s national sales rep.

The company’s large group of game developers based in Greenville, N.C., don’t receive many accolades, Smith said, but now “we can take this back and say, ‘good job, guys.’”

“Our games have gotten better because of you,” added Banilla’s Kevin Morse. “We’ve received good feedback ... you’ve told us what Georgia needed, and what you needed.”

The Southern Amusement and Entertainment Expo also provides an opportunity for GAMOA to raise money through a silent auction during the trade show and a live auction following the banquet. Led by auctioneer Jonathon Cul-



Paul Tash photos

MICHAEL ‘SMITTY’ Smith, above, laughs as an auction for his shoes begins at the awards banquet during the Southern Amusement and Entertainment Expo Sept. 12, while GAMOA President Shawn Fellows and Banilla’s Kevin Morse check for the shoe size. AMOA President Emily Dunn, left, provides an update of national issues at the banquet.



are currently serving on the AMOA board, as well, and acknowledged former AMOA President Gaines Butler, another longtime Georgia operator.

She said the national organization provides the amusement and music industry a “strong voice in Washington, D.C.,” while adding that the organization’s State Council comprised of representatives across the country works to ensure appropriate legislation at the state level.

AMOA is currently working on several national issues, including a consistent push by the banking industry to eliminate cash at the retail level, Dunn said.

Cash, she said, is “still legal tender” in the United States and is “still being minted.”

“Banks should not be in the business of determining the legal form of tender,” she said.

In Georgia, she said, the amusement industry has made “very impressive” strides and praised its “new ideas, innovation and hard work.”

“It’s very important that we continue to find compromise and work as a team,” she said. “We’re all in the same boat. The image we

carry is vital. ... I want us to be respected and admired as individuals and as an industry.”

And for those operators who don’t belong to GAMOA, Dunn urged them to join.

“We need you,” she said.

Dunn also urged members to attend AMOA’s huge Amusement Expo International March 9-11 in New Orleans.

“You won’t want to miss it.”

Expo outgrows facility

Turnout for the Southern Amusement and Entertainment Expo by both participants and trade show vendors reached all-time highs.

“I appreciate all the participation,” GAMOA’s Fellows said. “Attendance went well beyond expectations.”

In fact, the Expo has outgrown the Atlanta Airport Marriott, Fellows said, and next year will move to the Infinite Energy Center in Duluth.

The success, Fellows said, is the result of efforts by many, but primarily the GAMOA board and staff.

“I want to express my personal gratitude to the board and staff,” he said. “They really put themselves out there on behalf of the industry.”

verhouse of PB&J Industries, the live auction this year was, indeed, lively.

Several industry vendors donated items for the auction, including what turned out to be four new Fusion 4 machines by Banilla. And in what is becoming an auction tradition, even the shoes of Banilla’s Smith were sold, right off his feet. Proceeds benefitted the association and its many good causes.

Dunn leads AMOA

A featured speaker at the banquet was Emily Dunn, a longtime Georgia operator who currently is serving as president of the national Amusement and Music Operators Association. Dunn said she has “great appreciation” for GAMOA leadership, including Fellows and Executive Director Christina Kaiser, and thanked them and the GAMOA board for their efforts to lead the industry forward. She also mentioned that GAMOA members Sam Westgate and Chuck Brooks

Journal Opinion

GAMOA's Expo a growing success

**By Shawn Fellows
GAMOA President**

The second annual Southern Amusement & Entertainment Expo took place earlier this month and continues to grow in scope and attendance. The Expo has taken the place of GAMOA's annual trade show, which the association has hosted for over 30 years for the coin-operated amusement machine industry.

On Wednesday, Sept. 11, the Expo officially opened with its traditional exhibitor's appreciation party and move-in. While exhibitors worked late into the evening building their amazing booths, large groups of manufacturer sales reps, industry leaders and Expo attendees gathered for social activities that filled the late evening hours with comradery, fellowship and wonderful memories.

All the hard work paid off and by 10 a.m. Thursday, Sept. 12, the Expo's doors opened to hundreds of waiting attendees. It resembled something like Santa's workshop in the hours leading up Christmas Eve, as the large banquet hall was transformed from a cavernous space to 60 beautifully decorated booths.

This year's event included two additional hosting state associations – the North Carolina Coin Operators Association (NCCOA) and the North Carolina Citizens for Free Enterprise (NCCFE) – that helped to provide a wonderful venue for them to organize and meet with regional manufacturers and attendees

from across the southeast. Countless exhibitors were unfortunately turned away in the weeks leading up to the Expo as all the booth space had already been reserved. We



Shawn Fellows

The large banquet hall was transformed from a cavernous space to 60 beautifully decorated booths.

products on hand and many of these products were submissions for the Cutting-Edge Award.

This award is presented to a manufacturer for a new product that meets the following criteria 1) Quality, 2) Efficiency, 3) Creativity, 4) Originality, and 5) Overall impression by the committee. This year's committee was comprised of Chairman Stewart Carswell III, COAM Advisory Board member Bunty Doshi, GAMOA director Jane Park; GAMOA members Allen Joseph and Arif Alibhoy. Congratulations to this year's winner, Banilla Games, for the exciting new 32-inch vertical game the Fusion 4. Visit their amazing

product at www.banillagames.com

As the Expo neared its end, and the hall was closed for the day at 5:30 p.m., attendees were treated to a social gathering that led up to the GAMOA annual awards banquet and dinner. The awards banquet dinner was sold out, making the night's event even more exciting as more than 200 attendees gathered to celebrate our industry, thank our sponsors and exhibitors and acknowledge the achievements of some of the brightest minds in the COAM world.

As president, I had the distinguished honor of introducing our guest speaker – Ms. Emily Dunn – owner and president of Tom's Amusements from Blue Ridge, GA,

See Dunn Page 5

hope that next year's larger facility, the Infinite Energy Center in Duluth, will solve this issue.

As the attendees flowed into the exhibit hall, they were greeted with the very best and latest products in the COAM industry. There were countless parts suppliers, dozens of machine manufacturers, and some of the largest and best distributors in the country, all displaying the newest technologies available. Whether you were there to purchase a pinball machine, a two-player basketball machine or the newest 43-inch skill-based amusement game, you were in luck. The larger manufacturers all had new



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COAM calendar

— REPORTING DATES —

Now: The COAM licensing application (www.gacoam.com) is open for the 2020 licensing period (07/01/2019 - 06/30/2020) for the following:

- Master Class A - NEW and RENEWAL
- Master Class B - RENEWAL
- Location Class A - NEW and RENEWAL
- Location Class B - NEW and RENEWAL
- Manufacturers, Distributors - NEW and RENEWAL

Sept. 30: Deadline to submit a RENEWAL Location Class A and Class B License, Master Class A and Class B license and Manufacturer and Distributor license. If a holder of a 2019 COAM license fails to renew its license or its license application is not approved on or before this date, the person or entity will no longer be allowed to operate COAMs.

— MEETINGS/OTHER —

Oct. 22: COAM Advisory Board, GLC office, Atlanta
Oct. 24: GAMOA membership meeting, place TBD
Dec. 12: GAMOA membership meeting, place TBD

Journal Opinion

AMOA programs offer education, advocacy

By Lori Schneider
AMOA Executive VP

The AMOA board of directors recently met in Nashville, TN, where it conducted 18 separate committee meetings in addition to its fall Board of Directors meeting. Below are some highlights of AMOA programs and plans heading into the final leg of 2019.

Continuing Education

The AMOA On the Road Program is a short, highly informative program conducted near a major airport hub for convenient accessibility. This year's program, titled "20/20 Vision: Focus on the Future," will feature keynote speaker Kevin D. Wright, who will speak on "Millennial Leadership." Other featured speakers are Russ Van Natta, vice president of sales at Creative Works, presenting on "VR and Esports: Expanding the Gaming Experience," and Taylor McGlamery, director of strategy at Trustworkz, who will discuss "Marketing in 2020."

In addition to the expert presenters, the weekend also includes several round-table discussions where attendees can do a deep dive into topics such as navigating today's tight labor market, virtual reality, technology, remote dart leagues, card-stored/cashless technology and a quick-fire hot topic session to cover everything from operations to remote leagues to ATMs and more.

The 2019 program will run

Oct. 25-27 at the Westin O'Hare Hotel, just outside Chicago O'Hare Airport. Factory tours at both Raw Thrills and Incredible



Lori Schneider

Technologies are being offered to eligible attendees on Friday, Oct. 25, at 1 p.m. The educational portion of the program will begin Saturday morning, Oct. 26, and runs through Sunday, Oct. 27, at noon.

For more information or to register, visit www.amoa.com or contact AMOA at 815-893-6010.

On Campus Program

For over four decades AMOA has conducted its AMOA-Notre Dame Management Development Program. This program is available to AMOA members and is geared towards both owners and key management.

The AMOA On Campus Pro-

gram is a two-year, four-session program that takes place in the fall in conjunction with the On the Road Program and in the

For over four decades, AMOA has conducted its AMOA-Notre Dame Management Development Program.

spring on the prestigious campus of the University of Notre Dame in Notre Dame, IN.

The upcoming session will take place Oct. 26-28 at the Westin O'Hare in Rosemont, IL. Attendees will participate in On the Road and will stay for an additional session the afternoon of Sunday, Oct. 27, and Monday morning, Oct. 28. The Sunday afternoon session will feature an HR specialist who will discuss hiring and retention strategies in today's market. The Monday morning session will feature Brad Moody, executive vice president of operations with Lowers and Associates, who will address the group on the Human Capital Risk and Social Engineering.



On Demand education

AMOA has recently launched its On Demand education, which features Webinar Wednesday industry education sessions and Associate Member Monday member spotlight sessions. Sign up at amoa.com if you want to participate in a live presentation, or AMOA members can login and access recorded sessions 24/7 at amoa.com.

Legislative advocacy

AMOA will continue its advocacy efforts in Washington, DC, later this fall with continued focus on banking issues as it relates to cash.

Engage member app

AMOA has recently introduced its AMOA Engage membership app to bring the benefits of membership conveniently into the palm of its members' hands. The AMOA Engage app can be downloaded at the App Store for iPhone users or Google Play for android users.

Be sure to visit www.amoa.com to learn more on these and the many other AMOA member programs.

AMOA is a national trade association representing the interests of operators, distributors, manufacturers and suppliers in the amusement entertainment industry. GAMOA is an active participant in the AMOA State Council. Visit www.amoa.com.

Dunn

from Page 1

and this year's AMOA president. The crowd welcomed Emily with a standing ovation and lively applause as she walked to the podium.

Emily delivered a heartfelt speech about the issues facing the industry, not only on the national stage but also here in Georgia. As 35-year veteran of the industry, a dedicated mother of two daughters, a COAM Advisory Board member, and countless other civic roles that Emily fulfills across our state, it's no wonder why so many describe Ms. Dunn as

"Wonder Woman."

As the night's ceremonies moved into the awards sections – the GAMOA presented appreciation awards to all the sponsors. Diamond sponsors were Banilla Games, Betson, Cardinal Express, Primero Games and Southern Gaming Solutions; Platinum sponsors were Zydexo Games; Gold sponsors were GameBox Builders, Fish Game Kings, Player One and SUZOHAPP; Silver sponsors were Wimberly & Lawson Law Firm and Really Killer Systems. This year's Southern Amusement and Entertainment Expo was a huge success thanks to many incredible people that include the Expo committee,

dozens of exhibitors, multiple sponsors and hundreds of attendees.

GAMOA legal counsel and veteran of the industry Les Schneider helped the group honor Jim Siskin of Amusement Sales and Service from Savannah, GA, by presenting Jim with this year's Coin Operator of the Year award. In attendance were Jim's wife Dianne, his business partner Rudy Bairas, and his brother Bob. Jim is a veteran of the COAM industry and has served as a board member of the COAM Advisory Board for the past five years. For decades Jim has been a mentor to many within the COAM industry – always willing to lend a

hand or a kind word of encouragement. We are proud and honored to have such a quality individual as members of GAMOA and a leader in the COAM industry.

I was honored to be able to present this year's Lifetime Achievement Award to a personal mentor of mine and a true genius of the gaming industry – Michael Pace. I have known Michael for more than 30 years, and I can't count the number of times that his advice helped me find solutions. Michael, owner of Pace-O-Matic, has been called the "father of the countertop" for his invention the Little Casino, which helped vitalize

See PACE Page 9

At the Trade Show



Paul Tash photos

THE TRADE SHOW portion of the Southern Amusement and Entertainment Expo in Atlanta Sept. 12-13 was a big hit. Some of the vendors included, from left, Barry Rutherford and Kelly Macke of Primero, Maya Shannon and Ray Salazar of Trestle, and Chad Belter with Fish Game Kings.

COAMs

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about \$8 million over the previous year. In addition, he said, revenue per machine per day reached about \$96 in FY19, and increase of about \$6 over FY18.

Parham said the Georgia market currently has nearly 22,500 machines in over 4,600 locations. The number of enabled licenses at the end of FY19 were:

- Class A Master licenses – 288;
- Class A Location licenses – 2,319;
- Class B Master licenses – 187;
- Class B Location licenses – 4,681;
- Manufacturer licenses – 22;
- Distributor licenses – 2.

He also provided a summation of the current license renewal process, and told attendees that 98 percent of submitted applications and renewals have been processed (as of Sept. 13). Some applications, he said, have unresolved issues with entities such as the Dept. of Revenue or similar. Applicants who log in to the COAM website to check their application progress and see a pre-denial message will know “the ball is in their court” to resolve any issues that may be holding up a final decision, Parham said.

“We don’t want to cut off machines come Oct. 1,” he said.

He also urged master licensees to whom location licensees may direct questions about their application status to ask them, “Have you checked the website?” and go from there to find solutions armed with the information found online.

To increase the number of locations and resulting revenue, Parham told attending master li-



Paul Tash photo

MIKE PARHAM of the GLC’s COAM Division reviews some information for an audience of master licensees during the Southern Amusement and Entertainment Expo Sept. 13 in Atlanta.

licensees to show potential licensees some revenue numbers. “They’ll jump at the chance when they see the possible revenue” from the machines, Parham said.

Further, master licensees were urged to make sure their location licensees have a copy of the COAM Division’s Location License Holder Guide, a set of step-by-step instructions available on the COAM website for location licensees; “a one-stop shop” for any relevant information about the whole process, he said. He also told masters to keep some copies on hand for prospective licensees. The COAM Division is also currently working on an all-encompassing Master License Holder Guide that will be available on the COAM website for download in the near future.

Revenue suggestions

On another note, he encouraged attendees to pitch ideas that could boost revenue to the COAM Division.

“Anything that will help with Hope and Pre-K, she’ll be interested” in hearing about, he said, of GLC CEO Gretchen Corbin.

To maximize licensees’ own revenue, Parham had some advice.

“Look at your game performance, and get those that aren’t doing anything for you out of there,” he said.

“You have to get good games,” he continued, and also urged them to perform regular maintenance on all machines, from keeping the area in the store where they’re kept clean and inviting to making sure all machines are functioning correctly.

“You’ve got to make it a good environment, keep it clean” and respond quickly to any issues, he said, to increase player enjoyment and play.

Stickers stating that COAM play raises money for the state’s Hope and Pre-K education programs have been sent out to licensees to place in a visible spot on their machines, and Parham en-

couraged any licensees who didn’t receive them or who need more stickers to contact the COAM Division. Though Lottery hopes the stickers promote machine play, he reminded licensees that promotion isn’t Lottery’s main purpose.

“Our (GLC) focus is on regulation,” he said. “We’re putting promotion on you guys.”

Finally, Parham highlighted the new tweaks made to the COAM website to make navigation easier, as well as a new Intralot service that sends automatic emails about the status of licensees’ machines. The emails will notify location licensees if any machines have been disconnected and even provide a revenue break-down for the machines.

Parham said GLC is constantly working to improve customer service.

“We can’t emphasize that enough,” he said. “We are always looking for ways to refine the process. Any suggestions are appreciated.”



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Retail Matters

GACS to expand Lunch and Learn programs

More than 40 retailers turned out for the August GACS Lunch and Learn program in Waycross to hear from David Au and Chris Peasley of the Georgia Department of Agriculture.

“We are excited that participation has grown this year,” said Angela Holland, GACS president. “This tells us the program addresses a real need in our retail community for this type of education. Our plan is to expand the program in 2020 with more locations and events.”

Au, state oil chemist and director for the Fuel Laboratory, opened the Waycross program with a discussion of the new US EPD compliance requirements taking effect in 2020. He also shared information about the relaxation in 13 Georgia counties of RVP for summer gasoline. While the information is highly technical, Au covered important impacts for Georgia C-stores.

Peasley, whose division oversees retail food facilities including regulations and inspections, discussed the nature of FDA standardized inspections and what C-stores need to focus on. He identified the three biggest issues inspectors find in C-stores:

- Lack of CFPM, or Certified Food Protection Manager, on site – this is the main violation

inspectors cite. A store will not be shut down if there is no CFPM, but is given sufficient time to remedy the situation before fines are imposed;

- Rodents – stores are inspected and expected to maintain clean environments, and;
- Improper cooling or heating – inspectors measure temperatures to ensure safe practices.

How a C-store is coded, or classified, in the Department’s system can directly impact how that store is inspected and graded. It’s important to review the code if a store’s business changes, such as adding or eliminating food or beverage services categories.

Two more Lunch and Learn programs are scheduled for the remainder of this year, in Jackson Oct. 15 and Columbus on Nov. 12. GACS is planning to schedule 10 Lunch and Learn programs in 2020 across the state, two more than in 2019. New locations will be added, as well, including tenta-



GACS photo

A GOOD CROWD showed up Aug. 13 in Waycross for a Lunch and Learn program sponsored by the Georgia Association of Convenience Stores.

tively Athens, Atlanta, Macon and Rockmart, which will expand the accessibility of the programs to more retailers.

For information about attending or sponsoring a program, contact Sharon Shuford at the GACS office, sshuford@gacs.com.

Pace

from Page 1

an industry that was quickly dying in the 1980s due to the release of the home console game systems. Most notably, Michael built, engineered and programmed the Pot Of Gold – an electronic pull-tab game, which reportedly has sold hundreds of thousands.

Michael Pace is a veteran of the industry, has hundreds of games to his credit and has established himself as a brilliant inventor with a true love for the gaming industry. It was truly my honor to recognize Michael for all his accomplishments and most of all his contributions to the COAM industry here in Georgia. Michael is a Georgia native and continues to provide hundreds of jobs here in Georgia. Congratulations, Michael Pace, for more than four decades of service and successful products in the gaming industry. We will remain eternally grateful for all that you have given.

As the awards portion of the banquet concluded, the room was quickly converted into a lively auction space with bids flying in from every corner.

With a packed room and a lively auctioneer – Jonathan Culverhouse of PB&J Industries, the bidders helped raise a

record amount of money for GAMOA. It’s with a warm heart that the GAMOA Board of Directors thanks all the sponsors and attendees for their generosity! Once the auction was concluded, attendees and exhibitors packed a social event.

On Friday, the Expo’s doors opened at 10 a.m., allowing attendees additional time to visit booths and view hundreds of amazing products. At 12:30 the group was treated to a luncheon and presentation from the Georgia Lottery Corporation. Mike Parham from the GLC provided a detailed presentation that included ideas for Master Licensees to improve their revenue streams through marketing and promotions, establishing best practices, and equipment maintenance.

Much like all the events at this year’s Southern Amusement & Entertainment Expo, an empty seat could not be found during the Georgia Lottery Corporation’s presentation. We greatly appreciate the entire team at the COAM Division of the Georgia Lottery Corporation and the continued collaboration with the industry to generate revenues for state educational programs.

GAMOA’s mission: “To Promote and Serve Georgia’s Coin Operated Amusement and Music Industry.”

Kirby to join GACS

The Georgia Association of Convenience Stores has recently hired Kevin Kirby as its new manager of events and administration.

Kirby has a wealth of industry-related experience. He earned his Institute for Organization Management designation from the U.S. Chamber of Commerce in 2013, and served as director of member services for the Paulding County Chamber of Commerce. Prior to that he spent nearly 20 years as the CFO of a family owned and operated business. He is a lifelong resident of Dallas, GA, and a graduate of Kennesaw State University.



Kevin Kirby

“Kevin will be a great asset to our team,” GACS said in announcing the hiring in August on its website. “He has the nimbleness and skills it takes to work with members, while still orchestrating the details of this role to meet the GACS standard of excellence in meeting programming and administration.”

“It is an honor to join the great team at GACS to help facilitate the education and advocacy for the convenience store industry,” Kirby said. “I’m looking forward to working with all the members to ensure they get the most out of their membership.”

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C-store vendors show out



Jorie Tash photo

A WIDE VARIETY OF VENDORS provide information on products and services they provide to the convenience store industry during the 17th annual Southern Convenience Store and Petroleum

Show Sept. 12 in Athens. The show, sponsored by the Georgia Association of Convenience Stores, featured over 200 booths at the Classic Center in downtown Athens.

Find ‘one thing’ to stand out, presenter says

By Jorie Tash

Georgia Amusement Journal

The Georgia Association of Convenience Stores (GACS) recently hosted its 17th annual Southern Convenience Store and Petroleum Show Sept. 12 in Athens, where convenience store industry veteran Terry McKenna helped fellow c-store owners, managers and employees find ways to maximize their profits and compete with national chains at his featured speaking event.

McKenna, after almost two decades in the c-store marketing business, is principal and co-founder of Employee Performance Strategies (EPS), a consulting company that vows to optimize human capital. He is an expert in developing and implementing tailored solutions to common problems, particularly in the c-store sphere. He also wrote a book, called “Hire the Best C-Store Employees - Interviewing Tactics for Hiring Employees Who Can Actually Make You Money.”

McKenna’s presentation focused on helping c-store owners and managers find ways to differentiate themselves from the ever-growing competition, from locally owned shops to chains with thousands of stores across the country. The most important way, he said, is for store owners and managers to determine “their one thing.”

“What’s our one thing that makes us different, unique and that customers will only associate with us?” he said. With the vast competition, McKenna said c-stores are “a needle in a

haystack without that one thing.”

The “one thing” could be a particular food item or an especially large drink selection, or it could be particularly outstanding service that fosters connections among c-store cashiers and their community.

“Focus on your store,” he said. “Keep one eye on the competition and two on the customer” to best compete with regional brands, who, while often having millions of dollars of marketing cash at their disposal, miss out on the community feel smaller chains and single stores are able to offer.

“Brand familiarity isn’t enough,” he continued. “Give customers a compelling reason to come to your store.”

For those in the audience unaware what that “compelling reason” could be in a world with a c-store on every corner, McKenna gave several examples. C-store cashiers have the rare opportunity to interact with customers from all walks of life every day, and by tapping into the human element, they also have the opportunity to differentiate their stores from others that maintain purely routine checking-out processes.

C-store employees “are the last line of defense for the person who comes into your store every day,” he said. “They need something more than gas or a fountain drink.”

What they need instead, according to McKenna, is that human element, the feeling of

connection and community when going into their favorite c-store at the beginning or end of a hard day.

“Change the lens of how you see your job, and how you see the customer,” he said. “What if our job was to be the bright spot in the customer’s day? What if your store was different for being a little ray of hope? If our ‘one thing’ is that you make customers feel good? That’s more rewarding than your loyalty program.”

McKenna also asserted that this is where smaller chains and local stores have the advantage over “the big guys.”

“It’s hard to implement a new service philosophy in a huge chain,” he said. “We have the advantage there if we have fewer stores.”

From there, he encouraged attendees to find ways to spark conversations with customers to help them feel comfortable and important: kids, the customer’s car, or even their clothes can be easy topics for cashiers to bring up that customers generally enjoy talking about. He also urged them to try and remember regulars, and to make greetings and closings more personal: “See you next time” has more of an impact than a listless “have a nice day,” he said.

“Make it a personal transaction, make eye contact and give a genuine greeting when they come into the store (and) avoid empty niceties” to give the customer a sense of immediate belonging, get a leg up on the competition and gain a new regular who’s chosen your store over all the other options because of the kind cashiers, he concluded.



Terry McKenna



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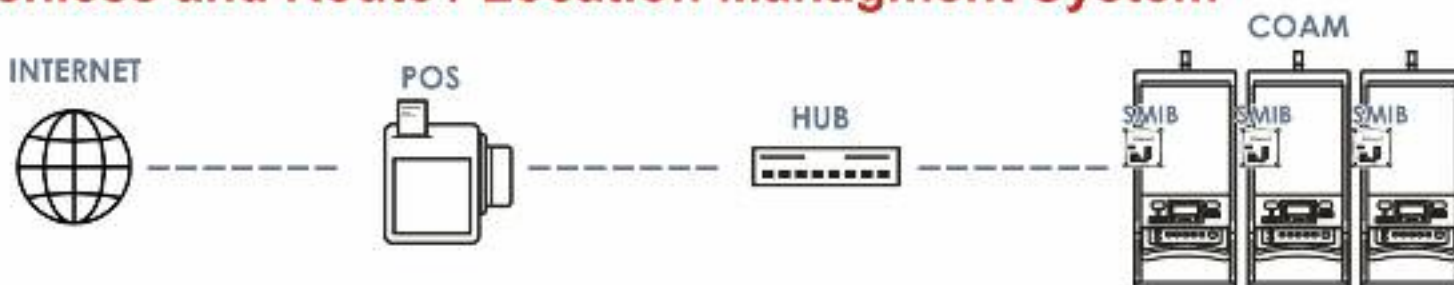


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