



# The Shelby Report of the Southeast salutes Associated Grocers, Inc.



## Grounded in experience, new leadership guides forward-thinking company

"We're just getting started."

That's the message from David Politz, new president and CEO of Baton Rouge, Louisiana-based Associated Grocers Inc., as the company marks its 75th anniversary this year and positions itself for future growth.

"It's a combination of being local experts in our food market and offering a level of service and intimacy with customers that you're just not going to get from anyone else," he said.

The energy and enthusiasm of Politz and AG's executive team have spread throughout the organization, which is being honored as *The Shelby Report* of the Southeast's 2025 Wholesaler of the Year.

Founded in 1950 with 17 members teaming up to lower the cost of goods by buying directly from food manufacturers, AG has grown into a full-service retail operations support and solution center for more than 200 independent retailers in Louisiana, Mississippi, Texas and Arkansas. It boasts more than 670,000 square feet of warehouse space, some 650 employees and annual sales topping \$800 million.

In the past three years, the company has implemented new systems in procurement, category and warehouse management, fleet, and finance and accounting, as well as retail systems.

"Our size has some very distinct advantages to it," Politz said. "We're certainly big enough to secure competitive pricing for our stores, to make sure we've got the right resources in place, but we're small enough as an organization that we all know each other. Our retailers know they can call any and every one of us if they need to."

"And the other advantage, especially on the technology side, is that we're nimble. We don't have layers of bureaucracy and red tape ... we're very minimal, and we've demonstrated that time and again, especially on the technology side."

Politz went on to note how independent grocers mirror that same philosophy.

"That's what we try to do - make it as easy as possible for them to run their business, so they can focus on that. They don't have to worry about pricing or the quality of



David Politz

products. They can lean heavily into their service to customers.

"We're going to get the best quality products that we can get at the best price we can get, which will be very competitive, and we will give retailers as much support as they need, including those just learning the business."

### In South Louisiana, everybody knows

"We've got a bright future ahead of us. Retailers are growing, expanding, reinvesting in their businesses," said Pete Tortorich, VP of retail operations/business development.

Whether with longtime partners or when courting potential new members, AG's strategy is straightforward.

"Our focus is the ease of doing business. It's easy for them to do business with us and for us to make their lives easier every day with all the services we provide," Tortorich said.

The goal is to level the playing field and get independents better deals.

"I think we have one of the strongest teams in place that we've ever had since I've been here. Everybody's in the same boat, going in the same direction, and that's important."

Chad Soprano, Daphne Lamendola and Jim Crifasi, who as members of the AG Board of Directors are part of that team, point to the company's deep roots in the region.

"In South Louisiana, AG is king. Everybody knows who AG is ... there was no question who I was going to go with [when starting out]. It was AG," said Soprano, owner of Soprano's Supermarket in Livonia, Louisiana.



Chad Soprano



Daphne Lamendola



Jim Crifasi

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2025 SOUTHEAST  
WHOLESALE OF THE YEAR



With new leadership team at helm, ‘we have the same goal in mind’

In announcing David Politz’ appointment this spring as president and CEO of Associated Grocers Inc. of Baton Rouge, Louisiana, Daphne Lamendola, who chairs AG’s board of directors, cited his “unwavering dedication, strategic vision and forward-thinking leadership” that will continue to guide the company toward sustained growth and success.

Politz has been with AG since 1985, serving in various leadership roles – most recently as SVP and chief information officer. The company credited his contributions for impacting its growth, noting that he had led the development and implementation of critical systems required to support retail members.

Politz had served as interim president since November, when he succeeded Manard Lagasse Jr., who left the company at the end of 2024 to become EVP and chief operating officer at Topco Associates. Lagasse had been with AGR since 2007, serving as president and CEO since 2019.

“I am honored to be able to continue to serve the independent retailers all along the Gulf Coast with a company that has meant so much to me personally,” Politz said.

“As we celebrate 75 years as a full-service grocery wholesaler, we remain committed to upholding the values that have defined us: integrity, excellence and a singular focus on the long-term success of the independent grocery retailer.

“I look forward to working with the talented team here to expand our reach, enhance our services and continue to innovate for the future to ensure that we remain the preferred wholesale distribution and support center for the independent grocery retailer.”

In addition to Politz, the company has an executive leadership team with about 200 years of combined experience in the grocery industry. After recent promotions and reassignments, that team consists of: Carl Marks, EVP and chief strategy officer; Chris Kennedy, SVP and CFO; Bobby Williams, SVP and COO; Gerry Buckles, SVP and chief sales officer; Pete Tortorich, VP of retail operations; Mike Bove, VP of category management and procurement; William Holtman, VP of wholesale operations; and Stephen Acosta, VP of information services.



Blaine Broussard

Blaine Broussard, the third-generation owner/operator of Nu Nu’s in Maurice, Louisiana, and an AG board member, has been pleased with the transition.

“One hundred percent, it’s a great team; everybody believes in the same thing,” he said.

“I find our board is so unified, and we have the same goal in mind – that’s supporting the team and making sure AG’s future is good. I think we’ve got a great management team at AG.”

Broussard credited Politz with bringing a different outlook to the company, particularly from the technology side.

“David’s a smart guy. I’ve been on the board for three years now, so getting to know him on a personal level is totally different. I think our future is very bright,” he said.

Ernie Matherne, owner of Matherne’s Market in Baton Rouge and the longest serving AG board member at 35 years, agreed with that assessment.

“I’m excited about David’s attitude toward the membership. You know, he gets it. He’s been with AG 40 years. He knows what it takes to be successful ... AG is continuing what it started,” he said.

Daphne Lamendola, owner/operator of Lamendola’s Supermarket in Gonzales, Louisiana, has chaired AG’s board of directors since 2024.

“[David] hasn’t missed a beat. He’s doing some different things. He’s making some different decisions – some really smart decisions – and he’s got that enthusiasm,” she said.

Lamendola, who in 2021 became the first woman elected to AG’s board of directors, noted that Politz has “the love for AG” because he’s been there so long.

“It’s kind of like his baby, his family,” she said. “Every meeting I go through with him, it’s like you would think he’s been doing it forever ... he’s just a natural.”

Lamendola also has been impressed with the leadership team.



Ernie Matherne

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Lamendola, who owns Lamendola’s Supermarket in Gonzales, Louisiana, echoed those sentiments.

“I was raised AG. I believe in AG,” she said. “My grandfather was on the board, so it’s been in my family forever. I just love all the growth. I want to see it go for another 75 years.”

Crifasi is the second-generation owner of Hi Nabor in Baton Rouge, which has been an AG member for 62 years.

“I asked my dad a long time ago what made him decide to go to AG at the very beginning. He said it was the character of the people that worked there. And that’s still true today,” he said.

Politz appreciates the passion of AG’s membership.

“The most successful retailers love being in the business,” he said. “And that’s a unique advantage that we have because of where we are, where we live, and that food is such a part of everything we do. The people that are in the business love being in it.”

He will get no argument from Craig St. Pierre, owner of DeLaune’s Supermarket in St. Amant, Louisiana.

“I’ve got a sign in my store saying we’re a proud member of AG,” St. Pierre said. “In our area, people look for the AG stores because they know we have good service, we have good meat, we have good products, and that’s a testament to what AG carries and what they buy. They’re buying good quality product and offering it to us to sell at a really good price.”

Going ‘above and beyond what others do’

To prospective new members, EVP and Chief Strategy Officer Carl Marks emphasizes AG’s commitment to service beyond competitive pricing.

He recalled how during the initial surge of the COVID-19 pandemic, the company dispatched 70 to 75 employees daily for three to four months to help retailers stock shelves due to increased demand and personnel shortages.

“I don’t think every wholesaler has the capacity or, for that matter, the willingness to do that kind of thing for their retailers,” he said.

Marks believes this level of service sets AG apart and will attract new members.

“Price alone isn’t the sole determinant on what supplier you’re going to go with. You want a supplier that’s going to be a partner with you.”

Politz agrees.

“The presence of our support team, that’s something we do that’s above and beyond what others do,” he said. “We’ve got a lot of people who call on retail – and these aren’t sales calls. They’re from [the retail operations team], giving business advice and counsel

to folks, helping them merchandise, showing them how to make something look better. That really sets us apart.”

AG also offers various value-added services, including retail account managers, department merchandisers and a reset team that will overhaul an entire store or section at no cost.

“We will be involved all along the way,” Politz said. “Anytime one of our retailers is building a new location from the ground up or doing a major remodel, our folks are there every step of the way with them. [AG] is a great organization to build your business on.”

Marks highlighted the “Fresh Start” team, a partnership with AG’s private label broker DeJarnett Sales, which provides 18 to 20 additional personnel assets in the field to help stores merchandise and cut in new items. This initiative also aids manufacturers that often lack their own field personnel.

“We’re making big investments in technology, for the sole purpose of maintaining our efficiency and maximizing our service,” added Marks, referencing the use of robots and automation in the warehouse.

“The goal is not to lose employees or anything. It’s just to optimize what we already do well and make it even better. We’re making investments in technology because we’re making investments in the future and in our capacity to service more retail.”

Politz acknowledged the challenges of running a grocery store, adding that AG is there to help.

“This is a tough business, and we just try to make it as easy as possible for them to run that business,” he said. “We don’t want them to have to worry about all those decisions and all those details. We want them to be like Wettlin Treppendahl (AG member and owner of Treppendahl’s Food Center in Woodville, Mississippi). He’s out on the floor, knowing everybody that comes through that door.”





# Outgoing EVP: From get-go, Associated Grocers has been ‘all about service’

Carl Marks, EVP and chief strategy officer at Associated Grocers, will retire in October, marking the close of 27 years with the company across two distinct tenures.



Carl Marks

Marks initially joined Associated Grocers in 1988, having started his career in the grocery industry “sort of accidentally” at a small wholesaler in Alexandria, Louisiana, followed by a stint at Grocers Supply Co. in Houston. He began in the accounting field.

Homesick for Louisiana and its small-town community life, Marks returned and started at AG under then-CFO Jay Campbell.

“He had me work on all kinds of special projects across the entire enterprise,” said Marks, who steadily took on new responsibilities over the years – from retail systems to becoming SVP of information services and CIO.

“I’m not a guy with a technical background, but I’ve always been a person who understands the business and figures out how to leverage technology to enhance the business mission and goals,” Marks said.

He recalled navigating the company through the Y2K project.

“We felt very good about that, because that wasn’t about technology as much as business continuity. And I felt that was a very important goal for our company and for our retailers.”

In 2005, following open heart surgery, Marks decided to pursue a long-held desire to work in the nonprofit sector. He spent 10 years with the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation, a cause close to his heart as he has lived with Type 1 diabetes for 51 years. This period took him to Florida, where he met many people and successfully raised funds for the cause.

A call from Emile Breaux, then-president of Associated Grocers who Marks had hired while still at the company, eventually drew him back.

“I was one of those guys who said I did my thing in the grocery industry. I don’t think I want to go back there,” Marks said. However, the pull of “the friendships I made here, the relationships I made here, the never-ending challenges to help our retailers succeed – all of that attracted me back.”

“I came to realize that while I was chasing a mission [at JDRF] ... the mission here is very important,” he said,

citing the success of retailers, their teams and consumers in local communities. “I fell in love with our mission all over again.”

Since his return 10 years ago, Marks has taken on various leadership roles, overseeing distribution and transportation, as well as sales and marketing, before moving into his current EVP role assisting CEO David Politz with strategic projects.

“David worked for me many years ago also, in accomplishing some of the strategic projects for our company,” Marks noted.

“I have mixed emotions about retiring in October. But I think for my health, it’s something I need to do. But I’m going to miss it terribly, because this company has a rich history of doing so many ... state-of-the-art and leading-edge things to get better, to engage in continuous improvement and, very importantly, make a difference to our retailers so they can compete effectively in a marketplace.

“Between 27 years committed to this mission, 10 years committed to another mission, I feel like I’ve had a mission-driven life. I feel very fulfilled.”

## Foundation of service

Marks emphasized the company’s core value: service. Asked to help define AG’s core values, he recounted how he and Roesawn Peters, the company’s corporate marketing manager, reviewed 25 years of annual reports.

“We built a word cloud,” he said. “The No. 1 word in that cloud was service. So we formalized it. It stands for various values that we cherish here, but it’s all about service. That’s who we’ve been from the get-go, and that’s how this organization is going to be to the very end.”

“You got to love service. You got to really support your retailers. But we also serve one another as employees, and departments serve one another so that together, as a company, we can accomplish our goals. So we’re all about service.”

Marks lauded Politz’s leadership.

“He is a people person. He cares about the people he works with, the people who work for him and the people for whom he works,” Marks said.

He added that Politz complements this with a “strong intellect” and “technical expertise,” having been involved in every department due to the importance of technology.

“He is not the stereotypical head of IT guy,” Marks said. “The people part, all the soft skills are there as well. And so I think he’s going to be excellent as a leader.”

He added that Politz has a great relationship with the board of directors. “They all know that he has AG’s best interests at heart.”

Marks also noted that while Politz makes the final decisions, he “very much respects the input, the feedback, the ideas, the suggestions from the entire team in formulating a decision. But he’s not into analysis paralysis. He gets all the input, and then we formulate the best decision for the company, and we move forward.”

Associated Grocers also is enhancing its community presence. Marks mentioned the creation of AGives!, the company’s nonprofit, a few years ago.

“Our employees contribute to our nonprofit ... and we have a strong, clearly defined mission that we follow ... and that’s making a difference in the community and getting our organization’s name out there more than it has in the past.”

The company also is undertaking a significant rebranding effort, including a logo overhaul. The focus, Marks said, will be on emphasizing AG’s role in supporting Louisiana’s rich food culture.

“David wants to put more emphasis and focus on that. And I totally concur with him,” Marks said.

Internally, Marks described Associated Grocers as “a community of people. We don’t like office politics; we don’t believe in silos. We like to tear down the walls. We’re all in it together as a team, and we have each other’s back. We often find ourselves in our roles of service to other people who work here, not just to the company’s mission. And I think our retailers respect that.”



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“His vices [vice presidents], they respect him. You can tell they work well together. You can tell that they communicate ... it’s a well-oiled team.”

Craig St. Pierre, owner of DeLaune’s Supermarket in St. Amant, Louisiana, pointed to Politz’s passion for the business.

“I think at AG, it takes a person from the inside to understand the culture, because they kind of spoil us,” he said.

“If somebody came in from the outside and didn’t understand AG’s culture, it would upset a lot of retailers because we’re spoiled by how well they treat us. I just think that starts at the top. He’s the right man for the job.”

Those sentiments are shared by Jay Breaux, general manager of Breaux Mart Supermarkets in Metairie, Louisiana, which has been an AG member for 37 years.

“David worked his way up through the company, and he knows it from the inside out. I think it’s going to be good,” said Breaux, who also sits on AG’s board.

Francis Robin, fourth-generation store owner of Russell’s Food Center in Arnaudville, Louisiana, which has been an AG member for 35 years, is also excited for the company’s future.



Jay Breaux

“David’s taken over the reins of something that has not only been successful, it can go even higher ... I’m sure there’s no corner of AG that he hasn’t walked through. He doesn’t need a roadmap,” Robin said.

Jim Crifasi, owner of Hi Nabor in Baton Rouge, which has been an AG member for 62 years, recalled playing on a recreational softball team with Politz a “long time ago.”

“David compares favorably with his predecessors ... he is a man of integrity, upfront, professional and remarkably grounded. He is a great fit for this position with his many years’ experience working at AG.”

The positive reaction to Politz’s appointment is not limited to Louisiana. Greg Ferrara, president and CEO of the Washington, D.C.-based National Grocers Association, has worked with him for years.

“I’ve known David Politz since my time as a retailer [in New Orleans] and have immense respect for him and am even more proud to call him a friend. He’s dedicated his entire career to AG and has played a major role in the co-op’s ongoing success,” Ferrara said.

“David understands what makes independent, family-owned grocers special – and he’s deeply committed to supporting them. I’m fortunate to have him on the NGA Board of Directors, helping shape the future of our industry.

“He’s also a fellow Paisano with a great appreciation for Italian food, which makes working together even more enjoyable.”



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With ESL, AG helps DeLaune’s Supermarket ‘stay ahead of technology’

Last October, DeLaune’s Supermarket in St. Amant, Louisiana, became the first Associated Grocers member store to install electronic shelf labels (ESLs).

Owner Craig St. Pierre credited AG for helping with the configuration and installation, noting that the labels are “working out great.” He cited price and integrity as the greatest benefits so far.



Craig St. Pierre

“[We wanted] to make sure every item is on file and it’s the right price, so the customer doesn’t get taken advantage of, and we don’t get taken advantage of by our own doing,” he said. “We’re proud of that because we want to be fair to our consumers.

“My main reason for doing this was trying to stay ahead of technology. If my scan lady quits, that’s a tough job to do – to try to get a 20-something-year-old to be that detail oriented.”

St. Pierre acquired DeLaune’s from the previous owner in 2017. Since then, he has completed a total

remodel.

“The store looks nothing like it used to. From the ceiling tiles, light bulbs, PA system, shelving, flooring, decor, AC system, all my registers – everything’s new. There’s not much we didn’t touch,” he said.

And all the work was accomplished through Dart Commercial Services, a subsidiary of Associated Grocers.

“Dart was great ... having that trusted eye with AG, knowing that those guys did the due diligence,” said St. Pierre, adding that Dart also services all his equipment.

It’s a partnership that is important to him.

“We see the same guys; you develop relationships with them. If you have a problem, you know the guy,” he said.

“It’s just good to know that you have somebody you know is local, that you have a personal relationship with, that you can call to get stuff.”

AG also handles DeLaune’s payroll and accounting, as well as its register system.

“That’s what makes AG so great, because if one of my registers goes down on Sunday, I just pick up the phone

and call. Somebody’s coming out – on a Sunday. That service is hard to beat.

“AG is like a one-stop shop for the independent retailer. They have accounting, payroll, register support ... they have specialists who come out. It could be somebody with the meat department; produce is always checking on us.

St. Pierre also is pleased with AG’s warehouse. “A boutique warehouse is the best way I can describe it,” he said.

St. Pierre shared a story about how he was unhappy to learn that a coffee company was giving a special rate to Walmart. He contacted Pete Tortorich, AG’s VP of retail operations, who told him they already had a meeting lined up with the company to discuss that very issue.

“That’s another reason my wholesaler is so important to me – they’re fighting the fight with me and taking that fight up to the next level for me ... when I called, he already knew about it. That’s very important to me as a single-store operator, that my wholesaler is going to bat for me on issues with vendors like this.”

‘We have a family,’ owner of Treppendahl’s Food Center says of supplier

From helping install electronic shelf labels and rooftop solar panels to remodeling the deli, Associated Grocers has been there for Treppendahl’s Food Center in Woodville, Mississippi.



Wettlin Treppendahl

“They’ve been my right arm,” said Wettlin Treppendahl, owner and 37-year AG member.

Years ago, AG even helped secure round-trip plane tickets to Washington, D.C., for Treppendahl and two other residents of the small town of 1,000 eight miles from the Louisiana line so they could lobby on behalf of a local issue.

Treppendahl started in the family business at age 8, counting and cleaning eggs. After graduating from Ole Miss in 1971, he has steered it through various incarnations and is beyond pleased with the direction of AG in 2025.

“Now we have another man that has worked himself up from the bottom,” he said, referring to new President and CEO David Politz. “He is just a prince of a man. I’ve been very fortunate to work with some really fine people [at AG]. It’s more of a family-oriented type warehouse – it’s small enough, but big enough ... they’ve been just wonderful to work with.”

Treppendahl also was quick to praise Carl Marks, AG’s EVP and chief strategy

officer, who will be retiring in October.

“Carl is such a great guy. I can pick up the phone and call Carl at home tonight and say, ‘Carl, I’ve got a problem’. And he’ll say, ‘Well, I can drive over right now. I’ll be there in about an hour and a half.’ That’s what I have at Associated Grocers. That’s what we have. We have a family.”

The way Treppendahl sees it, Associated Grocers is “doing business the right way” – and at all times.

“They’re making sure that we (retailers) make money. They’re making sure that money’s put aside for a rainy day. They’re making sure that it’s done the right way, and they’re not doing anything that we don’t know about. They’ve got an open-door policy. You can walk in and talk to David Politz anytime you want to. There’s nobody you can’t talk to at that warehouse.”

Treppendahl shared how his deli manager had quit on a recent Monday, leaving the store in a lurch. He didn’t hesitate to reach out to AG.

“They said, ‘How about Tuesday? I’ll have two people there with you Tuesday morning to work cakes, reset the deli section and get you looking good.’ And they did. They were here to help.

“They want us to succeed; they don’t want us to fail. The better they do, the better we do ... that’s how they want it done.”

‘A place where there’s not a lot of turnover’

“Associated Grocers has been in business for 75 years. A lot of people who work there have been there for years. It’s a place where there’s not a lot of turnover. You can trust the management.

“They are staying on top of technology. They go to meetings, meet with other independents to make sure that we are on the cutting edge of things.

“I think that’s something; they don’t just sit and get static – they keep moving.

“Fourteen years ago, I didn’t know anything, and AG came and taught me everything ... and I just don’t think you can get that anywhere. They really care, and they want to be the best.”

– Daphne Lamendola, owner/operator, Lamendola’s Supermarket in Gonzales, Louisiana; first woman elected to AG Board of Directors in 2021; chair since in 2024



Daphne Lamendola

‘They just make it so easy’

“AG provides the best service you can find, really taking care of the job and going above and beyond, doing whatever is needed.

“They just make it so easy. When you look at all the departments – from the computer department, walking you through that side of it, helping you with pricing every day, computer glitches, weather problems – they’re right there to help.”

– Blaine Broussard, owner/operator of NuNu’s in Maurice, Louisiana; AG member for 35 years; AG board member



Blaine Broussard



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AGives! builds momentum, fueled by heart and employee passion

When Associated Grocers launched AGives! in 2021, the goal was simple: create a dedicated, employee-driven nonprofit that could focus the company's charitable giving where it matters most – the communities where AG employees live, work and serve.

"It was right after COVID," said Roeshawn Peters, corporate marketing manager and immediate past board president of AGives!. "We decided as a company that we wanted to have a more focalized approach to facilitating funds for Associated Grocers."



A 501(c)3 non-profit affiliate of Associated Grocers, Inc.

AGives! was built from the inside out. A nine-person board – all AG employees from across departments – meets monthly to review donation requests, recommend nonprofit partnerships and lead engagement throughout the company.

"The purpose of AGives! is for us to focus the efforts toward what employees care most about," Peters said. "That could be grassroots initiatives like FO.A.M. – Fathers on a Mission – or organizations like The Life of a Single Mom, which is similar to that organization. But also our mainstays, like United Way and the American Heart Association, who we have a long-standing partnerships with, and St. Jude."

Whether it's baking for a cause or walking in support of heart health, AG employees are the engine behind every campaign. "We have a bake sale around Valentine's Day to raise money for the American Heart Association," Peters said. "We also participate in their annual Heart Walk. You

come out with your family. You enjoy the morning with like-minded people. It's not only something employees get behind – it promotes healthy living at AG, too."

FO.A.M. has become a meaningful new partner. The nonprofit offers financial literacy classes, group support and mentorship programs for dads in the Baton Rouge area, and AGives! is exploring how to bring those conversations to campus.

"We did a demonstration last year to show what that could look like. They came here; they set it up as if they would do it at their campus. We had guys from our distribution center but also in the administrative section that came. They went through what a class would look like. It was open group talk. We had topics going on, and it was an hour-long event. It was really well received," Peters said.

She added that a partnership with the organization is in the initial planning stages.

Through its Pause for Your Cause survey, AGives! offers employees an opportunity to recommend organizations to support.

Incoming board president Monica Walker, who serves as AG's director of risk management, is already thinking about how to build on AGives! momentum. "Our employees spoke, and we heard their hearts," Walker said.

She points to the Pause for Your Cause initiative and gave a personal example of recommending Redstick CARES, a local organization that helps underserved



Monica Walker and Roeshawn Peters

populations access mental, behavioral and social health through human connection. Walker said her grandson is autistic, and the organization offers cooking classes and nutritional education, among other programs. "It was a great fit," she said.

Walker wasn't part of the original AGives! board but had long wanted to be. "I'd always mentioned, 'Hey, if there's ever an opportunity, I'd love to serve,'" she said. "It's just part of who I am ... it's just giving of your time, of your talents and continue to build on that ... it's building those relationships and cultivating how we can better serve them and our employees."

One idea now in early discussion is a community

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# Congratulations Associated Grocers

## 75th Anniversary & AGBR Southeast Wholesaler of the Year



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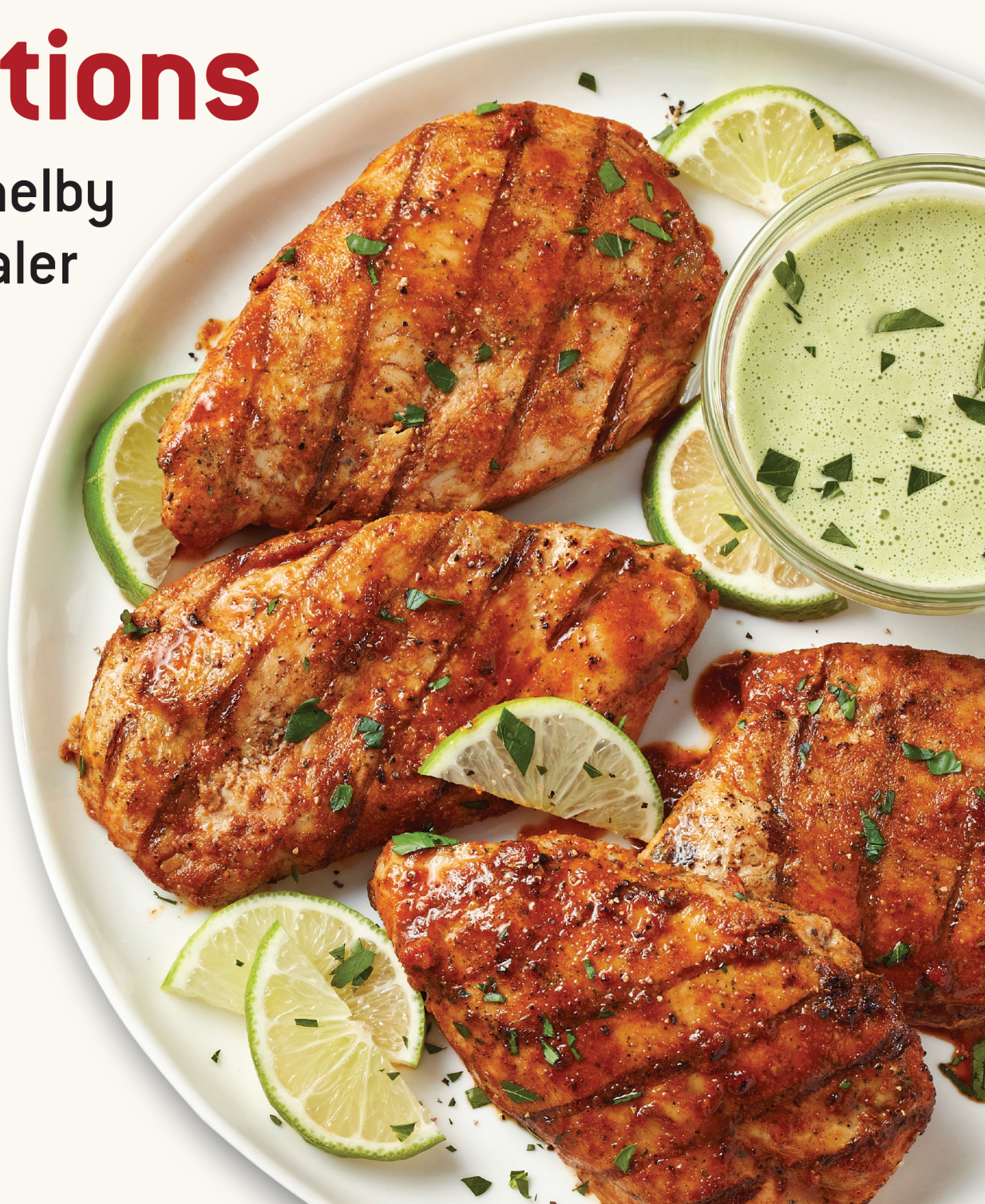


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# 2025 SOUTHEAST WHOLESALER OF THE YEAR

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garden. Walker said there is available space on site. “It’s bringing our employees together, and it fits our mission statement, the nutritional health and well-being of our employees and our community,” she said.

The nonprofit recently launched a new kind of partnership – one that meets customers right in the freezer aisle. In July, AGives! debuted two co-branded snowball flavors through Sno-Balls To Go: strawberry cheesecake and blue raspberry. A small portion of each sale benefits AGives!, and AG is matching the donation.

AG’s biannual food shows conclude with a massive donation to the Greater Baton Rouge Food Bank. “This last show, we donated 57,640 pounds of food – that’s 48,033 meals,” Peters said.

The floral arrangements are all donated to retirement homes and nursing facilities.

Whether it’s food, flowers or time, AGives! continues to show what’s possible when employees are empowered to lead.

“The one thing everyone [on our board] has in common is they have a heart for service,” Peters said. “Everyone on this board enjoys volunteering. It’s all volunteer driven ... that’s the goal of AGives!, to make a difference, make an impact and see immediate change.”

## Team committed to investing in tech, people, relationships

“With our company turning the age of 75, our legacy is built on service, trust and a single focus on our retailers. Strong leadership has played an important role in the past and will remain just as important in the future.

“Leadership today means listening more, adapting faster and staying true to the values that brought us here. There is a delicate balance of preserving tradition, while shaping the future.

“With our new leadership, we are entering a new chapter, one that blends experience with innovation. Our focus will remain on supporting the success of independent retail grocers while adapting to the evolving trends of our industry and the communities we serve.

“The next 75 years will be defined on how successful we are embracing change while honoring our past. Our leadership team is committed to investing in technology, people and relationships to ensure our retailers will have the support needed to compete in their respective markets.”

– Bobby Williams, SVP – Chief Operating Officer



Bobby Williams

## Supportive with every aspect of business

“These years since we’ve changed to Associated Grocers have been great. We have won numerous awards for store excellence. With that being said, we’ve been trying to represent AG as well as AG represents us – in a positive fashion – being that we’re independent, which is very trying in today’s age.

“AG is very supportive – and not only with customer service with every aspect of the business, which makes our job a lot easier.

“[AG is] 250-stores strong and if every [store] does just a little bit, then I think everybody can be successful, keeping this thing going.”

– Francis Robin, fourth-generation store owner of Russell’s Food Center in Arnaudville, Louisiana; AG member for 35 years



## 100% responsible for success

“In South Louisiana, Associated Grocers is king. Everybody knows who AG is ... there was no question who I was going to go with [when I started out]. It was AG.”

“One hundred percent, without AG, I’d have never got started and I would not be successful ... they make it very easy for me to operate.

“We do well with AG as a partner. AG is not going to lie to you. If you look at store locations and it’s not the right location, even though it might cost them some volume, they’ll tell you, don’t do it.

“They are 100 percent responsible for our success ... without them, I don’t have anything. I wouldn’t have known where to start.”

– Chad Soprano, owner, Soprano’s Supermarket in Livonia, Louisiana; AG member for 28 years; AG board member



Chad Soprano

## Grateful for long relationship

Associated Grocers is “pretty much all we know. We feel like it’s a direct partner. My father was on the board of directors since pretty much we started [the business], and I’ve been on the board now two years. We feel like it’s a hand-in-hand partnership.

“We do lead sometimes, and AG takes the lead from us and incorporates it and follows through with it on a larger scale than we can do without them versus us just always following them.”

– Jay Breaux, general manager of Breaux Mart Supermarkets in Metairie, Louisiana; AG member for 37 years; AG board member



Jay Breaux

# NGA leader reflects on his lengthy home-state ties to Associated Grocers



Greg Ferrara is president and CEO of the Washington, D.C.-based National Grocers Association. A Louisiana native and former grocery operator, his relationship with Associated Grocers dates back more than 25 years.

My family joined the Associated Grocers co-op in the late 1990s when I was running our family business with my father. At the time, we needed to switch wholesalers. Up until then, we had always been supplied by “voluntary” wholesalers, so transitioning to a cooperative was a new experience but ultimately one of the best business decisions we ever made. AG’s partnership helped us grow until Hurricane Katrina ended our company’s run after 99 great years.

One of AG’s greatest strengths – then and now – is its people. At the time, AG was led by Jay Campbell, who built and inspired a strong, high-performing team. I vividly remember when Jay, then serving as chairman of the National Grocers Association, sent a letter to all AG

retailers encouraging us to become NGA members. He made the case that independent grocers needed a strong national advocate.

My dad read the letter and said, “Jay is asking us to join NGA, so I think we should.” We joined. Never in a million years did I imagine that I’d have the privilege of leading NGA myself 25 years later.

The grocery business runs deep in my family. My grandfather, Merrill Ferrara, returned from World War II and transformed our corner grocery stores into full-fledged local supermarkets. Along the way, he worked with Hillar Moore Jr., then president of the Louisiana Grocers Co-op in New Orleans. Moore later went on to lead AG in Baton Rouge, where he was eventually succeeded by Jay Campbell. The grocery industry really is a small world.

After Katrina forced me to relocate to Washington, D.C., I found myself homesick for Louisiana. Jay Campbell and Emile Breaux gave me the opportunity to come home, hiring me to join AG as corporate project manager under Steve Miller. It was an extraordinary experience that

gave me visibility into every department of the company.

One of my side responsibilities was emergency preparedness – something that became very real in 2008, when Hurricane Gustav knocked out power at AG for the first time in its history. I helped coordinate AG’s emergency response, which was tested again just one week later when Hurricane Ike hit the western part of AG’s territory.

Those were long, grueling days, but I’ve never been prouder to be part of a team. The way leadership, operations and logistics came together – from Jay Campbell to the dock supervisors – was nothing short of inspiring.

Seventy-five years ago, a group of independent grocers in Baton Rouge came together to form a co-op to gain better pricing and terms from manufacturers – and to compete more effectively with the chains. Today, co-ops like AG remain vital to the strength of Main Street and the resilience of local communities. They allow generations of grocers to continue doing what they do best: serving their neighbors with pride, integrity and a deep sense of place.





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# 2025 SOUTHEAST WHOLESALE OF THE YEAR



## Store visits, personal connections power approach to retail operations

Pete Tortorich, VP of retail operations/business development, celebrated his 30th anniversary with Associated Grocers on June 12, having started as a bakery deli buyer and rising through the ranks along the perishables side of the business.

To Tortorich, the company's strengths are in the service it provides.

"We've got fresh merchandisers in every department - produce, floral, bakery, deli, meat, seafood. On top of that, we have the center store team that does merchandising. They go out and do the resets, or they're out there selling, educating [retailers] on gross profits. If we merchandise this here and this here, you're going to upgrade your gross profit. Don't just put your sale item there, make sure you've got something to bring up the gross.

"And the same applies in perishables ... we're going to go out there and evaluate the older departments from the back door all the way through the front. We're looking at shrink, looking at bad habits, poor conditions and helping bring their game back up. And for the most part, we're very successful at that.

"For each store, we have a person for meat and seafood,



Pete Tortorich

one for bakery and deli, one for floral and produce ... now, if we're doing a reset in a store, we'll pull merchandisers from the other areas. We'll put a team in there."

The merchandisers assigned to each store make frequent visits.

"We have stores listed as A, B, C and D. Volume determines how often we visit - whether that's once a week, once every other week, once a month and so on. And at any given time, if somebody has a problem, we're out there."

Turning to new business development initiatives, Tortorich said AG's reputation for service and value draws interest.

"We're constantly getting calls from people interested in coming to do business with us," he said. "I get the call, first thing I do is turn it over to Bryant Hedrick, our business development director. Bryant will go out there and visit with them, because we evaluate whether the store is large enough for us to do business with.

"If not, we will find them someone to service them. We also service some other wholesalers that can service smaller stores. So, we're ultimately still selling to them, but through another distributor.

"Besides that, we'll go out and visit with competitors' retailers and just say, 'Hey, we're here if you need us.' And

through that, we get some good leads."

Tortorich emphasized AG's biannual food shows. Held each spring and fall (weather permitting, as the fall 2024 show was scrapped due to Hurricane Francine), the shows bring together retailers, vendors and AG staff for a day of food, fun and fellowship.

"The value of the shows is, No. 1, the relationship building - you get to spend more time with the retailer away from the store; No. 2, showing new items, new programs; and No. 3, offer deals, special buy-ins, pallet buys, special offers."

For the vendors, the shows offer exposure.

"[They're] about growing their business. Because it's great for our business to grow, but if we don't partner with certain vendors to grow their business, then they're going to leave us on the sideline and move on somewhere else. It's all about turning their products."

Three decades on with the company, Tortorich's favorite part of the job remains visiting with retailers.

"We spend time just listening to them. 'Hey, what are the challenges? They share the challenges, and I'll say, 'Let me see what we can do to help.' Depending on which area it is, I'll get with the team, and we'll go back out and say, 'OK, here are a couple of ideas to resolve these.'"

## Customer service, communication separate AG from competitors

"I think we've built probably the strongest team we've ever had here at AG."

That's the feeling of Mike Bove, VP of procurement and strategic sourcing. He is well qualified to speak about the strength of the team, his viewpoint shaped by two stints with AG.

He first joined the company in 2005, spent seven years there, left for about eight years and then returned in 2020. He worked for a Midwest wholesaler and a Southeast supermarket operator in the intervening years.

When he returned to AG five years ago, a key goal was formulating a succession plan - "putting a team in place that would really get us into the future and maintain the sustainability of AG," said Bove, who describes his strategic sourcing role as "buying product from different avenues than we normally would look for."

Thanks to the focus on succession, today the AG team features more young people and has a mix of those with



Mike Bove

retail and wholesale experience.

Bove estimates about 70 percent of the AG team has retail experience, which helps strengthen the relationship between AG and its retailer members. "It's important to understand what they go through on a daily basis."

In his role, the reality is that he has "over 200 bosses" - AG's member retailers. "It's hard to meet their expectations on a daily basis, but that's what our challenge is, and that's why we come to work every day," he said.

Bove primarily works on the fresh side of the business. In 2025, building the meat department and putting a succession plan in place for its leadership are among the company's priorities.

### 'Perfect leader'

Bove has known President and CEO David Politz since 2005, calling him "the perfect person for the job."

"David built the infrastructure of the entire IS/IT team," Bove said. "I've seen various warehouses around the country and various retail operators, and what really

sets us apart from a lot of the operations out there is our IT support and our programs and our systems we have in place. We're amazingly efficient."

Under Politz's leadership, AG is looking at new ways to attract retail members. Though the company's name is not seen on stores, Politz believes in letting the public know AG's role in the grocery supply chain and building goodwill.

"We support the people that operate the store, so we're kind of behind the scenes, but I think [Politz's] goal is to be a little bit more prominent out there, let people know we're here," Bove said.

### Above and beyond expectations

If a grocery retailer has been a member of AG since they started in business, top-notch customer service is an expectation, Bove said.

Those considering becoming a member may be pleasantly surprised at the level of support they receive. They not only get groceries, but they get guidance as well.

"Where we differ from a lot of our competitors - even some of the major competitors out there will tell you - is the service end of our business. We guide everybody through various processes and challenges that they may face," Bove said. "It could be as simple as a credit. It could be complications understanding the P&L. It could be complications in shrink management, merchandising.

"When you grow up in the retail business, you take for granted that everybody who's in the retail business understands every facet of the industry, and they don't," Bove continued. "A lot of young people out there have never been in this before and are faced with challenges that may be simple to me, but it's enough to tear somebody apart at store level."

On that same note, thinking up programs for retailers is great, but the program must be able to be carried out in the aisles. AG's team of fresh category merchandisers are out in the field to help retailers, and they also can call its offices at any time.

"They have a direct line of communication to us," Bove said. "These are things that really separate us from our competitors out there."

## 'Our partners in progress for 62 years'

"Associated Grocers has been wonderful. We call them our partners in progress for 62 years.

"We had a flood in 2016, a terrible flood. Our Winbourne Avenue location had never had water anywhere near it, and we had four feet of water in the store all the way front to back, and we didn't know where to start. But AG came in and they pulled up their sleeves, just like the rest of us, and got to work. We had it cleaned out and opened up in one month's time.

"We opened so quickly that the neighborhood wasn't even back because they were all flooded, too.

"Their technology is second to none as far as ordering, and they put us onto AppCard, which is our customer loyalty program ... they're just the best.

"Of course, it's all I've ever known, because we've been with them forever, and we've never had any complaints. There's no sense in looking for somebody else when you know you've got the best.

"I asked my dad a long time ago what made him decide to go to AG at the very beginning. And he said it was the character of the people that worked there. And it's still true today."

- Jim Crifasi, owner of Hi Nabor in Baton Rouge, Louisiana; AG member for 62 years; AG board member



Jim Crifasi



## Dart Commercial Services – ‘We’re the only distributor that has what we do’

As a subsidiary of Associated Grocers, Dart Commercial Services helps support the independent retailers served by the wholesaler. From store design to refrigeration equipment procurement and installation, Dart provides turnkey solutions to ensure retailers stay competitive, efficient and cost-effective.

“We’re the store development group for AG of Baton Rouge,” said Kevin Landry, general manager of Dart. “AG purchased a small refrigeration company to help our retailers verify that they’re getting the best deal possible ... then at some point, they separated Dart ... and moved store development within Dart.”



Kevin Landry

While Dart has become its own entity, its core mission remains focused on retailer success.

“We became a separate company, still providing the same services for all our retailers – to design the stores, find the best deal on equipment, verify what type of equipment goes in the store,” said Landry, adding the staff all come from mechanical backgrounds.

“We actually install it and service it. So we’re a full-blown, turnkey subsidiary to help our retailers build a store, remodel a store, upgrade a store and to be as cost effective as possible on the mechanical side.”

### Competitive edge among wholesalers

Landry noted that Dart’s capabilities set AG apart from other wholesalers.

“We’re the only distributor that has what we do, which we feel is a big advantage,” he said. “Most distributors, when the store owner wants to build a new store, remodel or replace equipment, then they go after contractors, subcontractors, procure equipment and whatnot. We do it all in-house.

“We deal straight with manufacturers, which cuts out a middleman ... the fact that we’re able to install, service it, maintain it and everything above that is a big plus.”

### Deep industry expertise, partnership

Dart’s team brings mechanical expertise and market insight to every project. The company manages 140-180 active projects at any given time, ranging in scale.

“In any given year, we’re doing two ground-up stores and probably three to four remodels,” Landry said. “It takes a while to get from start to finish – two- to three-year projects. So in between all that, we’re doing a lot of small projects.”

Dart also occasionally performs non-AG work to maintain volume and keep pricing competitive for its core retailers.

### Leadership, trust, unity

Commenting on the leadership changes at AG, Landry said he was very supportive of the appointment of David Politz as CEO.

“I love the fact that David Politz has been here a long time. He’s been in probably every role with AG. My personal thought is he was a perfect fit to take [it] on,” Landry said. “David’s very even keeled ... he allows us to do what we need to do as long as we can justify it. He trusts us in what we do.”

That leadership extends to a strengthened executive team.

“Just in the last year, the few changes we made in the vice presidents and leadership over here ... we have, in my opinion, the best team we’ve ever had,” Landry said.

“Everyone is on the same page ... it’s as strong as it can be within a company.”

### Local strength amid industry change

Landry noted that market pressures, including labor challenges and wholesaler competition, underscore the importance of AG’s community-first approach.

“We pride ourselves on being local, being a service for our retailers. We’re not as much about making money as we are about whatever we can do to help our retailers,” he said. “If we do it right, we’ll do it profitably ... our retailers trust us.”

That trust has paid dividends.

“We haven’t really had to pursue or go after new work,” he said of Dart and AG. “It actually comes our way because of our relationships and the trust that retailers have in us.”

### Facing regulatory, technical challenges

The refrigeration and HVAC landscape is changing rapidly due to federal regulations and shifting technologies. Dart is committed to staying ahead of these developments.

“Refrigerants, because of the EPA rules, the ozone depletion, global warming ... it’s hard to compare it with anything. Pricing has become volatile,” Landry said. “A lot of refrigerants we’ve been using for 20 and 30 years are going away.

“We’re having to adapt to the new refrigerants while trying to keep prices down ... we’re trying to find the best way we can do it to keep it affordable for our retailers.”

New refrigerants such as propane are flammable and bring new safety protocols. “There’s so many different

things, and every month the rules change again, so it’s hard to keep up with.”

He noted that one of the biggest expenses in a super-market is refrigerants. To address these issues, Dart remains flexible in sourcing equipment by getting price quotes from different manufacturers.

“We’re able to go after all of them to make them compete with each other,” Landry said. “We may have a meat department with Hillphoenix, frozen food with Hussmann, dairy with Zero Zone ... it’s all good equipment. Each has their strength and their weakness.”

The company also is adapting to new technologies in HVAC, including variable refrigerant flow (VRF), which makes systems more efficient.

“There’s a lot more electronics, a lot more control part of it to make it cost effective,” he said. “It’s a lot more expensive, and it’s somewhat less mechanical and more computerized now. That’s the going theme now on refrigeration and HVAC.”

### Looking forward

With strong leadership and a passion for service, Landry believes AG and Dart are more resilient than ever.

“It seems like the worst it’s getting out in the world, the better AG’s becoming,” he said. “We’re there for our retailers, we’re there for the local community, and we’re as strong as we’ve ever been with that part of it.”

As AG looks to raise its profile, Landry believes the company’s values will continue to set it apart.

“Service is everything. Personal service is everything,” he said. “If you do right by your customer, everything else works itself out.”



## Continuity key to being successful

“Without Associated Grocers, we would not be where we are at today. They have contributed to almost all the successes that Matherne’s has had over the years, going back to Hillar Moore when he was president, to Jay Campbell to Emile Breaux to Manard Lagasse and now David Politz. One thing AG has had is continuity, and that’s the reason we’re successful. I give them full credit.

“It’s a combination of programs helping you understand the business, having the knowledge and the wherewithal to guide you, especially when we were young at our first store ... to learn it all. AG was very instrumental in teaching us.

“It’s been such an honor to serve on a board as many years as I have and to be a part of the success to grow a company from where they were to now.

“In Baton Rouge and the surrounding areas, we’re top dog. AG is one of the largest employers in all East Baton Rouge Parish and the city of Baton Rouge.”

– Ernie Matherne, owner of Matherne’s Market, Baton Rouge, Louisiana; AG member for 41 years; longest serving AG board member (35 years)



Ernie Matherne



2025 SOUTHEAST  
WHOLESALE OF THE YEAR



Warehouse automation benefits employees as well as member retailers

William Holtman, VP of wholesale operations for Associated Grocers, oversees “everything in the box – coming in, going out.”

A 27-year company veteran, Holtman said AG began to realize the need to automate its warehouse when the COVID-19 pandemic began to severely impact its workforce five years ago.



William Holtman

“We realized we can’t continue on a conventional path; we have to add automation,” he said. “We have to add more intelligence with robotics ... to relieve some of those pressures that required our human resources.”

The company wisely waded into automation, starting in the repack and slow-moving grocery areas in the warehouse. Once outbound product is selected, a robot puts it in totes that are picked up by a palletizing arm – no human interaction required.

That means the warehouse staff have less wear and tear on their bodies, and some everyday frustrations are lessened because there is more order and efficiency, according to Holtman.

“Our employees reap those benefits,” he said.

While some believe automation takes away human jobs, Holtman says that’s not the case in the AG warehouse.

“It’s replacing those employees that weren’t even working here – those that we struggled to bring in and to retain,” Holtman said. “We want to continue to expand on our core group [of warehouse team members] and be able to position ourselves to take on more business and do it

more efficiently.”

Automation also allows AG to better track its inventory and cuts down on product damage. For AG’s retailer members, that means improved service levels.

And that’s what it’s all about for AG. The co-op strives to set itself apart through “attention to our customers,” Holtman said. “That means listening to their requests and trying to fill those requests, looking out for our customers. That’s first and foremost.

To meet retailers’ needs, AG is in the process of adding freezer space and expanding cooler space to accommodate all dairy and meat products. AG was able to free up warehouse space in recent months thanks to a cross-dock program with Bunzl.

AG sends orders to Bunzl, which puts together a pallet for individual stores. The pallets are shipped to AG and added to the store-bound truck. Partnering with Bunzl freed up about 400 slots – or two aisles – in the warehouse, making room for other items.

The use of automation will only increase in AG’s future warehouse.

“Over these next five, seven years, [technology will] continue to allow us to improve, reduce costs and still handle current volumes and hopefully volume growth,” Holtman said. “That’s the biggest thing for our members, right? The bottom-line dollars that go back to our members are very important.”

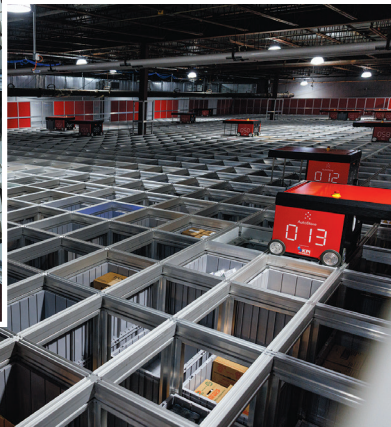
The change in top leadership at AG, with David Politz taking over as president and CEO in May, has been smooth, he added.

Having most recently served as senior VP and chief information officer during his 40-year tenure at the company, Politz has a solid understanding of the technologies and nuances of distribution, Holtman said.

“He has a very good knowledge of those things. That’s one of the pluses internally, which ultimately will translate to positives for our customers,” he said.

The future is bright at AG, thanks to the strong foundation built over the past 75 years, he concluded.

“We’ve got a great set of retailers; we’ve got a great team here.”



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2025 SOUTHEAST  
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Information services department, new VP draw on CEO’s tech background

Automating a warehouse is a tall order, with lots of moving pieces that must work in concert to achieve success.

Associated Grocers has introduced two flagship pieces of software in recent months to coordinate its AutoStore warehouse automation system with its Korber (now known as Infios) warehouse management system.

Korber came first, while current President and CEO David Politz was still in the information services department. But in May he was installed as the company’s top leader, and Stephen Acosta, VP of information services, took over, overseeing the teams that were responsible for coding the software.

AutoStore came on the heels of the Korber project, and Acosta was able to step in and see that project to completion as well.

“But that’s not all that this department is responsible for,” Acosta said. “We service many different business departments, so I definitely had a lot of respect for what David did.”

He went on to note that he believes in the “baptism by fire” approach.

“You’re going to learn the most that way,” said Acosta, adding that Politz continues to be a mentor for him. They have a weekly one-on-one meeting where Acosta is able to bring questions to Politz that have arisen during the previous week.

“I have a great support system. While it has been definitely an eye-opening experience, I felt mostly prepared

for it ... and I’m growing in this role daily.”

AG has two main software teams: applications development (AppsDev) and ERP. Acosta said AppsDev does custom software development for both the distribution center and for retail, while ERP handles systems integration between legacy systems and enterprise solutions.

“The pillars of our organization are service, and that first test is support,” Acosta said. “I take that very seriously, and I try to instill that in my software teams. We are here to help. We are here to support.”

Any time an AG business unit needs IT or IS help, “we are quick to answer,” he added. “We don’t have a lot of red tape in between us and the business units. We want to solve your issue quickly ... we always try to be as fast and respond as quickly as possible and provide that world-class support.”

Acosta, who has worked for grocery-related companies for 33 years, joined AG in May 2021. At his first interview, he immediately knew he wanted to join.

“I just knew I wanted to be a part of this company, and it has not disappointed at all,” he said.

He appreciates how many long-tenured team members AG has. However, the flipside of those long tenures are the accompanying retirements. But AG has been focusing on training and infusing new talent into the leadership team.

Politz has been a mentor to Acosta from the start of his tenure at AG. Acosta described him as a “logical thinker who’s got a good way of putting things that are easy to understand. I have always enjoyed his leadership and

what he brings.”

Acosta was hired as a manager and studied under Politz. As higher roles opened up in the IT department, Acosta was able to ascend and achieve his ultimate goal – to lead the company’s IT/IS efforts. With his tech background, Politz is quick to understand software issues.

“Typically, your CEO might not necessarily come from IS or IT, but I think that’s a benefit, considering where this company is going and what we’re trying to do, like with AutoStore and upgrading,” Acosta said. “We’re in the middle of upgrading so much software right now, and David is aware of all of that and able to understand the need for that and what it entails.”

Acosta also appreciates that the company is focused on “providing world-class support to our stores but also budgeting and planning,” he said. “We have had very collaborative meetings with other VPs centered around profitability.



Stephen Acosta



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The Colavita logo, featuring the brand name in a stylized, serif font.

A bottle of Colavita Extra Virgin Olive Oil. The label includes the brand name, a picture of an olive tree, and text indicating it is 'EXTRA VIRGIN OLIVE OIL', 'FIRST COLD PRESSED', and 'PREMIUM ITALIAN'.

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2025 SOUTHEAST  
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‘Different than other wholesalers,’ marketing takes variety of forms

Associated Grocers’ complement of services for its retailer members includes marketing support in its various – and ever-evolving – forms.

AG’s marketing efforts are directed by 27-year company veteran Carrie Stanley, senior director of advertising and marketing. Leading both the Creative and Digital Services teams, she is responsible for the overall vision and direction of AG’s marketing initiatives.

Managers of retail marketing and corporate marketing are part of Stanley’s team, as is a director of retail pricing and promotions.

Weekly promotional efforts still include sales circulars, as member retailers find it important to have an ad to distribute in-store. Mailed circulars are less prominent today, a decline that accelerated during the COVID-19 pandemic. Some of that information has migrated over to social media channels.

Above and beyond social media outreach and the traditional weekly ad, AG offers additional promotions that retailers can implement if they so choose. The wholesaler also collaborates with retailers on specific marketing projects as they come up, such as one-day sales or anniversary events.

“We’ll help them push that activity forward and give them some ideas and strategies behind that,” she said.

AG is “uniquely different than other wholesalers,” Stanley added, noting that many of these services are provided to member retailers at no charge; they’re simply part of the AG program.



As it benefits both AG and the retailer when sales promotions and special events are properly promoted, AG will provide the digital assets for them to use on their social media platforms.

“It’s not something they’re having to think about or create; we make it easy for them to just take the tools and utilize them,” said Stanley, whose career at AG has included alternating stints in advertising, category management and marketing.

Some stores also enlist AG to do social media management, and Stanley said the company imparts local flavor to the content.

“It’s not just curated content that we’re developing; we’re trying to help them tell a story at their store and empower them to be a part of that, too. “We realize that they’re not necessarily the digital experts,” she continued. “They’re running a grocery store; this is not what they focus on every day. We’re helping them with better ways to utilize those platforms. Or if they want to just hand it off to us, we’re here.”

AG’s social media specialist, Alex Whitten, “does a great job with our retailers, helping them plan their social media activity but also being able to, on the fly, make changes when things happen.”

The marketing department also stands ready to help if a retailer is looking for ways to boost sales.

“We’ll come in as a group and brainstorm different ideas and give them our feedback and recommendations and help them with whatever they decide on. It could be creative or branding, in-store materials that they might need, point of sale ... we are able to do that for them,”

Stanley said. “I don’t think anyone else provides the level of customer service we do.”

Retail media networks – advertising platforms owned or operated by retailers that brands can advertise on – is a topic that is evolving all the time, Stanley said. Because brands are looking for the widest possible reach for their message, AG likely will find the most success in RMN by partnering with its fellow Retailer Owned Food Distributors & Associates (ROFDA) members, Stanley said.

“It takes a huge network to be able to get the attention of the CPG companies and to activate content on their platforms. So as a ROFDA group, we’re trying to determine some initiatives to all focus on together to give our retailers opportunities that wouldn’t be there otherwise.”

AG’s retailer members increasingly are offering programs found at larger retailers. Stanley said that nearly 50 percent of AG’s retail volume is now on a loyalty platform, “and more is coming. That’s impressive for a vendor.”

Technology is such a complex topic for grocers that AG expanded its spring food show by a day with a Tech Expo. AG’s director of retail strategy, Scott Anderson, recognized that members need time to focus on these initiatives outside the hustle and bustle of the food show, and tech companies responded.

Companies representing e-commerce, loyalty programs, electronic shelf labels, POS systems and more met with retailers the day before the food show.

“It was a well-attended event, and I think it’s a

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2025 SOUTHEAST  
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Creative, digital services team helping independents embrace future

In an era where digital transformation is paramount, Associated Grocers stands out as a beacon of innovation, largely thanks to its forward-thinking creative and digital services team led by director Krystal Gomez.

Gomez has spent two decades at AG, evolving from a fresh college graduate to teaching new software to a driving force behind the wholesaler's digital and in-store marketing initiatives.



Krystal Gomez

Gomez's journey at AG began in 2005 as a graphic designer, arriving just as the company transitioned to Adobe software.

"I had just graduated from college in May, so I became the resident teacher of the new software," Gomez said.

Within months, she became the go-to expert for the team. And today, she

oversees a creative operation that spans weekly ads, digital marketing, social media, e-commerce, signage and full-scale store design.

The evolution of retail marketing has been swift, and Gomez has been at the forefront of guiding AG's independent retailers through these changes. From faxing proofs to sharing drive links for files, and from traditional print ads to sophisticated digital campaigns, she has witnessed and spearheaded significant shifts.

"We have a lot of retailers now who have transitioned from print to digital only, and that's going well for them," Gomez said. "Distribution has ... just evolved completely over 20 years."

Embracing new frontier

Through new initiatives with Ideal Design House, Instacart and "all these Retail Media Network pieces," Gomez and her team are working to give retailers new

ways to connect with their communities.

"That's pretty much what we're focusing on, and pushing that content to those areas. That way, they can reach more people digitally than just posting on Facebook, posting on Instagram and boosting posts and whatnot," she said.

They also are emphasizing the importance of partnerships. "We're trying to compete with ... all the big guys, and you can't compete with [them] as much if you don't have a big system to say you have eyeballs," said Gomez, highlighting the importance of aggregating data to attract major partners.

A key challenge is convincing retailers to embrace new digital strategies and transition from print to digital.

"They're afraid of losing the audience that has been their bread and butter for years," she said. "What we're seeing a lot is the retailers are transitioning things to their kids, if they want to be involved. And that's helping them to see the vision of the future."

"They do tend to be hesitant, but then we have some that just dive headfirst ... and the feedback we're getting is they don't see a drastic drop; they see more of a lift."

That data helps get other retailers on board. "Those stories help push along the other ones," Gomez said.

Holistic approach

The creative services team at AG includes a diverse group of designers as well as production coordination, social media and digital marketing.

"While our graphics team can handle all of the nice, pretty artwork, we still need those people that are knowledgeable in social media to help grow that area," Gomez said. "We're evolving, and more retailers want to have their digital marketing aspects specialized."

The team is always looking to expand its digital expertise to meet growing retailer demands across diverse geographic areas. Gomez noted they have retailers in larger cities such as New Orleans and in smaller towns across the region. Location is considered in determining "how we try to go to market for them."

Beyond digital and print marketing, AG offers comprehensive store design and decor services.

"We go into the stores. We do measurements. If it's ground-up, we talk to the architects, the contractors. We look at the plans, and we actually design a store, perimeter and interior part," Gomez said. "We help them with making it nice and beautiful and come to life."

The team also helps with remodels. Each design is customized down to the smallest detail.

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testament to the retailers understanding that these are important decisions they must make for their business to thrive for the future. They were willing to come and spend a little time there," Stanley said.

AG went a step further and offered retailers a checklist to make sure they are RMN-ready. Asked how she would describe David Politz's installation as the top executive at AG, Stanley said the process has been "smooth."

"It's just been a natural transition," she said. "He's been here for so long, and our team is just naturally leaning into his vision, taking direction from him in terms of changes that he might want to make as we move forward."

One of the changes is a rebranding initiative that should roll out in coming months. Carrying a calm and open demeanor, Politz challenges his team to ask questions about how things are done and if they can be improved.

"That's part of what David's direction has been - let's not think traditional," Stanley said. "What other opportunities are out there that we've maybe not been positioned to handle in the past, but now we are? That may be because of what we can do out of our warehouse, or the teams we have in place that bring experience to those areas. I think we're in a great spot right now."

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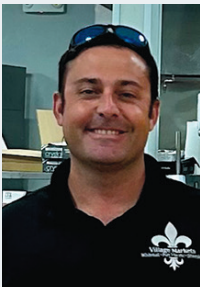
Provide 'unmatched' support

"The support and partnership [Associated Grocers] gives us is unmatched."

"Just talking through the construction process - moving, shelving, resetting - there's no way we could have completed any of that without the support they gave. That was probably several weeks to a month, full time, 10 people a day moving product, shelving."

"It's really the whole process - a store addition, a store renovation, the customer support they give us daily ... We can call the warehouse at any time."

- Dillon Murphy, co-owner of Port Vincent Village Market in Port Vincent, Louisiana



Dillon Murphy

'Just couldn't be happier'

"If you need something, you pick up the phone and [Associated Grocers] is going to answer. They're going to do their best to get you product, take care of a problem, whatever it is."

"AG has gone above and beyond the call of duty to try to keep us in business, keep us taking care of our customers. We just couldn't be happier with the service levels."

"AG communicated everything to us during [COVID-19] to make sure that we knew product was on the way and I could communicate to our customers. Ultimately, it's about them. We've got to be able to do whatever it takes to have product on the shelf, get them what they need."

- Jonathan Sumich, owner of Greenwell Springs, Louisiana-based Oak Point Fresh Market; AG member for 35 years



Jonathan Sumich