



## Shelby Publishing's salute to 'backbone of our industry'

On the following pages, Shelby Publishing is proud to present its fourth annual Exceptional Independents Awards. Nominations were open to independent retailers, wholesalers and technology and other service providers.

"Independents are the backbone of our industry, and this awards program is an opportunity to recognize them for their contributions," said Stephanie Reid, Shelby president and COO.

"Independents are a vital part of their communities and lead the way in caring for their customers. Our Exceptional Independents Awards shine a light on these businesses that continue to help feed our communities."

Coverage of the award winners will appear by region in the March editions of *The Shelby Report of the Midwest*, *The Shelby Report of the Southeast*, *The Shelby Report of the Southwest*, *The Shelby Report of the West* and *The Griffin Report of the Northeast*. Awards winners also will be featured on [theshelbyreport.com](http://theshelbyreport.com).

### A Clean Plate Local & Organic Grocery

A Clean Plate Local & Organic Grocery was founded in 2012 by Wayne and Julie Isaacson. Wayne Isaacson, who was working at a conventional grocery store at the time, saw an opportunity to open a new store focused on healthy food choices in his own community of Menahga, Minnesota.

A Clean Plate believes that rural Americans deserve access to healthy natural foods, especially when so many of these areas are dominated by big-box chains with poor food access.

A Clean Plate is proud to offer healthy food at affordable prices, including products from local farmers and producers, organic produce and national organic brands. The community has begun to transform with A Clean Plate's help, as it has steadily seen foot traffic rise and local interest pique.

A Clean Plate also prides itself in being an education center for the community. Whether it be through quick conversations at the register, impactful customer service, programming such as yoga classes or donations to local organizations, A Clean Plate is embedded in the fabric of its community. The store serves as a beacon of quality, attracting customers from over an hour away, a testament to its impact.

Being a small, independent grocer is no small feat, and A Clean Plate encountered many bumps in the road. But Wayne Isaacson attributes their success to the tenacity it takes to persevere.

In 2018, A Clean Plate joined the Independent Natural Food Retailers Association and has seen its sales grow by nearly 180 percent. A Clean Plate's success under INFRA is a testament to its commitment to delivering value to the community, as it has strengthened its promotions program and has capitalized on leveraging INFRA's collective purchasing power to deliver value to shoppers.

The Isaacsons are active leaders in the larger natural food movement. They often

share their knowledge at industry and peer events. Wayne Isaacson recently joined the INFRA Board of Directors to strengthen the organization's collective purchasing power and amplify the voice of independent natural food retailers in the industry.



### B&R Stores

B&R Foods in Lincoln, Nebraska, deserves Exceptional Independents recognition for its strategic utilization of technology to enhance the overall shopper journey.

The team at B&R Foods has effectively modernized operations, using a powerful loyalty engine to bridge the gap between traditional service and digital innovation.

The team's approach centers on using technology not just for efficiency, but as a primary driver for building lasting relationships with shoppers.

## Baesler's Market

Baesler's Market was nominated for the Exceptional Independent Award for its dedication to people, progress and community. For more than 130 years, this family-run, two-store operation in Terra Haute and Sullivan, Indiana, has been a trusted name in grocery.

Under the leadership of fourth-generation owner Bob Baesler, Baesler's Market continues to blend tradition with innovation, proving that heritage and forward-thinking can thrive together.

Baesler's commitment to technology aims to make life better for employees and customers. From accelerating onboarding and simplifying coupon clipping with ECRS' Connect+Save, to harnessing CATAPULT Cognition for rapid, data-driven decisions, Baesler's has embraced tools that create efficiency without losing the personal touch.

Fresh departments shine with AutoScale Max, streamlining weighing and labeling for a faster checkout experience – and with self-service checkouts planned for 2026, convenience and customer satisfaction remain a priority.

But what truly sets Baesler's apart is its heart for the community. The company supports local charities through donation drives and events such as Salvation Army Red Kettle matches and Miracle on 7th Street fundraisers, often matching customer

contributions to amplify impact.

From food drives for veterans and health programs to disaster relief partnerships, Baesler's stores have become hubs of generosity, especially during the holidays, ensuring that neighbors in need never stand alone.

Baesler's Market is more than a grocery store; it's a pillar of service, innovation and care. The company's legacy of giving and commitment to progress makes it the gold standard for independent grocers.



## Coborn's Inc.

In May 2025, Emily Coborn Wright was promoted to president of St. Cloud, Minnesota-based Coborn's Inc.

Coborn Wright brings a deep and personal commitment to the company's mission and values, along with a proven track record of operational excellence, innovation and strategic leadership.

Throughout her career, she has served in a variety of key roles, including communications manager; director of Topco programs; district manager; VP of fresh merchandising; VP of operations; and SVP of growth initiatives.

Each of these roles has prepared her for this new chapter. Her promotion reflects the company's confidence in her leadership, strategic vision and understanding of who it is as an organization.

Coborn Wright has literally grown up in this business and, over the years, has worked in many areas of the company to gain a deep and well-rounded understanding of its operations. Her passion, commitment and leadership have been evident in every step of her career.

Since becoming president, she has shown outstanding leadership in defining the company's three-year strategic plan focused on differentiation, competitive strategy, people development, remodels, new market growth and operational excellence as an independent grocer. She has

led with purpose, professionalism and resolve, making tough decisions that align the company for future success.

Her maturity, conviction and business acumen are exceptional. She leads with heart and intellect, sets clear expectations and inspires through visibility and vision. Her broad experience across the organization grounds her leadership in a deep understanding of the business and the competitive landscape.

Beyond the company, she serves on the National Grocers Association's board of directors and advocates for community efforts as president of the Coborn Family Foundation, supporting numerous local organizations across the markets it serves. She is committed to developing people and positioning teams for long-term growth and success.



Emily Coborn Wright



## Cosentino's Food Stores

Cosentino's has introduced a number of enhancements behind the scenes and throughout its shopping experience.

The renovations includes new refrigeration and frozen cases in key departments, refreshed and maintained lighting for a brighter environment and rebranded displays.

Shoppers will also find a significant number of lower prices and more than 1,000 new items – offering trusted brands and fresh options tailored to the neighborhoods the company's stores serve.

Through a full, fresh and clean environment, Cosentino's employees take pride in being not only part of daily operations but the growth and success of the company. With ongoing training in a classroom setting to hands-on learning in its manager-in-training program, Cosentino's continues to invest in the future of the company and leaders.



Family owned and operated for 77 years, Cosentino's Food Stores has been proudly serving its hometown of Kansas City with trusted service, hometown values and a commitment to local communities.

The company operates 32 stores under the banners of Price Chopper, Apple Market, Sun Fresh and Cosentino's Market.





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## Daily Deals Food Outlet

Michigan-based Daily Deals Food Outlet believes grocery retail is more than a transaction; it is a community anchor and source to save on groceries.

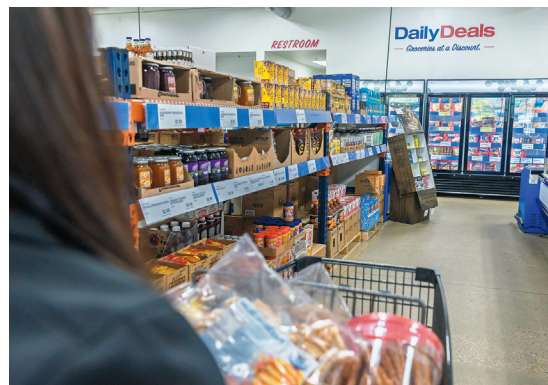
Operated by Natural Choice Foods, the five-store chain serves as an extension of the company's mission: to transform excess and short-dated inventory into affordable, high-quality food for communities where access and affordability matter most.

Daily Deals began in 2013 with a single store. Over the past 12 years, it has grown to five locations, each standing the test of time. The stores have navigated economic challenges, including the COVID-19 pandemic, demonstrating the resilience of the team and the loyalty of customers. This is a testament to the value they provide and the trust customers place in them.

Today, Daily Deals Food Outlet welcomes more than 11,000 customers each week across all locations, underscoring its role as a needed and frequently visited resource in the communities it serves.

The ability to deliver value without compromise is reflected in a mix of branded and NCF's private label products – repackaged in-house at the company's USDA-inspected facility – at prices that make everyday essentials affordable. The stores are not just selling groceries; they're solving food access challenges in real time.

They price products 30-50 percent below big-box retailers, helping families stretch their budgets without sacrificing quality. In fact, the company estimates that each store saves its community more than \$2 million annually. That's real impact – measured not just in dollars but in meals on tables and relief in households.



As Greenville Store Manager Josh VanHaver shared, "One of the best things about working for Daily Deals is the impact we have with our customers. I often hear that, because of us, they can keep their house stocked with groceries. Knowing how much we help our community leaves you going home every day feeling fulfilled."

"Our rewards program boasts



an impressive participation rate of nearly 90 percent, highlighting the deep loyalty of our customer base. Through this program, customers earn store credit points simply by saving money with us, reinforcing our commitment to giving back and making every dollar count."

Each store is staffed by passionate team members with a culture of personalized service, so the stores feel like a neighborhood grocery store.

Inventory rotates constantly, making every visit a treasure hunt. Customers enjoy the thrill of discovering new finds each week – from premium snacks to pantry staples.

Natural Choice Foods takes pride in its spotless Daily Deals Food Outlet stores and their exceptional service. It is passionate about providing quality food to all, regardless of income or background.

At the heart of operations is the company's purpose: "ensuring no good food goes to waste." Daily Deals Food Outlet is more than a store – it's a solution. The company is proud to be part of a supply chain that reduces waste, restores value and nourishes communities.



## Dave's Supermarket

Dave's Supermarket is a family-owned independent grocery retailer that has served Fairbury, Illinois, and surrounding rural communities since 1950. Celebrating 75 years of service, the company has grown from a small hometown store founded by Dave and Emma Steffen into a 40,000-square-foot full-service supermarket employing more than 110 team members.

Now led by a second-generation family member Brian Steffen, along with third-generation nephews Justin Steffen and Matthew Zehr, Dave's Supermarket remains committed to delivering exceptional value, quality and personalized customer care. The Steffen family attributes the store's enduring success and growth to God's blessing, which continues to guide their history and faithful path forward.

Known for its blend of big-city variety and small-town hospitality, Dave's Supermarket features a traditional butcher-staffed meat department, a produce department celebrated for its fresh and seasonal offerings and the popular Pinabar pineapple-coring station.

Dave's Old-World Bakery is known for scratch-made doughnuts, breads, cookies and custom cakes, while the in-house 3rd Street Deli – seating 75 – continues to be a local favorite with daily complimentary coffee, 50-cent ice cream cones, homemade salads, fried chicken and the store's growing Smokehouse line of signature meats.

Dave's Supermarket has made significant investments in infrastructure and innovation, including the installation of two Hussmann Protocol units for energy efficiency, updated deli, produce and bakery cases and equipment and a planned 2026 deli remodel with the help of AWG's engineering team.

The store leverages modern retail technologies through its Alliance Retail Group partnership, Alliance Link digital display program, Instacart home delivery, Freshop/NCR online shopping, and the AppCard-powered Dave's Rewards program, which offers personalized deals and loyalty benefits.

Rooted in community support, Dave's Supermarket partners with local food pantries for monthly produce boxes, leads the Good Neighbor Sack Summer Food Drive, supports the Lifewise school lunch program and participates in numerous Boys & Girls Club initiatives.

Its leadership team recently completed Stephen Black's "The 5 Rules" master class, strengthening the company's culture of trust and service. With many long-tenured employees and a commitment to work-life balance – reflected in its longstanding

practice of closing on Sundays and many holidays – Dave's Supermarket continues to set the standard for excellence among independent grocers.



# Congratulations

to *The Shelby Report's*

## EXCEPTIONAL INDEPENDENTS

Award Winners



**Arteaga's Food Center**

**Piggly Wiggly 310**

**Oliver's Market**

**Chester's Markets**

**Border Town**

**Vallarta Supermarkets**

**McKay's Markets**

**Savers Cost Plus**

**Harvest Market IGA**

**Piggly Wiggly 191**

**G&E / Hocker's Supermarket**

**Seabra Foods**

**Piggly Wiggly 272**

**Clements' Marketplace**

**Lewis Food Town**

**Oleson's Food Stores**

**Food Depot & Extra Supermarkets**

**Teloloapan Meat Market**

**Polly's Country Markets**

**Rudy's Markets Inc.**

**Fresh Encounter, Inc.**



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## Fareway Foods

Zach Lane, VP of retail systems, is an exceptional leader who has played a pivotal role in helping Johnston, Iowa-based Fareway Foods modernize its operations while staying true to the values that define successful independent grocers. He combines deep operational knowledge with a forward-thinking approach to technology, ensuring Fareway remains efficient, competitive and well-positioned for the future.



A key part of Lane's impact has been his leadership in evaluating and advancing technology across the organization. He understands that modern systems are critical to supporting store teams, improving operational consistency and delivering a strong customer experience.

Through thoughtful adoption of retail technology, he has helped Fareway streamline processes, strengthen data visibility and support scalable growth – without losing the personal, service-driven culture Fareway is known for.

Lane approaches technology not as a standalone initiative but as a business enabler. He works closely with

internal teams and partners to ensure solutions are practical, reliable and aligned with store-level realities. His ability to bridge operational needs with IT strategy has resulted in improvements that benefit associates, management and customers alike.

Equally important is Lane's people-first leadership style. He engages store teams throughout periods of change, emphasizing training, communication and accountability. This approach has helped drive adoption, minimize disruption and build confidence in new tools and processes.

Beyond his contributions at Fareway, he is a respected voice within the independent grocery community. He values long-term partnerships, leads with integrity and consistently represents independent grocers as innovative, disciplined and community-centered businesses.



## Fresh Encounter

Findlay, Ohio-based Fresh Encounter is being nominated for the Exceptional Independent Award for its commitment to community health and well-being.

By embracing technology to expand access to nutritious food, the company has made a real difference for local families. Through the acceptance of Healthy Benefits/OTC cards, Fresh Encounter ensures that the community can afford healthier choices – removing barriers and promoting dignity in the shopping experience. Its retail automation and POS platform, ECRS' CATAPULT, processes these benefit payments seamlessly, creating an efficient and respectful transaction for every customer.

But the impact goes far beyond technology. Fresh Encounter invests in the communities it serves, regularly donating to local charities and supporting initiatives that strengthen neighborhood well-being. This combination of accessibility, generosity and innovation sets it apart as a true leader among independent retailers – proving that when technology serves people, everyone wins.



## GreenTree Co-Op Market

GreenTree Co-op Market has achieved several milestones that demonstrate strong business performance and deep community impact.

Since relocating to its newly constructed store in downtown Mount Pleasant, Michigan, in December 2021, which expanded its footprint fivefold, the store has sustained year-over-year sales growth driven by strategic investments in operations, local sourcing and community engagement.

In 2024, GreenTree welcomed 273 new owner-members, reinforcing community trust in the cooperative model and strengthening the local equity base. Ownership growth ensures that decision-making remains community-centered while providing long-term financial stability.

Strengthening the regional food system remains a core strategic priority. GreenTree partners with more than 120 local producers within a 100-mile radius, generating about \$400,000 in local product sales in 2024.

These partnerships support farmers, artisans and small businesses while reducing supply chain vulnerability and differentiating GreenTree through authentic, locally rooted products.

Operationally, GreenTree has focused on efficiency and scalability to support its expanded facility. Since relocating, it has systematically developed and standardized operating procedures across all departments, including adopting generally accepted accounting practices

and improving receiving and inventory workflows. The improvements have enhanced transparency, accountability and organizational agility.

This strategic maturity was recognized nationally when GreenTree Co-op Market was named one of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce's Top 100 Small Businesses, selected from more than 12,500 applicants.

The recognition validates GreenTree's leadership as a mission-driven, community-owned enterprise. The company also continues to invest in its workforce as a foundation for long-term success. Using the MIT Living Wage model, it maintains starting wages above the local rate and implements compression adjustments to reward longevity and ensure internal equity. These efforts support retention, morale and high-quality customer service.

GreenTree Co-op Market integrates philanthropy and sustainability into daily operations. The local sourcing strategy reinvests dollars into the regional economy while shortening supply chains and reducing environmental impact. Its Beans for Bags program encourages reusable bag use while generating donations for owner-selected local nonprofits. Over three years, the program has raised more than \$3,500, fostering environmental stewardship and collective giving.

GreenTree also partners with a local composting farm to divert food waste from landfills and co-lead is a public recycling initiative that processes some 10 cubic yards of



recyclable material weekly. These efforts strengthen environmental outcomes while supporting the same farms and community members who sustain our cooperative.

As an independent, community-owned grocery, GreenTree's structure enables rapid decision-making. The leadership team can respond quickly to supply disruptions, pricing pressures and changing consumer preferences – an advantage over large corporate chains.

Looking ahead, GreenTree's strategy centers on inventory optimization, customer engagement, staff retention and economic monitoring. By combining operational excellence with community partnership and innovation, GreenTree is positioned for continued growth, resilience and shared prosperity.



## Congratulations to The Shelby Report's 2026 Exceptional Independents

You are the backbone of your communities and the driving force behind independent grocery. The early mornings, long days, and commitment you bring to your stores make a meaningful difference for the families who rely on you every day.

Through your leadership and dedication, you create welcoming spaces, keep shelves stocked, support local teams, and strengthen the neighborhoods you serve. Your impact goes far beyond transactions; it's about trust, service, and community.

From all of us at LOC Software, thank you for your passion and perseverance. We are proud to stand beside you and celebrate everything you have accomplished today and in the future.



LOC Software is proud to continue to sponsor the Exceptional Independents Awards presented at The NGA Show.

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## Oleson's Food Stores

Beyond offering some of the best local and prepared food, Oleson's Food Stores has continually found innovative ways to support the northwestern Michigan community through its four stores.

With a proud 99-year history, this family-owned business was founded by Gerald and Frances Oleson in Traverse City, Michigan, and their vision has been carried forward by their children, grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

The Oleson family has long been woven into the fabric of the region, creating a welcoming in-store experience while championing local fundraising efforts. In 1956, the Olesons launched the annual Northwest Michigan College Barbecue, a tradition that has brought thousands together and underscored the company's enduring commitment to education and community support. That legacy continues today through ongoing contributions to the college via the Oleson Foundation.

Another pillar of impact is addressing food insecurity. Each year, Oleson's hosts multiple food drives and serves as a year-round donation center. Most recently, the Traverse City location partnered with the Salvation Army and local organizations to provide 15,000 meals to community members in need.



Beyond direct food and financial contributions, Oleson's has built a legacy of community-centered programs that deliver measurable results. The Community Share program has returned nearly \$1.8 million to nonprofits and schools since 1990, while partnerships with food pantries and farmers have rescued more than 1.1 million pounds of food since 2008.

In 2025, the Oleson Foundation awarded grants to 77 nonprofits, advancing its five pillars of giving – art, community development, education, health and human services and environment. Together, these efforts highlight Oleson's holistic approach to strengthening communities by meeting immediate needs while investing in long-term growth and sustainability.

Equally important, Oleson's has embraced innovation to meet modern consumers where they are. Recent upgrades include new department scales, centralized pricing, advanced management tools and the launch of AppCard rewards at every register.

These were joined by technology improvements such as fiber internet, upgraded communication systems and a refreshed website. The investments ensure that Oleson's remains a trusted community partner and a forward-looking retailer.



## Pat's Foods IGA

Pat's IGA in Houghton, Michigan, is a strong contender for the Exceptional Independents recognition, showcasing how a multi-generational family business can successfully embrace modern innovation.

By integrating a powerful rewards program into its daily operations, Pat's IGA has enhanced its ability to deliver the customer-oriented service it is known for, while adapting to the digital expectations of today's shoppers.



## Piggly Wiggly Sheboygan South

Piggly Wiggly Sheboygan South in Sheboygan, Wisconsin, is a standout candidate for the Exceptional Independents recognition, exemplifying leadership in the operations and technology category.

Its approach to shopper loyalty is rooted in a commitment to innovation, effectively utilizing its advanced rewards program to connect with shoppers at every point of the shopping experience.



## Piggly Wiggly Store 191

Brenda and Marc Lois, owners of Lois' Piggly Wiggly Store No. 191 on 14th Place in Kenosha, Wisconsin, are outstanding new owners who have quickly become pillars of their community. Though new to store ownership, they are longtime members of the Piggly Wiggly family and have transformed their store into a vibrant, community-focused destination.

Every Thursday, the couple hosts a breakfast for local veterans – a weekly tradition that brings connection, gratitude and community pride. On Tuesdays, they extend support to seniors with a discount program that helps stretch household budgets at a time when every dollar matters.

Their creativity shines through in the events they organize, such as the Halloween Craft Fair, which turned the parking lot into a lively celebration of local crafters, families and community spirit.

When the government shutdown threatened SNAP benefits in September, the Loises took action. Partnering with community outreach programs, they distributed more than 500 meal bags to families in need. Their efforts were amplified through local media and the help of close

friends and volunteers – turning compassion into real relief for hundreds of families.

Seeing continued need, they led another large-scale initiative by assembling and distributing 400 complete Thanksgiving meal kits. Supported by community donations and a storewide round-up campaign, more than 20 church volunteers joined the couple in delivering meals to families across Kenosha.

This past holiday season, Store No. 191 hosted a large community event featuring live reindeer, Santa Claus, photos, activities and treats – further cementing the store as a beloved gathering place for families.

Despite being new owners, the Loises continually elevate the customer experience by offering high-quality selections, exceptional service and a welcoming, positive atmosphere for customers and employees. Their dedication to innovation, community connection and team



culture sets them apart as rising leaders in independent retail.

They exemplify what it means to be independent community retailers – compassionate, driven, customer-focused and committed to the people they serve. Their impact was immediate and their momentum continues to grow.

## Piggly Wiggly Store 272

Carolyn Preston and her brother, Doug, of Piggly Wiggly Store No. 272 in Union Grove, Wisconsin, exemplify the best of independent grocery leadership – combining community impact, operational excellence, and forward-thinking innovation that strengthens both their store and the Piggly Wiggly brand.

The Prestons recently were recognized by Community Bank with its Community Award, a testament to the significant impact that she and her brother make within the community.

Through charitable initiatives, local partnerships and consistent support of neighborhood events, they have positioned Store No. 272 as a true community cornerstone. Their leadership reflects the core values of independent retailing – service, connection and trust.

The Prestons' partnership with Piggly Wiggly is exceptional. They work closely with the team to develop and execute strategies that elevate brand presence, enhance store visibility and increase customer engagement. Their openness to new ideas and commitment to continuous improvement make them standout operators.

They also are among the most innovative and future-focused owners. They have been an early adopter of key programs such as Click & Collect and the AppCard digital loyalty platform, leveraging technology to streamline the shopping experience and remain competitive in a rapidly evolving retail landscape. Their willingness to embrace new tools positions Store No. 272 at the forefront of modernization within the Piggly Wiggly franchise.

Operationally, Store No. 272 sets the benchmark. Under the Prestons' leadership,



the store consistently leads in cleanliness, organization, merchandising execution and overall store condition, outperforming many other locations. Their attention to detail directly contributes to top-tier sales performance and exceptional accountability across the team. Their leadership inspires staff to take ownership, pride and responsibility in their roles.

The Prestons are deeply involved in driving store success. They frequently champion new programs, implement companywide initiatives quickly and push for innovations that enhance both operational efficiency and the customer experience. Their passion and commitment can be felt in the culture of their store.

Equally important, they foster a positive, motivated and unified workplace environment. Their leadership creates a team that is enthusiastic, empowered and dedicated to serving the community with excellence.



## Plum Market

Brothers Matthew and Marc Jonna have built one of the grocery industry's most admired independent brands through vision, integrity and relentless innovation. As co-founders of Farmington Hills, Michigan-based Plum Market, they have redefined what a neighborhood grocer can be – combining the heart of local markets with the sophistication of a modern, chef-driven food destination.

Since launching the first Plum Market in 2007, the Jonnas have led with a clear mission: to inspire shoppers to "Live Well, with Taste." Their commitment to quality, service and community has propelled Plum Market's expansion from a single family-run store in Michigan to a nationally recognized independent retailer with locations across multiple states, including large format stores, small format street locations, airport shops, schools and corporate campuses and entertainment venues.

Together, they've made strategic investments in infrastructure, technology and talent to ensure sustainable, scalable growth. From building best-in-class prepared food kitchens to introducing advanced digital loyalty programs and operational systems, the Jonnas have positioned Plum Market at the forefront of independent grocery innovation.

Their leadership blends Matthew Jonna's operational discipline and visionary strategy



with Marc Jonna's culinary expertise and intuitive merchandising, creating a shopping experience rooted in authenticity and excellence.

Their dedication to people extends well beyond customers. Under their direction, Plum Market has cultivated a workplace culture defined by empowerment and growth. Through leadership training, culinary education and mentorship programs, employees are encouraged to build long-term careers within the company.

This investment in people has fostered high retention and advancement, particularly among those who began as hourly workers and grew into leadership roles.

Equally central to the Jonnas' philosophy is a sense of community responsibility. Each Plum Market location reflects and supports its local neighborhood through donations and partnerships. The Jonnas prioritize giving back – from supporting local schools, nonprofits and food banks to partnering with organizations like United Way and Forgotten Harvest. Their stores not only serve fresh, high-quality food but also act as hubs for connection and generosity.

Even through challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic, their leadership was characterized by empathy, adaptability and courage.



## Polly's Country Markets

With a rich legacy spanning more than 90 years, Polly's Country Market has never just been a grocery store; it has been a gathering place, neighbor and trusted friend to families across Southeast Michigan.

The commitment to exceptional service shines through in every aisle, where shoppers are greeted not only with efficiency and quality but with warmth and care that feels like home. Every visit to Polly's is more than a transaction; it is a continuation of a relationship built on trust, tradition and community.

Rooted in family and built on tradition, Polly's story began in 1934 when Frank Aloysius Kennedy first opened the doors. From the beginning, Polly's was about people, not just products. Kennedy's vision was simple yet profound: create a store where customers felt valued, connected and cared for. His son, F.A. Kennedy, carried that vision forward, renaming the store Frank's Finer Foods, and keeping it in the family until 2005.

Even the parrot on Polly's logo tells a story of joy and community. It was inspired by Frank Kennedy's own parrot, who perched at the front of the store to greet customers

with cheer. That playful symbol continues to embody the welcoming spirit that defines Polly's.

When Polly's marked its 90th anniversary in 2024, it also celebrated the community. Through giveaways promoted on social media and local radio stations, Polly's turned a milestone into a shared moment of gratitude, reminding everyone that success has always been intertwined with its customers. Ninety years was not simply a marker of longevity; it was a testament to the enduring bond between Polly's and the families who have walked through its doors for generations.

What truly sets Polly's apart is its unwavering devotion to community. The support for Michigan-made products is more than a business choice; it is a promise to lift up local farmers, artisans and families.

In the past year, Polly's has touched lives in countless ways – supporting a local dance competition bake sale, giving away tickets to a Detroit Tigers game, joining the Movers and Meals food drive in Jackson and partnering with organizations for "Stuff the Bus" programs that help children in need.



Polly's even transformed its parking lot into a place of joy during Halloween, hosting trick-or-treating events for kids while also investing in the future of Michigan agriculture by supporting 4-H youth programs. Each initiative reflects Polly's belief that a store should be more than shelves and registers but a hub of generosity and connection.

Polly's also knows how to make shopping an experience. A partnership with a local radio station has brought countless giveaways, but one event stands out – the Chili Cookoff. Polly's gave the first 35 contestants \$100 gift cards to help with ingredients and supplies, turning a fun competition into a celebration of community spirit.

## Potash Markets

Potash Markets was founded in 1950 by brothers Herb, Dave and Melvin Potash. Today, second- and third-generation operators Art Potash and his nephew, Max Potash, continue the family tradition across three neighborhood-focused Chicago locations.

A defining strength of Potash Markets is the longevity of its team. Among the many valued employees who have built their careers at Potash Markets, two former store managers continue to work part time after each worked full time more than 40 years. One cashier has been with the company for 63 years – a testament to the mutual commitment between the Potash family and their employees.

Potash Markets has continually evolved to meet changing consumer needs. Recent improvements include a remodeled deli at the State Street store, full renovations to the Clark and State Street locations over the years, and the recent addition of self-checkout at the State Street store.

Long before online grocery shopping, Potash Markets

provided home delivery and personal shopping “phone orders” to support customers who needed extra help.

The multigenerational grocery company has received several recognitions for excellence and commitment to the community and industry.

In 2011, the Illinois Retail Merchants Association honored Potash Markets as Retailer of the Year. A few years later, the National Retailers Federation named it America’s Champion of the Year-Retail Industry Advocate 2014. Most recently, it received the Lighting for Impact Retailer of the Year Award in 2024 for innovation in retail lighting.

Potash Markets remains true to its roots, offering warm, neighborly service, everyday essentials, specialty foods, fine wine, beer and spirits and fresh, in-house prepared deli offerings.

The company’s balance of tradition, innovation and community connection is what continues to set Potash Markets apart.



## Schnuck Markets

In May 2025, two tornadoes swept through the St. Louis area. The first hit the community of Arnold, Missouri. In response, the Schnucks Community Kitchen was dispatched to the local Schnucks store and served free lunches to customers, employees, vendors and neighboring businesses.

Then a second, more devastating tornado struck. And within 15 hours, Schnucks employees responded. Dozens from every area of the business mobilized to offer help on the ground and behind the scenes.

The Schnucks Community Kitchen was dispatched to stores in the neighborhoods hit hardest and served as a central hub for employees and products. As those affected by the storm made their way to the stores, employees served them a free meal.

Employees then began to deliver meals directly into the affected neighborhoods. Collaborating with the Urban League and the American Red Cross, they ensured aid reached those most in need.

They logged hundreds of volunteer hours and delivered thousands of meals to the community with many truckloads of food, water, cleaning supplies and personal care items donated by the company. The American Red Cross estimates that donations from Schnucks and its vendor partners totaled 178,000 meals.



Schnucks relief efforts come in many facets. Internally, the company relied on employees’ willingness to volunteer and logistics experts who made sure product donations were where they needed to be when they needed to be there. For 15 consecutive weekends, Schnucks donated product that helped feed more than 27,000 residents, and its employees volunteered more than 400 hours at Urban League product distribution events.

Externally, with scores of locations across the St. Louis area, Schnucks offered customers simple

and convenient ways to help those in need. As a result of a Round Up at the Register, Schnucks customers and the company donated \$110,000, with 100 percent of donations being split evenly between the United Way and Urban League.

As part of a personal care item drive, Schnucks customers also donated 20 pallets of some of the most sought-after items.

Seeing the community step up in such a big way was inspiring and a powerful reminder that Schnucks’ mission to nourish people’s lives goes beyond store aisles; it’s about supporting communities when they need it most. The devastation from the tornado was immense, but the spirit of generosity from Schnucks customers and employees gave everyone strength.



## Strack & Van Til Food Market

Strack & Van Til has served as northwest Indiana’s local grocer since 1929. Its mission to make people’s lives easier is demonstrated every day through investment across its 22 stores, 2,500-plus employees and dozens of local communities. The grocer’s culture is built around key values including people, excellence, accountability and stewardship.

Strack & Van Til has established strong ties within the communities it serves and has been voted Best of the Region by *The Times of Northwest Indiana* for 15-plus consecutive years.

As a retailer, Strack & Van Til is continually focused on delivering new solutions to make customers’ lives easier. In December 2024, the grocer launched a new online shopping platform and mobile app that provides shopper personalization, integrated loyalty rewards, digital coupons and order-ahead capabilities. Since its launch, e-commerce orders have surged.



Most recently, Strack & Van Til introduced virtual dietitian services, providing easy and affordable access to personalized nutrition guidance and support. It also has formed

longstanding partnerships with 16 growers in Indiana, Illinois and Michigan to source the freshest, best quality products for its customers.

As an employer, Strack & Van Til has a history of strong retention. About 25 percent of its workforce has served the company for 10 or more years, including some 50 employees who have served for 40-plus years. To attract and retain talent, the company offers competitive wages and benefits, including paid training, paid vacation/holidays, premium pay for Sundays/holidays, healthcare and a 401(k) plan.

The grocer also has invested in an internal career fair to help employees advance in the company, as well as a career development curriculum to expand their skillsets. Additionally, it has created job opportunities for people with disabilities by partnering with local organizations such as TradeWinds and Opportunity Enterprises.

In addition, Strack & Van Til is committed to fighting hunger across its communities. Since 1989, the grocer has united customers and employees around fighting hunger through annual register roundups, food rescue efforts and holiday meal packaging and distribution events to support the Food Bank of Northwest Indiana. In 2024, Strack & Van Til and its customers gave nearly \$600,000 to local charities.

By investing in its stores, people and communities, Strack & Van Til proves every day why it is an exceptional independent grocer.



## Sunset Foods

Sunset Foods was founded in 1937 by John J. Cortesi and his uncle, Adeodata Fontana, in downtown Highland Park, Illinois. Its name was inspired by Sunset Park, which was adjacent to the original location.

When Sunset Foods opened, customers placed orders by phone for home delivery, as self-service shopping did not yet exist in the area. When relocating to a larger facility a few years later, Sunset Foods took a step forward by offering self-service shopping. The innovation, rejected by many grocers, helped Sunset Foods continue to prosper.

Today, Sunset Foods operates seven locations with a focus on service, quality and community under the leadership of John E. Cortesi, a third-generation family member.

Sunset Foods is committed to providing customers with various shopping options, from shopping in-store with a traditional checkout experience to using self-checkout (fast lanes) or using a prototype cashier unloading lane.

Sunset Foods offers customers a number of online shopping convenience options, including its own curbside shoppers through a partnership with eGrocery, a recently added delivery component with DoorDash for last-minute delivery and same-day delivery service with Instacart. Customers looking for prepared foods, bakery items, platters and food trays can order online and book for events and holidays through another technology partner, Foodstorm.

Sunset Foods is currently undertaking a brand refresh design review, looking to



update décor, color palettes, department signage and storytelling. Part of this refresh will include reallocating service counter space to offer customers more grab-and-go solutions, allowing for less time spent in line, freeing staff to more fully engage with customers and maintaining high stock levels.

Technology is constantly evolving as software continues to grow. In addition to redesigning the Sunset Foods website last year, the company has recently upgraded its front-end systems to modern software, pin pad solutions and loyalty program hardware.

The IT department is developing an artificial intelligence solution to combine internal sales data with external factors such as holidays, weather impacts and buying trends to better forecast sales patterns and inform buying, pricing and merchandising plans.

Sunset Foods values its employees and is dedicated to internal promotion. It hosts an annual Employee Appreciation Dinner for employees with 10 years or more of service and recognizes Employees of the Year and Golden Star winners. Anytime a customer shares an exceptional service experience, the employee receives a Service Star and a \$10 gift card.

To train the next round of department managers, assistants and store directors, Sunset Foods manages the Pathway to Management Program. This allows employees who are interested in management to submit a letter of intent. The program enables staff to train and learn the differing roles in the company, better aligning them with the needed skills as positions open.



## Super One Foods

As a fourth-generation, family-owned operation, Super One Foods remains committed to the neighborhoods it serves across Minnesota, Wisconsin and Michigan's Upper Peninsula.

In 2025, parent company Miner's Inc. strengthened that commitment through continued community support, charitable giving and reinvestments into store locations and teams.

Throughout the year, the company hosted nine register pin-pad fundraising campaigns, during which customers contributed more than \$800,000 to local causes.

A long-standing partnership with Second Harvest Northland remains a major focus, and the Miner family pledged to match all corporate gifts to the nonprofit's Nourish the Northland capital campaign, up to \$500,000, in support of its new regional food bank facility in Duluth, Minnesota.

In addition, the company supported a wide variety of community organizations, youth programs, local events and nonprofits through in-kind donations, sponsorships and monetary contributions totaling more than \$250,000. Giving back is a core value of the company, and it remains grateful for the strong neighborhoods, customers and store teams that make success possible.

In addition to community involvement, 2025 was a year of significant store investments. One of the largest projects was the reopening of the Virginia South Super One

Foods following a seven-month, multi-million-dollar renovation.

The 55,425-square-foot project delivered a modern shopping experience, including:

- Full exterior refresh with new signage, paint, windows and canopies; and
- Complete interior renovation featuring energy-efficient equipment, décor updates, new fixtures, fresh paint and upgraded flooring.

The March 2025 grand reopening celebration brought together store teams, corporate staff, vendors and customers for food demos, prizes, a ribbon cutting with the Laurentian Chamber of Commerce, live radio remote and a two-week coupon book filled with savings.

The company completed several additional store improvement projects, including interior and exterior updates; major remodels in Ashland, Wisconsin, and Roseau, Minnesota; and a liquor store renovation in Baxter, Minnesota. These investments reinforce its commitment to delivering low prices and better choices while supporting the teams who bring the company's core values to life every day.

A major milestone in 2025 was the acquisition of three stores from the S&R Quisberg group. As a fellow family-owned retailer, this partnership was a natural fit, expanding the company's footprint into Brainerd and Pequot



Lakes, Minnesota.

The Baxter Quisberg store was shuttered due to Miner's Inc. already having a Super One Foods location in that community. Transition efforts began immediately, with remodel and rebranding projects under way and support provided to new-hires joining the Super One family.

Throughout 2025, the company also continued investing in infrastructure and technology to enhance the shopping experience for customers and the work environment for employees. These accomplishments reflect a continued focus as a family-owned, independent grocery retailer committed to serving local communities.

The company looks forward to carrying this momentum into 2026 and beyond as it builds on the key focus of providing low prices and better choices to customers right in their neighborhoods.

## Trig's

For more than 50 years, Trig's has served Wisconsin's rural Northwoods as a full-service, family-owned independent grocer led by Trig and Tula Solberg. With five locations, the company brings big-chain caliber to small-town communities – but with heart, heritage and purpose that's uniquely its own.

At Trig's, everything centers on three promises: enhancing the shopping experience, giving back to communities and investing in employees. These principles fuel innovation, service and community impact every day.

Trig's is more than a grocery store; it is the hub of local communities. From the hyper-local sourcing initiative "Love It Local" – which brings in-season, Wisconsin produce and locally crafted goods to shelves – to experiential events that introduce specialty products often unavailable in rural markets, Trig's create connections between people and food in meaningful ways.

Trig's stores don't just stock groceries – they spark inspiration, nourish well-being and celebrate the region's bounty. Innovation drives how it serves. Trig's works to ensure access for all through food donation partnerships, outreach programs and meal initiatives focused on children facing food insecurity.

Trig's also offers convenient services such as curbside pickup and home delivery – critical lifelines in rural areas with limited transportation options.



Employees are the soul of Trig's. It believes in growing leaders from within through various programs, including Influential Leadership Training, CPR and First Aid certification and customized development tracks that help employees advance their careers. Many department leaders began in entry-level roles, and their longevity reflects the supportive, empowering culture Trig's has built.

What makes Trig's truly special is a deep-rooted relationship with its communities. Trig's sponsors conservation efforts, partners with schools, supports military veterans and emergency services and steps up in times of need. When communities thrive, Trig's thrives – and it never forgets that.

At a time when rural areas often are underserved, Trig's takes pride in being a fresh food oasis, a place of connection and a trusted neighbor. Trig's stands toe-to-toe with national retailers not by outspending them – but by out-caring them. Customers choose Trig's because it consistently delivers excellence with a hometown touch, familiar face and genuine smile.

Being an independent grocer is more than a business; it's a calling. Trig's is proud of its legacy but even more excited about the future – one where innovation, compassion and community continue to shape everything it does.



## Versailles IGA

Robert and Dotty Wood, along with son Daren, opened Versailles IGA on Dec. 13, 2014. While the Woods had previously run a bulk food store, they did not have experience operating a full grocery store. They grew the business into a viable operation that serves the community of Versailles, Indiana.

After his father's death from COVID-19 in 2020, Daren Wood ran the store for the next two years, replacing freezers, adding new programs and providing direction. In August 2022, his sister, Kelly Gutzwiller, became part owner.

From that point on, they began to trust the direction and advice of the International Grocers Alliance and Associated Wholesale Grocers. They empowered their managers and took time to understand each department.

Since 2022, the family has completed many

improvement projects. These include a new POS system, adding a loyalty program with digital coupons via AppCard, replacing 1980s-era carts and repaving the parking lot.

Other additions include an LED storefront sign, new equipment for the deli and meat departments and an extended opening for the forklift with new doors. Future projects call for new produce and meat cases, electronic tags, refreshed décor and curbside pickup, among others.



However, the family said there is much that hasn't changed, as the store is a mission for them. They play Christian music every day and honor God in all that they do. At Christmas, the store has a large nativity display and crosses at Easter. They are unapologetic about their faith;

treat all customers, employees and vendors with respect and extend grace to all.

And it is the employees that make Versailles IGA what it is. They care for the customers and go out of their way to make them feel special, especially senior citizens. They are a dedicated, hardworking and fun-loving team that wants to see the store succeed.

While all 33 employees are important, ownership wanted to recognize its leadership team: Doug West, store manager; Cassie Russell, deli/bakery manager; John Martin, dairy/frozen manager; Carrie Woods, grocery manager; Dustin Debord, meat manager; Mari Tekulve, general merchandise manager; Shannon McKane, produce manager; and Brandy Bydon, Emily Brunner, Graci Rodriguez, Tori Svatba and Kiya Thomas, front-end managers.



## Woodman's Food Markets

Founded in 1919, Woodman's is an employee-owned grocer based out of Janesville, Wisconsin. Having grown from a local produce stand to a multi-state operator with 19 locations and over a half a million customers each week, Woodman's prides itself on staying true to its goal of delivering amazing prices and tremendous selection through a mindset of technological innovation and an eye on costs.

Woodman's has demonstrated its ability to adapt new technology. Starting in 1975, Woodman's became the first grocer store in Wisconsin to begin using UPC scanners to improve the efficiency of checkout. In 2015, it created an online pickup and delivery service, which brought the selection and values of Woodman's Food Markets directly to customers' doorsteps.

Furthermore, Woodman's attention to costs helps bolster the value proposition to customers while allowing a painless shopping experience devoid of the "on sale – off sale" model that many traditional grocers use.

This focus on maintaining efficiency is also a natural offshoot of the employee-owned structure introduced in 1979, which correlates profits directly back to employees.

With over a century of delivering service, savings and selection to the communities it serves, Woodman's looks forward to the next century.





## Shelby Publishing's salute to 'backbone of our industry'

On the following pages, Shelby Publishing is proud to present its fourth annual Exceptional Independents Awards. Nominations were open to independent retailers, wholesalers and technology and other service providers.

"Independents are the backbone of our industry, and this awards program is an opportunity to recognize them for their contributions," said Stephanie Reid, Shelby president and COO.

"Independents are a vital part of their communities and lead the way in caring for their customers. Our Exceptional Independents Awards shine a light on these businesses that continue to help feed our communities."

Coverage of the award winners will appear by region in the March editions of *The Shelby Report of the Midwest*, *The Shelby Report of the Southeast*, *The Shelby Report of the Southwest*, *The Shelby Report of the West* and *The Griffin Report of the Northeast*. Award winners also will be featured on [theshelbyreport.com](http://theshelbyreport.com).

### Brooks Grocery Co.

Brooks Grocery Co. is an excellent operator in Mississippi and Tennessee. The company's stores feature tremendous scratch delis with unique, special recipes.

Shoppers will find more than 125 special home-made items made fresh each day. And the stores are known for their superb customer service.



### Grocery Basket

The Grocery Basket in Grenada, Mississippi, has spent more than four decades becoming a fixture in the community. But what makes it truly stand out is the way it has blended that long-standing, hometown reliability with a noticeably modern way of operating.

Shoppers can see it everywhere – in the way the store communicates, the way it promotes and the way its keep customers connected and informed.

The store's Facebook page is a great example, but it's really just the surface. Behind it is a mindset that embraces what's current and what's possible. Updates are timely, intentional and useful: fresh-cut items, seasonal specials, cookout-ready displays and honest praise for team members who keep the store running strong.

When supply chain challenges hit, the store doesn't hide it – employees communicate clearly and confidently, showing customers they were on top of it and working ahead.

That same forward-thinking approach shows up in day-to-day business operations. Management consistently leverages modern tools to make shopping easier and more accessible for local families – digital savings, online ads and fast-moving promotional cycles match the pace of how customers shop.

At its core, the store still operates with the heart of a true independent: greeting customers by name, showing pride in its products and celebrating every local tradition right alongside the community.

But there's also a clear sense of direction – a leadership style that's not afraid to adopt new methods, use different tools and evolve in ways that keep the store thriving in a rapidly changing retail landscape.





## Houchens Food Group

Bowling Green, Kentucky-based Houchens Food Group deserves an Exceptional Independents Award because of the way it invests in stores, people and communities.

As a 100-percent employee-owned company, Houchens empowers its teams to take pride in their work and make decisions that benefit their customers. That ownership mentality shows up in clean, well-run stores and a commitment to providing the best shopping experience possible.

HFG also invests heavily in its employees, offering meaningful ownership, recognition and opportunities for growth. This is evident in the way store managers are celebrated and supported, as well as in the culture that encourages leaders to run their stores like entrepreneurs.

What stands out most, though, is how deeply Houchens gives back. Whether it's supporting local charities, partnering with community organizations or contributing to major causes like the Boys and Girls Club, the company consistently puts its values into action.

Dedication to providing a great customer experience in stores, lifting up employee-owners and strengthening the communities they serve is what makes HFG an exceptional independent.



## Lamendola's Supermarket

Back when cash registers were powered with hand cranks and customers were greeted by name, Lamendola's Supermarket was the community's go-to grocer. In that sense, the only thing that has changed today is the register itself.

In 2025, Lamendola's Supermarket celebrated its 90th anniversary. Located in the Ascension Parish, the store is a true community cornerstone of Gonzales, Louisiana. This milestone served as a tribute to the store's rich history and a thank-you to generations of loyal shoppers who have come to think of it as home.

Today, the store is owned and operated by fourth-generation owner/operator Daphne Lamendola, a trailblazer in her own right. Lamendola's Supermarket has been a member of Associated Grocers for 68 years. Her grandfather, Sonny, was an original AG board member.

As a store owner, Lamendola followed in the footsteps of her father, Blair, when she purchased the store in 2013. In 2021, she became the first woman to serve on the AG board, which she now chairs.

Lamendola brings a valuable perspective to the board by elevating the voice of single-store operators and championing their unique needs and opportunities. She's always applauded and learned from the experience of the board, while offering balance, representation and a fresh point of view.

Her determination to lead the store into the future is evident in her attention to detail and her focus on bringing projects to life. She seeks opportunities to market and merchandise the store to align with the culture of the community.

Known as the "House that Jambalaya Built," Lamendola's Supermarket leans into its strengths. In its history, the store has earned multiple consecutive victories in local jambalaya competitions.

Lamendola's offers not only grocery and fresh items, but also essential cooking equipment for cooks in South Louisiana.

A commitment to social causes, such as breast cancer awareness, is shown throughout regular fundraising efforts, assisting nonprofits. This is exhibited through yearly October fundraising and awareness tributes.

The history of Lamendola's is revered, but it is a forward-thinking approach that has allowed the store to thrive for 90 years, guided by compassionate leaders deeply rooted in their community.

The fifth generation isn't far behind, with Daphne's son Easton already learning the business, absorbing the knowledge and traditions passed down through his family and the store he grew up in.





# Congratulations to Our **Exceptional Independents** **Award Winners for 2026!**

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## NuNu's

NuNu's is redefining what a local market can be. Last year, NuNu's opened its third location – a 33,000-square-foot market in Maurice, Louisiana, that was built to serve as a production hub for a variety of high-volume items for the company's other locations in Scott and Youngsville, Louisiana.

The Maurice store has a 1,750-square-foot industrial kitchen, with an abundance of refrigeration and specialized appliances to prepare batch foods. The old store totaled 5,000 square feet and had 11 parking spaces; this location has 200. The company once employed 13 people, and now there are 95 – with a team of 21 working in the deli.

Known for its best-selling specialty item, boudin, NuNu's planned this space to expand production exponentially. The company is prepared for the future and designed for gradual expansion.

The layout of the store has taken a forward-thinking approach. It allows for a divided kitchen space, avoiding cross-contamination. The front-end consumer-facing counter has its own refrigeration and Rational oven to keep the daily deli department lines flowing without interrupting kitchen production.

NuNu's is changing the way grocery stores are perceived. It is trailblazing in its efforts to create an experience for today's shoppers and adding personalized touches.

The décor package boosts the experiences of not only family but that of the community. Design combines modern function with rustic charm- "country chic" details like wood, galvanized metal and barn-inspired décor.



## Piggly Wiggly 310

Before Piggly Wiggly, Ashley and Missy Thompson owned a car-crushing business. Today, they are crushing it as independent grocery retailers.

The couple purchased their first grocery store in September 2010 in Ellabell, Georgia. In 2026, they plan to open their fifth location.

Early on, as single-store owners, Ashley Thompson managed the market and produce departments, while Missy Thompson oversaw the rest of the store. And grocery has become a family event for the Thompsons. Coming up on 20 years of marriage they are thrilled to have their son, Cole, on staff.

Their business philosophy centers on building relationships first: "Make friends now and make money later" is how they sum it up – and they've done both. They focus on growing sales by noticing loyal shoppers' buying patterns and finding ways to grow those basket sizes. They have reached out to customers to offer discounts and incentives for large purchases, which has led to even larger baskets.

The Thompsons prioritize employee respect and friendliness. Over the years, they have taken several employees under their mentorship to help them grow in their profession and find their passions. In fact, they have stepped up to help employees financially with schooling and personal development, even when some of them planned a career outside of grocery.

Employees are part of the larger community, and the Thompsons want them, their friends and families as long-term customers. They look for ways to leverage employee strengths by placing them in appropriate roles.

The employee benefits they offer include a 401(k), health insurance, dental, vision, paid vacation, personal days and an employee discount that is extended to the parents of employees who are minors.

The Thompsons work to enrich the communities around their stores. They participate in a variety of charitable events with local schools and booster clubs. In 2021 they started



working with Second Harvest and WJCL Turkey Drive. They distributed 1,665 turkeys this year, significantly up from about 300 in 2021.

They also contribute to the Sheriff's Boys & Girls Club Christmas Gift drive. Missy Thompson's grandfather was a veteran. When she heard the local group who put out flags for veterans didn't have enough funds, she stepped in and provided the needed funding.

The Thompsons are particularly proud of their hot line, fried chicken and hometown butchers, saying these differentiate them from the larger stores. However, anyone who works with or shops there can attest that it is their attitudes toward life and people that make them exceptional independent retailers.

# Congratulations

to *The Shelby Report's*

## EXCEPTIONAL INDEPENDENTS

Award Winners



**Arteaga's Food Center**

**Piggly Wiggly 310**

**Oliver's Market**

**Chester's Markets**

**Border Town**

**Vallarta Supermarkets**

**McKay's Markets**

**Savers Cost Plus**

**Harvest Market IGA**

**Piggly Wiggly 191**

**G&E / Hocker's Supermarket**

**Seabra Foods**

**Piggly Wiggly 272**

**Clements' Marketplace**

**Lewis Food Town**

**Oleson's Food Stores**

**Food Depot & Extra Supermarkets**

**Teloloapan Meat Market**

**Polly's Country Markets**

**Rudy's Markets Inc.**

**Fresh Encounter, Inc.**



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## Publix Supermarkets

Since its founding in 1930 by George Jenkins, Lakeland, Florida-based Publix has set itself apart as an exceptional independent grocer through its unwavering commitment to associate relations, customer service and community support. These values, deeply rooted in the company's culture, have guided Publix for more than 95 years and continue to define its success today.

### Associate relations

Publix is the largest employee-owned company in the United States. Associates are the owners, a benefit for both their working and retirement years. They are the heart of the company and with more than 265,000 associates across eight states working in retail, support, manufacturing and distribution, the company strives to foster a culture of opportunity, teamwork and respect for all. Publix supports and encourages associate well-being through five drivers: financial health, physical health, mental and emotional health, social connectedness and career engagement.

Training and development programs ensure associates are equipped to grow within the organization, and the company's focus on promoting from within creates a



sense of loyalty and pride. This strong culture translates into a positive work environment and a team that is genuinely invested in providing exceptional service to customers.

### Customer service

Publix's customer service is a cornerstone of its reputation. The company's motto, "Where Shopping is a Pleasure," is more than a slogan; it's a promise. It is dedicated to growth, opening 43 new stores in 2024. That year, Publix also remodeled nearly 10 percent of all retail operations so customers would continue to enjoy a clean, beautiful and welcoming environment.

The company strives to expand product and service offerings and innovate technological solutions to enhance the shopping experience. Associates are trained to greet customers, assist them proactively and are encouraged to go above and beyond to meet their needs. Whether it's walking a customer to an item, offering to special order an out-of-stock product, or taking groceries out to the car, associates consistently deliver thoughtful, personalized service. Publix's commitment to keeping stores clean, well-stocked and friendly further sets it apart. This dedication to service builds lasting relationships and trust with customers, many of whom become lifelong shoppers. This leads to customers raving about "My Publix."

### Community support

Publix's impact extends far beyond its stores. The company is committed to supporting the communities it serves through philanthropy, volunteerism and environmental stewardship.



Publix holds annual campaigns to raise funds for organizations like United Way, Special Olympics, Children's Miracle Network and March of Dimes. It has donated more than 1 billion pounds of food to Feeding America partner food banks and other nonprofits since the inception of its Good Together Food Donation Program.

Publix Serves is the company's community service program. Thousands of associates volunteer together at local nonprofits each year during planned events. Environmental sustainability is another priority, with initiatives ranging from funding tree plantings and wetland restoration to supporting sustainable seafood practices.

Publix's exceptionalism as an independent grocer is built on a foundation of caring for associates, delighting its customers and lifting up communities. By staying true to these principles, Publix has created a unique and enduring legacy, one where people always come first and where shopping and working are a pleasure.



## Rouses Markets

Rouses Markets was started by Anthony J. Rouse Sr., "Mr. Tony," in 1960. It is now one of the largest independent grocers and fastest growing family-owned companies in the United States. Donny Rouse, the current CEO, is the third generation to run the company.

Rouses has more than 7,000 employees and serves customers across three states: Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama. Rouses has 76 stores: 64 in Louisiana, four in Mississippi and eight in Lower Alabama.

Rouses' strength is its ability to know customers. The company's seafood, meat and produce departments are unique to the area. They strive to provide what customers want and need.

Supplied by Associated Wholesale Grocers' Pearl River division, Rouses is about more than just good prices. The company values its customers, vendors and teams and is an excellent corporate citizen.



## Seabra Foods

Seabra Foods is a distinguished nominee for the Exceptional Independents Awards, illustrating how a specialty grocer can leverage modern technology to deepen community ties.

By integrating a rewards program into its operations in Florida for the first time, Seabra Foods has successfully bridged the gap between its rich heritage as a family-owned business and the digital expectations of the contemporary shopper.

This adoption of advanced loyalty technology allows the company to better understand and serve the diverse customer base that relies on them for authentic ethnic products.





## Congratulations to The Shelby Report's 2026 Exceptional Independents

You are the backbone of your communities and the driving force behind independent grocery. The early mornings, long days, and commitment you bring to your stores make a meaningful difference for the families who rely on you every day.

Through your leadership and dedication, you create welcoming spaces, keep shelves stocked, support local teams, and strengthen the neighborhoods you serve. Your impact goes far beyond transactions; it's about trust, service, and community.

From all of us at LOC Software, thank you for your passion and perseverance. We are proud to stand beside you and celebrate everything you have accomplished today and in the future.



LOC Software is proud to continue to sponsor the Exceptional Independents Awards presented at The NGA Show.

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## Sedano's

For more than 60 years, Sedano's has been a pillar of South and Central Florida's grocery landscape, a family-owned, independent operator that has grown from a single storefront in Hialeah to the nation's largest Hispanic-owned grocer.

What has remained constant through every expansion, remodel and new initiative is Sedano's commitment to its communities, people and customers.

Sedano's continues to reinvest in its stores and operations to meet the evolving needs of today's multicultural shopper. The company has completed multi-store remodels focused on modern design, enhanced wayfinding, expanded prepared foods and improved checkout experiences.

In 2025, Sedano's accelerated its technology investments to ensure it continues to meet the needs of customers and employees. The company's promise is to offer the foods that allow shoppers to continue their traditions and cultures, while creating operational efficiencies that support the best possible pricing.

Beyond innovation and infrastructure, Sedano's is embedded in every neighborhood it serves. Its "Season of Giving" campaign, now an annual tradition, supports thousands of families each holiday season through meal bundles, food pantry donations and surprise gift cards at checkout.

Sedano's partners with more than a dozen local nonprofits, from feeding programs and faith-based organizations to grassroots community groups, ensuring food donations stay

within the neighborhoods where they are collected.

The company's year-round philanthropy includes school partnerships, youth sports support, cultural event sponsorships and emergency relief efforts during times of crisis.

Sedano's also takes pride in lifting up its people. Many team members have risen from entry-level roles to leadership positions, reflecting a strong culture of training, mentorship and growth. With its diverse, multigenerational workforce, the grocer continues to create new pathways for skill development and long-term retention for its employees.

As an independent operator, Sedano's distinguishes itself by staying true to its roots while evolving with the communities it serves. Its stores are more than retail spaces; they are gathering places where culture, flavor and tradition intersect.

Sedano's listens to its customers, adapting assortments to heritage cuisines, emerging food trends and local preferences. This customer-centric approach has earned the company generations of loyalty and recognition as a trusted community anchor.

In every facet of the business, from operational and technological modernization to community investment and employee empowerment, Sedano's sets a high standard for what an exceptional independent grocer can be.

The company's ability to innovate while preserving the heart and values of a family-run business makes Sedano's not only a leader in the Hispanic grocery sector but also a model of independent grocery excellence nationwide.



## St. Pierre Supermarket/dba Delaune's Supermarket

Craig St. Pierre is the owner of St. Pierre Supermarket/dba Delaune's Supermarket, which he bought in January 2017.

Prior to owning and running a grocery store, he worked for Baton Rouge Coca-Cola for 22 years, calling on Delaune's Supermarket as one of his customers. Although St. Pierre had told the former owner of his interest in buying the business whenever it came on the market, he said he never actually imagined owning a grocery store.

A couple years into his ownership, COVID-19 happened. With the increase in sales that the grocery industry experienced, St. Pierre said he felt he needed – and could afford – to undertake some store upgrades.

In 2020, he started remodeling the office and front end, then replaced store shelving, flooring, ceiling tiles, store decor and the air-conditioning system. These improvements were made in the following three years, which changed the whole feel of the store.

Customers experienced a warmer feel, cleaner appearance and more pleasant shopping experience.

In 2024, he made the decision to invest in electronic shelf tags – the first Associated Grocers of Baton Rouge store to do so. The tags add to the clean feel of the store, but more importantly streamline the antiquated procedure of hanging paper tags.

All these upgrades have helped the supermarket to do what St. Pierre strives to do every day – serve and support the community. Customers are the reason the store exists and he wants it to do its best to be there rain or shine, hurricane or snowstorm.

"Our customers know us, and we know them," St. Pierre said. "We keep our customers informed by putting out a Facebook video with highlights of weekly sales and announcing our giveaways."

"We are committed to supporting our local volunteer fire department, community food pantries and our local schools as much as we can. As an independent supermarket, we are the backbone of our community, and we take that responsibility seriously. We love our community, and it shows."



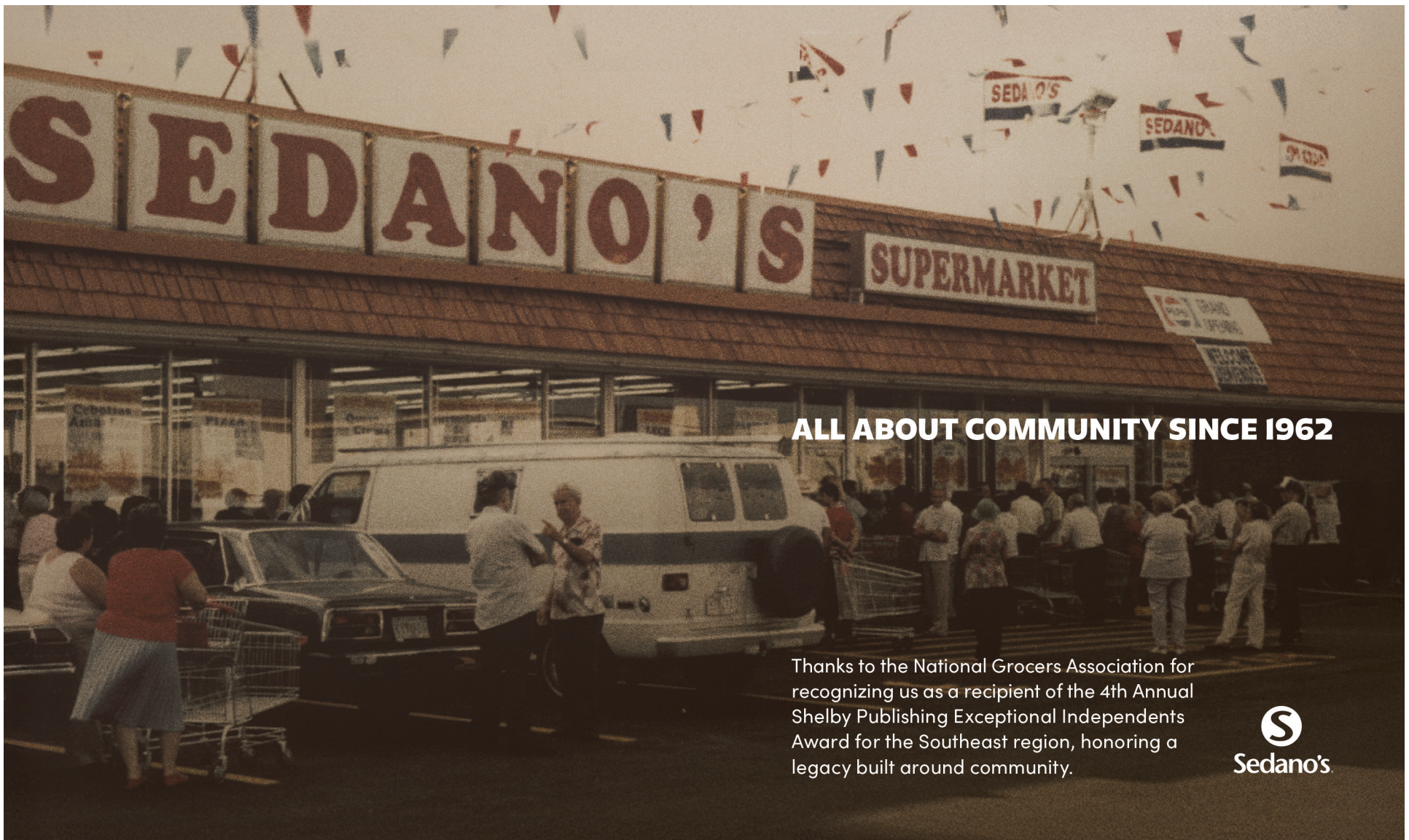
# Turnip Truck Natural Market

After being inspired by a small co-op that emphasized locally farm-grown and -raised products, John Dyke knew the people in his community of Nashville, Tennessee, could benefit from a similar establishment.

In May 2001, Turnip Truck was born with the purpose of providing the highest-quality goods that empower people to be their best selves. In January 2025, Dyke opened his fourth – and largest – location to date at the original site of the co-op that planted the seed.

The new location not only represents a milestone for the company but is a reflection of the commitment to enriching and serving neighboring communities. With the addition of the new location, Turnip Truck has extended its impact and created more opportunities for the 100-plus local brands it carries.

Turnip Truck Natural Market has truly become a Nashville staple for those who care about community, transparency and independence.



**ALL ABOUT COMMUNITY SINCE 1962**

Thanks to the National Grocers Association for recognizing us as a recipient of the 4th Annual Shelby Publishing Exceptional Independents Award for the Southeast region, honoring a legacy built around community.





## ***Shelby Publishing's salute to 'backbone of our industry'***



On the following pages, Shelby Publishing is proud to present its fourth annual Exceptional Independents Awards. Nominations were open to independent retailers, wholesalers and technology and other service providers.

"Independents are the backbone of our industry, and this awards program is an opportunity to recognize them for their contributions," said Stephanie Reid, Shelby president and COO.

"Independents are a vital part of their communities and lead the way in caring for their customers. Our Exceptional Independents Awards shine a light on these businesses that continue to help feed our communities."

Coverage of the award winners will appear by region in the March editions of *The Shelby Report of the Midwest*, *The Shelby Report of the Southeast*, *The Shelby Report of the Southwest*, *The Shelby Report of the West* and *The Griffin Report of the Northeast*. Award winners also will be featured on [theshelbyreport.com](http://theshelbyreport.com).

# Border Town Foods

Border Town Foods was founded in 2006 in Roma, Texas, by Armando and Dalinda Peña, who were later joined by their children to make it a true family enterprise.

From one store, the company has grown to 15 locations across the Rio Grande Valley. Known for fresh meat, produce and Hispanic groceries, Border Town Foods reflects the culture and traditions of the RGV.

Guided by the philosophy "by family, for family," the stores have become community hubs and trusted independent grocers, thriving against larger chains through resilience, dedication and a deep commitment to serving local needs.

Border Town Foods stands as an example of how independent grocers can succeed by blending entrepreneurial spirit with cultural authenticity. Its history is a testament to perseverance, family unity and the power of community connection.



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**BROOKSHIRE**  
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2025 Exceptional  
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## Brookshire Grocery Co.

In 2025, Brookshire Grocery Co. celebrated 97 years of service with major growth and continued investment in its employee-partners and communities.

A newly constructed Super 1 Foods opened in Natchitoches, Louisiana, and a new Fresh by Brookshire's is opening this November in Longview, Texas. BGC also acquired two locations in the Oklahoma City area that have reopened as Fresh by Reasor's, bringing the Fresh banner to Oklahoma.

In addition, BGC acquired two Winn-Dixie store locations in Baton Rouge and St. George, Louisiana. Following brief closings, both reopened as Super 1 Foods as the company continues to expand its footprint across the region.

In addition to opening new stores, BGC has continued remodeling efforts, with more than 44 stores updated in the past three years.

BGC reached several milestones in 2025, including the reopening of Brookshire's Wildlife Museum in Tyler, Texas. Its return has been met with enthusiasm from first-time visitors and longtime residents alike, celebrating the wonder of wildlife from around the world.

BGC has provided several opportunities for its more than 17,500 employees for development and advancement while also creating a diverse and welcoming work environment.

For the sixth consecutive year, BGC was certified as a Great Place to Work, based on partner feedback. The company hosted a leadership academy for store directors, offering tools for building strong teams and thriving stores.



The company also invested in developing and implementing special training and education programs, including the Dollars for Scholars initiative, which provided tuition assistance to working students. In 2025, BGC completed a raise retention initiative, improving retention by 20 percent.

It also launched the Brookshire Communities Foundation, which supports local charitable organizations focused on hunger relief, education, health and wellness, family well-being and programs benefiting first responders, military members and veterans.

BGC hosted the inaugural Sip and Savor Food and Wine Event on Sept. 11. More than 300 guests helped raise more than \$38,000 for the foundation.

BGC's long-standing Giving Back program continued to make an impact, raising more than \$817,700. The 12th annual Fresh 15 race sold out, collecting a record-breaking \$230,000 for local nonprofits.

The 35th annual BGC Golf Tournament brought in nearly \$1 million, raising the event's lifetime total to nearly \$10 million since 1988.

BGC also hosted five First Responder Luncheons and donated \$130,000 to support local police, fire and military organizations.

As BGC approaches its 100th year, the company remains dedicated to its mission of serving others through growth, opportunity and community giving – continuing a legacy built on care, commitment and excellence.



## Camino a Verte Supermarket

Camino a Verte Supermarket in McAllen, Texas, is redefining what an independent grocery store can be.

Built on a regenerative philosophy that elevates the dignity of agricultural work and reduces food waste across the supply chain, CAV has emerged as a standout operator through its strategic investment in infrastructure, modern operations, community engagement and employee development.

Its mission is simple yet ambitious – ensure that every product with value reaches the people who can appreciate it, even when it does not fit traditional retail standards.

One of CAV's strongest qualifications is its commitment to responsible sourcing and regenerative retail practices. The company prioritizes the purchase of "second-chance produce" – high-quality fruits and vegetables that would otherwise go unused due to aesthetic imperfections.

To support this approach, CAV has invested in upgraded cold chain handling, enhanced receiving procedures and a tailored inventory management structure designed for produce with variable grading. These operational improvements allow CAV to minimize shrink, ensure optimal freshness and offer customers nutritious food at fair prices.

CAV also has invested heavily in store infrastructure and customer experience, creating grocery environments that

feel warm, human and community centered. Each store is designed to serve as a welcoming neighborhood hub, balancing efficiency with approachability.

Open layouts, intuitive product flow and clean, natural visual elements help customers connect with the purpose behind the store: valuing food for its story, its origin and its potential – not just its appearance.

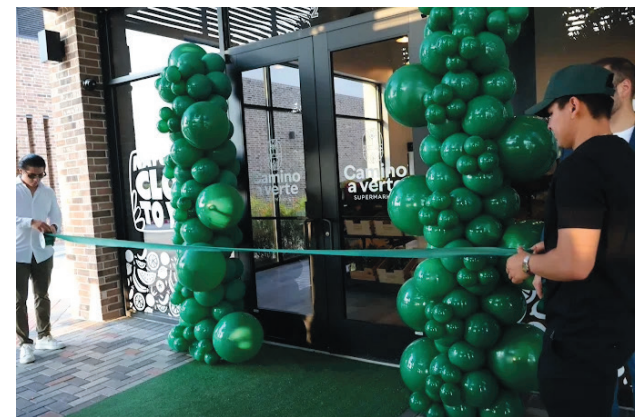
CAV's impact extends well beyond its walls. The company plays an active role in supporting growers by offering a consistent retail outlet for produce that traditional buyers often reject. This not only increases grower income but also reduces waste in regional supply chains.

Within its surrounding neighborhoods, CAV partners with community organizations to promote nutrition awareness, food access and responsible consumption.

Through produce donations, educational workshops and local engagement events, the store has become an ally for families seeking quality food and a connection to their food sources.

A defining strength of CAV is its investment in employee training and advancement. Team members receive comprehensive education on produce handling, food quality, customer service and the principles behind CAV's regenerative mission.

They learn not only how to manage inventory or assist customers but also



how to communicate the value inherent in each item the store carries. Structured growth pathways, leadership development and cross-training opportunities empower employees to build long-term careers within the organization.

Many come from the same communities the store serves, creating a cycle of local inclusion and upward mobility that strengthens the brand from within. Camino a Verte exemplifies what makes independent grocers essential to the fabric of their communities.

Through deliberate investments in infrastructure, thoughtful operational innovation and a sincere commitment to people – growers, customers and employees – CAV demonstrates how a grocery store can be both sustainable and deeply human.



# Congratulations

to *The Shelby Report's*

## EXCEPTIONAL INDEPENDENTS

Award Winners



**Arteaga's Food Center**

**Piggly Wiggly 310**

**Oliver's Market**

**Chester's Markets**

**Border Town**

**Vallarta Supermarkets**

**McKay's Markets**

**Savers Cost Plus**

**Harvest Market IGA**

**Piggly Wiggly 191**

**G&E / Hocker's Supermarket**

**Seabra Foods**

**Piggly Wiggly 272**

**Clements' Marketplace**

**Lewis Food Town**

**Oleson's Food Stores**

**Food Depot & Extra Supermarkets**

**Teloloapan Meat Market**

**Polly's Country Markets**

**Rudy's Markets Inc.**

**Fresh Encounter, Inc.**



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## Lewis Food Town

Lewis Food Town is an exemplary candidate for an Exceptional Independents Award due to its forward-thinking approach to operations and technology.

By leveraging personalized marketing, shopper analytics and digital coupons, this grocer has transformed its marketing strategies into actionable insights that directly benefit the customer.



## Pay and Save Inc./dba Lowe's Markets and Food King

Littlefield, Texas-based Pay and Save Inc./dba Lowe's Markets and Food King launched the Lowe's Retail Media Network to provide vendors with a modern, data-driven way to reach high-intent grocery shoppers across its independently owned store footprint.

Designed to bring enterprise-level retail media capabilities to local and rural markets, the RMN connects vendors with shoppers through a mix of onsite and offsite channels, including in-store digital screens, in-store audio, displays for company truck gas pumps, digital flyers, website and app placements, email newsletters and programmatic advertising.

The RMN operates on flexible, 14-day advertising cycles available year-round, allowing vendors to align promotions with seasonal priorities, product launches and key retail moments. Vendors gain access to more than 2 million shoppers across Lowe's Markets, including 510,000 active digital coupon and app users, ensuring messaging reaches engaged customers before and during the shopping trip.

To drive stronger conversion, vendor coupon offers were fully integrated into the program. When available, promotional offers were featured directly in Lowe's weekly ad and activated as digital coupons within the Lowe's app, making it easy for shoppers to discover, save and redeem offers across multiple touchpoints throughout their path to purchase.

The campaign, which started May 21, 2025, is ongoing and includes 146 stores. It was developed by first mapping how Lowe's Market shoppers interact with media throughout their path to purchase, from pre-trip planning to in-store decision-making.

To support efficient execution at scale, Lowe's partnered with Adsta to create a centralized vendor portal that streamlined the collection, management and distribution of advertising assets.

This system ensured creative consistency and timely delivery across all participating partners, including Webstop for website placements, AR Marketing for digital media activation and Lowe's internal teams for in-store audio and physical media.

Lowe's also partnered with AR Marketing to oversee digital distribution and support vendors without internal creative capabilities. In these cases, AR Marketing developed placement-specific, RMN-ready artwork, lowering barriers to participation and allowing vendors of all sizes to engage in the program.

Campaigns were structured around standardized 14-day cycles, enabling consistent activation, optimization and reporting across the year. Performance reporting was embedded into every campaign, providing vendors with clear visibility into impressions, engagement and sales impact while allowing Lowe's to continuously refine placements and targeting.

The Lowe's Retail Media Network quickly demonstrated measurable success across shopper engagement and sales performance in its first year of launch. As part of the RMN offering, each participating vendor is guaranteed more than 4 million impressions per campaign, delivered through a combination of onsite and in-store placements.

The results: 4.3 million total impressions across digital and in-store channels; 818,000 digital impressions; access to 1.7 million shopper visits and 510,000 engaged coupon and app users; and a 32 percent average sales lift.





## Congratulations to The Shelby Report's 2026 Exceptional Independents

You are the backbone of your communities and the driving force behind independent grocery. The early mornings, long days, and commitment you bring to your stores make a meaningful difference for the families who rely on you every day.

Through your leadership and dedication, you create welcoming spaces, keep shelves stocked, support local teams, and strengthen the neighborhoods you serve. Your impact goes far beyond transactions; it's about trust, service, and community.

From all of us at LOC Software, thank you for your passion and perseverance. We are proud to stand beside you and celebrate everything you have accomplished today and in the future.



LOC Software is proud to continue to sponsor the Exceptional Independents Awards presented at The NGA Show.

**1 (450) 663-6327** **[locsoftware.com](http://locsoftware.com)**

## Savers Cost Plus

Established in 1987 in Irving, Texas, Savers Cost Plus was created to introduce a fresh supermarket concept to the region. The “Cost Plus” format focused on delivering groceries and household essentials at competitive prices, while providing customers with a straightforward, value-driven shopping experience.

Over the years, Savers Cost Plus expanded to five locations across the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex, becoming a trusted destination for working families and budget-conscious shoppers. The stores emphasize affordable groceries, fresh produce and household goods, consistently meeting the everyday needs of their communities.



Savers Cost Plus has grown into a community-focused supermarket, serving diverse neighborhoods in Dallas and the surrounding areas. Today, it continues to operate as a regional independent grocer, recognized for its affordability and customer-first approach.

Its history reflects nearly four decades of resilience, adapting to changing retail trends while remaining true to its mission of providing accessible groceries and household essentials to local communities.



## Teloloapan Meat Market

Teloloapan Meat Market of Houston, Texas, was nominated for an Exceptional Independents Award for its commitment to the communities it serves and leveraging innovative technology.

Family-owned and operated by second-generation owners the Ayala sisters, the markets have become a cornerstone for neighborhoods often considered food deserts.

The mission is simple yet powerful – ensure local families have access to fresh produce, quality meats and authentic specialty products at fair prices. From custom cuts of meat to handmade tortillas, tamales and soups, the sisters create a unique, culturally rich shopping experience that feels like home.

Beyond providing food, the Ayala family gives back through initiatives like back-to-school events, helping underserved families with essential supplies and meals. The sisters’ dedication to community care is at the heart of everything they do.



This commitment is complemented by a forward-thinking approach to technology. The sisters have modernized operations with ECRS’ Catapult POS system and built a loyalty program to reward customers.

They also have added automated processes in their fresh meat and hot bar departments using AutoScale for precise weighing and labeling that speeds up the checkout experience.

These innovations allow them to streamline business operations while enhancing the customer experience – ensuring that tradition and technology work hand in hand for the benefit of their community.



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**EIA** From page 1

Dirk Stricklin of Savers Cost Plus in Irving, Texas, described it as an “incredible honor.”

“Being included among so many dedicated independent operators was a reminder that this journey is more than a business; it is a mission that truly matters,” Stricklin said. “It renewed our commitment to continue serving with gratitude, humility and heart.”

Marc and Brenda Lois of Lois Family Piggly Wiggly No. 191 in Kenosha, Wisconsin, were surprised to receive the recognition in their first year of ownership.

“[It] reflects the strength of our community and the shared commitment to caring for our neighbors,” they said. “To us, this is a huge accomplishment and inspires us to continue giving back and serving our community.”

“Our customers have complimented us on this recognition and are proud to help where they can in order to be part of our network to serve Kenosha.”

Lupe Lopez of Arteaga’s Food Center in San Jose, California, said the recognition reflects a “mission rooted in love, resilience and true partnerships” with farmers, manufacturers and others in the industry.

“It honors the countless hours, challenges and personal sacrifices we all make,” Lopez said. “More than an award, it symbolizes the shared hard work, the common commitment to serving communities, and strengthening local economies. This honor reinforces our commitment to lead with integrity and purpose.”

Maggie Kaepfel, VP Publisher at Shelby Publishing, said the awards program was successful.

“Our exceptional independents were honored to receive the award. The unique shape of the trophy represents the blood, sweat and tears of our independent retail grocers,” Kaepfel said.

“These retailers work hard to feed and support their customers and communities across the U.S. We are thrilled to present this award to our independent retailers and to honor their amazing efforts.”

The awards program is made possible through the support of industry sponsors who share a commitment to the independent grocery sector.

“I am proud to be a sponsor of the Shelby Exceptional Independents at NGA,” said Caroline Catoe, president of ECRS, a four-year sponsor of the awards.

“These independents represent strong businesses – often family-owned – that continue to make waves in our grocery industry. Being able to honor their effort and celebrate them at the show is one of my favorite parts of the week.”

LOC Software, a fellow fourth-year sponsor, also hailed the winners. René Stai, head of marketing, said the company’s sponsorship is “an opportunity to celebrate the retailers who truly define the strength” of the industry.

“At LOC Software, we work alongside independent operators every day,” Stai said. “We see firsthand the discipline it takes to manage margins, lead teams, adopt new technologies and still deliver the personal service that sets independents apart.”

“Sponsoring the EIA Awards is our way of honoring that commitment and reinforcing our dedication to supporting their success. It’s much more than sponsorship, it’s partnership. We are proud to stand behind the retailers who continue to raise the standard for excellence in grocery.”

A third sponsor, C&S Family of Companies/SpartanNash, shared similar sentiments.

In a statement, the company said the EIA program is a “great opportunity to highlight these independent retailer communities and feature their exemplary achievements on a national stage.”

The event, C&S said, provides retailers with a “prestigious national opportunity for recognition of their dedication, commitment and valuable community initiatives at an industry celebration.”

The following companies in the Southwest were recognized:

- **Texas** – Border Town, Roma; Brookshire Grocery Co., Tyler; Camino A Verte Supermarket, McAllen; Lewis Food Town, Houston; Pay and Save Inc./dba Lowe’s Market and Food King, Littlefield; Savers Cost Plus, Irving; and Teloloapan Meat Market, Houston.



Jose Luis Guzman Paredes, manager of EIA recipient Camino A Verte Supermarket in McAllen, Texas



Matt Corbin, director of EIA recipient Pay and Save Inc./dba Lowe’s Markets and Food King in Littlefield, Texas



Dirk Stricklin, president and CEO of EIA recipient Savers Cost Plus in Irving, Texas

**SUPPLIERS**

**Topco Associates LLC names new board chairman, shares leadership updates**

Topco Associates LLC elected Michael D’Amour, president and CEO of Big Y Foods, as board chairman during the cooperative’s Annual Membership Conference.

D’Amour, who previously served as vice chairman, succeeds Steve Smith, president and CEO of K-VA-T Food Stores Inc., whose two-year term as chairman expired following the conference. Smith remains on the board as a director.

“I am truly honored for the opportunity to continue serving on Topco’s board of directors as board chairman,” D’Amour said. “I look forward to continuing to strengthen our partnership within the membership as we further drive our shared strategic vision for Topco.”

D’Amour brings deep roots in the industry and Topco. The grandson of Big Y co-founder Paul D’Amour, he began working in the family’s supermarkets as a

teenager before joining full time in 1996.

Big Y has been a Topco member since 1991. D’Amour also served on the operations team for more than 20 years and sits on the board of FMI – The Food Industry Association.

Topco President and CEO Randy Skoda credited Smith’s tenure before welcoming D’Amour’s appointment. “We thank Steve for his stewardship and leadership of Topco’s Board of Directors over the past two years,” Skoda said.

“We look forward to Michael’s oversight of the strategic direction of the Topco board of directors and to advancing the strength, innovation and collective success of independent grocery retailer and wholesale member-owners.”

Smith’s history with Topco spans nearly three decades. He joined the board in 1999 and previously served as chairman from 2003-07 and 2011-13, and as vice chairman from 2022-24.

Member-owners unanimously approved a slate of directors for two-year terms.

In addition to D’Amour and Smith the full board includes: Chris Coborn (Coborn’s Inc.); Dan Funk (Associated Wholesale Grocers); Brian George (Alex Lee Inc.); John Persons (Northeast Grocery Inc.); David Rice (Associated Food Stores); Todd Schnuck (Schnuck Market); Skoda (Topco Associates); Pete Van Helden (Stater Bros. Markets); and Eric Winn (C&S Wholesale Grocers).

The conference also brought changes to Topco’s

operations team.

Manard Lagasse, Topco’s EVP and COO, was appointed co-chair alongside Rebecca Calvin, EVP and CMO at Stater Bros. Markets. The team advises on decisions that maximize Topco’s value as a strategic resource for its member-owners.

The rest of the operations team includes: Nick Albrecht (The Fred W. Albrecht Grocery Co.); Tye Anthony (Associated Wholesale Grocers); Randy Arceneaux (Affiliated Foods Inc.); Tanya Carlson (Coborn’s Inc.); Michael Cormier (Big Y Foods); Jeff Culhane (Northeast Grocery Inc.); Bob Gleeson (Weis Markets); Dan Gleib (K-VA-T Food Stores); Kim Gray (Schnuck Markets); Tom Hermes (Alex Lee Inc./MDI); Glen Keysaw (Associated Food Stores); Jerry LeClair (Brookshire Holdings Inc.); and Mark McGowan (C&S Wholesale Grocers).



2026 Topco Associates Board of Directors



2026 Topco Associates Operations Team

# Cheers to Brookshire's!

Hiland Dairy congratulates Brookshire's on receiving  
The Shelby Report's Exceptional Independents Award.

This recognition honors independent retailers who lead with innovation,  
dedication, and a deep commitment to the communities they serve — values  
that matter to us as a local dairy and proud partner.

We're honored to support Brookshire's and the important role they play in  
strengthening the communities we share.



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## Shelby Publishing's salute to 'backbone of our industry'

On the following pages, Shelby Publishing is proud to present its fourth annual Exceptional Independents Awards. Nominations were open to independent retailers, wholesalers and technology and other service providers.

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### Arteaga's Food Center

Arteaga's is one of the top Latino grocery stores, taquerias and carnicerias in Northern California. For more than 30 years, it has remained a family-owned business dedicated to providing the highest-quality authentic products.

In 1972, Alfredo Lopez arrived in the United States from Mexico with a dream – to build a better life for his family. After years of hard work and dedication, Lopez opened his first grocery store in 1993 in Newark, California, originally named Chavez Meat Market.

As the business grew, he decided to honor his wife, Maria Guadalupe Lopez Arteaga, by renaming the store Arteaga's Food Center. From a single store, the Lopez family has expanded Arteaga's to nine locations across Northern California, embodying the American Dream.

Today, Arteaga's is still a family business, run with love and dedication by Lopez's wife, children and grandchildren. They proudly carry on his legacy, serving communities with fresh, quality food and genuine hospitality because their customers are part of the family, too.



### Barons Market

Barons Market is a family-owned and -operated natural, organic and specialty food grocery store in Southern California that is known for its unique and exciting customer experience.

Barons has extended that experience to the littlest shoppers with the rollout of Fun Tours for Kiddos. Ideal for kids ages 4-11, teachers and parents bring the classroom to the grocery store for an engaging and fun behind-the-scenes look at how a neighborhood grocery store runs.

Kids learn about different kinds of produce, specifically where it comes from and what's in season. They get to squeeze their own orange juice and bring that bottle home to their families.

One of the most exciting parts of the tour is the back of the house, where kids get to check out the walk-in coolers and freezers. Customers on the store floor may hear the faint chants of "Crush it! Crush it! Crush it!" coming from the back, as the kids cheer on a Barons employee flattening boxes in the baler.

As the children walk through the rest of the store, they learn fun facts about each department while tasting healthy snacks. At the end of the tour, each child gets to take home a goody bag.

Over the past year, Barons Market has hosted 248 groups from classrooms to Girl Scouts and Little League teams. If local schools are interested in setting up a tour but have limited funds, Barons will work with the school district and pay for school buses to make the field trip happen.

Barons believes that all kids should have access to these tours. They are popular among parents, teachers and kids, but the best review came from a child who attended a Barons Market tour with his classroom, then left the next day to go on a trip to Disneyland with his family. The following week, he and his parents came to Barons to do their weekly food shopping and the boy proudly proclaimed that the store tour was more fun than his trip to Disneyland.



## Big Saver Foods

Big Saver Foods is a family-run grocery store chain consisting of eight stores located in Los Angeles and the greater L.A. marketing area that primarily focus on Hispanic and international consumers. It was founded in 1977 by Uka Solanki and his wife, Nalini.

Big Saver Foods has been remodeling stores for the past two years, custom-tailoring each one to best serve its neighborhood. The company is creatively adding new fresh categories, while maintaining a balance of ethically sourced and recognizable brand-name products.

Many of the stores are 15,000 square feet or smaller, so adding to their mix takes careful planning to meet everybody's expectations.



Big Saver offers a full assortment of fresh meat and produce, with many stores featuring artisan bakeries, tortillas and hot foods.

Big Saver Foods prides itself in giving back to communities by sponsoring consumer and educational events at stores. The Uka and Nalina Foundation donated funding to create the Yadunandan Center for India Studies regional center at Cal State Long Beach. It is named after Nalini Solanki's great-great grandfather, who was an advocate of education in northern India. The center engages with the history and culture of India and South Asia and the experience of the South Asian diaspora.

Along with charitable giving in the United States, the Solanki Foundation also established a girl's school in the city of Junagadh in Gujarat, India, where 1,200 girls a year are educated.



## Cambridge Farms

Cambridge Farms is located in Valley Village, part of Los Angeles County, California. It is a family-owned kosher grocery store celebrated for its selection of prepared foods, Kosher, fresh, organic and locally sourced products.

The store's contributions extend beyond donations, fostering a strong sense of unity in the community. Cambridge Farms also collaborates with local farmers to bring exclusive, seasonal produce to customers, reinforcing a commitment to supporting the agricultural community.

The store regularly organizes workshops on healthy eating, food preparation and sustainability. These events

not only educate the community but also strengthen the bond between Cambridge Farms and its customers.

The store's innovative approach to customer engagement includes loyalty programs, seasonal promotions and social media campaigns that keep customers informed and engaged.

Cambridge Farms is dedicated to the professional growth of its employees, offering training programs that emphasize customer service, food safety and sustainable



practices. They are encouraged to take part in training and development programs, ensuring a pathway for career advancement.

By fostering a positive work environment with competitive wages and benefits, the store ensures a motivated team that delivers exceptional service. The focus on employee

well-being extends to wellness initiatives, such as mental health support, creating a holistic and supportive workplace culture.



## Chavez Supermarkets

For over four decades, Chavez Supermarkets has exemplified what it means to be an independent grocer committed to excellence, innovation and community. From its humble beginnings in Redwood City, California, this family-owned business has grown to 11 thriving locations across Silicon Valley – each a vibrant hub for authentic Hispanic culture and quality products.

Chavez Supermarkets continually reinvests in modern store designs, advanced technology and locally sourced products to deliver an exceptional shopping experience. Its meat department and in-store taquerias showcase a perfect blend of tradition and innovation, offering customers fresh, authentic flavors they can trust.

Chavez Supermarkets is more than a retailer; it's a community partner. Through sponsorship of cultural events, charitable

initiatives and outreach programs, the company strengthens neighborhoods and celebrates Latino heritage. This commitment has garnered Chavez Supermarkets recognition as a trusted pillar of the community.

The company prioritizes its workforce by providing training, leadership development and career advancement opportunities. This investment fosters a culture of inclusivity and excellence, ensuring employees thrive while delivering outstanding service.

Voted "Best Place to Buy Latino Groceries in Silicon Valley" for nine consecutive years, Chavez Supermarkets stands as a beacon of quality, authenticity and community engagement. Its continued growth reflects a clear mission: to serve customers with the highest standards while honoring cultural traditions.



## Chester's Markets

Chester's Markets, a community grocer based in rural Oregon, is worthy of the Exceptional Independents Award due to its significant investment in operations and technology, deep commitment to community involvement and dedication to providing essential services in underserved areas.

Operating in rural areas such as John Day, Lincoln Beach and Pacific City, Chester's Markets goes beyond a typical grocery store. It acts as a vital hub for these towns, especially where big-box retailers are miles away.

Recognizing the community's reliance on the stores, Chester's has expanded inventory, such as adding a variety department to the John Day location, providing essential household goods that would otherwise require long-distance travel for residents. This is a direct investment in the community's convenience and quality of life.

The stores also emphasize personal, friendly service, where most customers are greeted by name. The leadership, including owner Bob Cowan-Thompson, have built

a reputation on community involvement and local employment, fostering a strong sense of local ownership and dedication.

Chester's leadership has shown a forward-thinking approach by adopting new technologies to better serve loyal customers.

Recognizing the need to keep pace with technology, Chester's implemented an e-commerce and loyalty program through AppCard. This move was strategic, aiming to reward shoppers and encourage them to stay local rather than driving long distances to chain stores.

The investment in the loyalty program has proven successful, with AppCard members on average spending \$14 more and increasing their basket size by three items compared to non-members. This demonstrates a successful deployment of technology to enhance the customer experience and improve business performance.

Chester's values its employees, often promoting from



within and creating a supportive work environment.

The stores boast long-time employees, demonstrating a culture of employee retention and appreciation. At the same time, the promotion of staff members showcases the company's commitment to employee advancement and providing career opportunities.

Overall, Chester's Markets embodies the spirit of an exceptional independent grocer by acting as a pillar of Pacific Northwest communities; making strategic investments in stores and technology to better serve customers; and prioritizing a workplace that values employees.



# Congratulations to Our **Exceptional Independents** Award Winners for 2026!

ECRS proudly recognizes its award-winning retail partners who have revolutionized their operations with CATAPULT®.



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## Jons Marketplace

Jons Marketplace is a 13-store grocery chain based in Southern California. The first store opened in 1977 and Jons was one of the first chains to offer international food.

As Southern California demographics changed, the company was in step with them, living on its mission statement of:

- Quality you can taste
- Variety you can explore
- Value you can trust

Jons Marketplace stores feature produce, meat, seafood, dairy, bakery and floral departments. They also boast an international service deli and a wide selection of grocery items.



All stores have been remodeled with an expanded focus on fresh, floral, bakery and better-for-you items, which are moving the needle despite the current economic conditions.

From kombucha to protein powders and non-dairy alternatives to plant-based meat substitutes, Jons Marketplace is working to take the lead in providing healthy foods to customers. Working with UNFI and other vendors and broker partners, the company's procurement team seeks out the latest and greatest natural, organic and specialty

items. Utilizing the UNFI Home Store program, schematics are updated and maintained regularly.

Jons Marketplace utilizes social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook to get the word out to about its products and services and offers delivery through Instacart and other platforms. Social media influencers help draw attention to the brands sold in-store.

Jons Marketplace donates school supplies to community schools. Many employees have decades of service with the company, adding to the positive workplace environment.



## KTA Stores

KTA Stores in Hilo, Hawaii, is an ideal recipient of the Exceptional Independents Award due to its dedication to supporting neighborhood charities.

The company's implementation of rewards technology extends beyond simple transactions, serving as a powerful tool to reinforce a century-long commitment to the community.

By utilizing technology, KTA Stores can seamlessly integrate charitable giving into the customer loyalty experience, making it easier for shoppers to support local causes that matter to them.



## Lucerne Valley Market & Hardware

The story of Lucerne Valley Market & Hardware in Lucerne Valley, California, cannot be told apart from the story of its founder, Ernie Gommel.

Gommel began working construction and carpentry with his contractor father before earning a civil engineering degree from the University of California at Berkeley. He then



climbed the corporate ladder at U.S. Steel and became president of Alberta Phoenix Tube and Pipe Co. in Canada.

He later received a degree from Christian Theological Seminary in Indianapolis and became a minister at a suburban church while operating two grocery stores before his death at age 91 in November 2012.

He and members of the small church he led learned the grocery business from scratch in the 1960s by operating the Hitchin Post Market in Reche Canyon, Colton, California. Lucerne Valley Market's first day of operation was March 10, 1975. The Hitchin Post was sold in 1981. Over the years, the Lucerne store was relocated to a new site, expanded and added new departments.

Today, it totals 33,000 square feet and serves customers with the same passion for God and customers/neighbors that has been the driving force over the years. The owners stated, "We like to think of it as a lighthouse in a darkening world, a place with special warmth and spirit that even those who come in for the first time can sense ... We pray that the store in its mission fulfills that calling."



## McKay's Markets

McKay's Markets, a cornerstone of the Pacific Northwest independent grocery scene, has distinguished itself through its commitment to community, employee ownership model and dedication to customer service. The company exemplifies what it means to be a true local resource, not just a retail outlet.

McKay's Market operates under an employee stock ownership plan (ESOP), a structure that directly ties the success of the business to the well-being of its team. This model fosters exceptional employee dedication and pride, which translates into the friendly and helpful customer service often cited by shoppers.

The longevity of managers – averaging more than 25 years with the company – further underscores a stable, valued workforce. This deep employee investment creates a hometown feel that large corporate chains cannot replicate.

Moreover, McKay's supports southern Oregon communities. Beyond being a major local employer, the company is involved in community events and fundraisers, including

holding an annual golf tournament whose proceeds benefit local food banks.

McKay's dedication to service is evident in its customer-centric offerings. Stores maintain a diverse selection of high-quality products, including fresh produce and gourmet deli items. They also are known for quality meats and hosting popular monthly "Meat Bonanza" sales.

The company has adapted to modern needs by offering online shopping via Instacart while catering to their elderly and non-tech-savvy customers with traditional cab order pickup services.

Finally, the company has made significant investments in energy-efficiency upgrades – installing LED lighting and cooler doors – that show a forward-thinking approach to sustainable operations. This not only lowers their operating costs but also makes the stores "more contemporary and inviting" for customers, proving that operational responsibility can go hand-in-hand with an improved shopping experience.

Overall, McKay's Markets is a successful,

multi-generational business that represents the very best of independent grocers. The company's ESOP model cultivates dedicated employees, its charitable giving and tailored services solidify community standing and the commitment to quality and modernization ensures a superior shopping experience.



# Congratulations

to *The Shelby Report's*

## EXCEPTIONAL INDEPENDENTS

Award Winners



**Arteaga's Food Center**

**Piggly Wiggly 310**

**Oliver's Market**

**Chester's Markets**

**Border Town**

**Vallarta Supermarkets**

**McKay's Markets**

**Savers Cost Plus**

**Harvest Market IGA**

**Piggly Wiggly 191**

**G&E / Hocker's Supermarket**

**Seabra Foods**

**Piggly Wiggly 272**

**Clements' Marketplace**

**Lewis Food Town**

**Oleson's Food Stores**

**Food Depot & Extra Supermarkets**

**Teloloapan Meat Market**

**Polly's Country Markets**

**Rudy's Markets Inc.**

**Fresh Encounter, Inc.**



*C&S Family  
of Companies*



**SpartanNash**

## Mollie Stone's Markets

In 1986 Mike Stone, the owner of Mollie Stone's Markets, opened what at the time was the largest natural food store in Northern California and named it after his late mother, Mollie, who worked in the grocery industry for 45 years.

The company's mission and values are inspired by all she represented. Like Mollie herself, it strives to "make a difference in people's lives through food."

The first market was in Redwood City, California, and carried only natural and organic products. The company soon realized that customers wanted a place where they could also get conventional necessities and popular name-brand products. Therefore, the concept of "best of both worlds" was born.

This marriage of necessity and passion shopping sets Mollie Stone's Markets apart from most. Its roots remain in healthy, natural and specialty foods.

Mollie Stone's buyers work closely with local producers around the greater San Francisco Bay Area to offer high quality products in every aisle. The goal is to surprise and delight customers.



## Okimoto Corp. – The Waianae Store and Nanakuli Super – Friendly Market Center

Okimoto Corp. was nominated for an Exceptional Independents Award for its ongoing commitment to community – no matter the challenge. Operating three stores in Hawaii, the Okimoto family exemplifies what it means to put people first.

When the Friendly Center Market on Molokai faced closure, they stepped in and purchased it – not for profit, but to ensure the community kept its local independent grocery store. That decision speaks volumes about their values and dedication.



Leadership runs deep in the Okimoto family. Kit Okimoto has proudly followed in his father's footsteps, serving as president of the Hawaii Food Industry Association and stepping up during his tenure as VP when the organization's previous president fell ill.

For generations, the Okimoto family has been a vital part of Hawaii, strengthening the fabric of communities through service and care.

In 2025, the family embraced innovation, modernizing operations with ECRS' Catapult platform. This leap into retail automation enabled rapid, data-driven decision-making through Catapult Cognition, streamlining processes and improving efficiency.

The commitment to learning and leveraging new technologies ensures Okimoto Corp. remains at the forefront of progress – while never losing sight of its mission to serve.

Okimoto Corp. is more than a retailer; it's a lifeline for communities, blending tradition, leadership and innovation to create a lasting impact.



## Oliver's Market

Oliver's Market has attained several new milestones as it marks its 37th year serving Sonoma County, California.

In October 2025, Oliver's marked its first anniversary as an employee stock ownership plan (ESOP) company. As the culture of employee ownership builds and account balances grow, the company is seeing improved employee retention and engagement.

This culminates when annual ESOP statements become available. Oliver's celebrate employees with a series of store parties, spirit days, raffles for prizes and gift cards and added discounts.

It has restructured ESOP education and communication systems this year with a new steering committee and collection of store representatives called the employee ownership crew, which implements a monthly series of activities designed to educate and build ESOP cultural engagement.

Oliver's Market commissioned and released an update on its economic study by Robert Eyler in which he explores the power of buying locally made products at a locally owned business.

As the company grows, the impacts become more significant. However, breaking it down with a \$100 grocery purchase illustration, it is clear to customers that many more of their dollars stay in the community, funding parks, roads and safety when they shop locally.

Oliver's Market has seen marked progress in the area of food recovery and landfill reduction. It was Sonoma County's first grocer to obtain Green Business certifications from the California Green Business Network in 2011, and sustainability remains a constant quest.

While sales have continued to grow annually, the amount of waste that Oliver's has sent to the landfill has dramatically decreased since 2020. This is a result of renewed

commitment, creativity and focus, all of which was sparked by changing California legislation.

Redwood Empire Food Bank became a food recovery partner in 2020, and Oliver's then added other certified partners and created better storage for food recovery in each of its stores. The full schedule of food recovery organization pickups and improved storage has paid off in several positive ways, reducing waste and related landfill costs and feeding more people in need.





## Congratulations to The Shelby Report's 2026 Exceptional Independents

You are the backbone of your communities and the driving force behind independent grocery. The early mornings, long days, and commitment you bring to your stores make a meaningful difference for the families who rely on you every day.

Through your leadership and dedication, you create welcoming spaces, keep shelves stocked, support local teams, and strengthen the neighborhoods you serve. Your impact goes far beyond transactions; it's about trust, service, and community.

From all of us at LOC Software, thank you for your passion and perseverance. We are proud to stand beside you and celebrate everything you have accomplished today and in the future.



LOC Software is proud to continue to sponsor the Exceptional Independents Awards presented at The NGA Show.

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## Pay-Less Markets

Since 1950, Pay-Less Markets has been Guam’s trusted local supermarket, providing quality products and services with the warmth of the Hâfa Adai spirit. Over the past 75 years, the company has grown from a single store into a multi-faceted business with eight grocery stores, six pharmacies, four floral shoppes, a wholesale distribution center and a security division.

Pay-Less continually reinvests in its operations to elevate the shopping experience, completing more than a dozen store renovations, including the recent transformation of its Sinajana location featuring sustainable equipment, energy-efficient lighting and design elements that honor the island’s heritage.

The company also strengthens Guam’s economy by lifting up homegrown businesses, partnering with local brands, supporting emerging vendors, serving as the island’s largest purchaser of local produce and maintaining a network of 247 local vendors.

Pay-Less leads in digital innovation through advanced in-store technology powered by BRData, upgraded back-end systems with PayCom and dynamic digital marketing through platforms such as Ideal Advertising.

Its Mâolek Rewards loyalty program, representing 80 percent of shoppers, offers exclusive rewards, digital coupons and personalized savings that enhance customer value and engagement.

At the heart of Pay-Less’ success is its people. Guided by the value of building a “family of valued and impassioned employees,” the company fosters a culture of mentorship, teamwork and growth, with many leaders advancing from within.

Continuous investment in training, including leadership development, customer service excellence, safety and compliance programs and educational courses, ensures employees are equipped to thrive in a dynamic retail environment.

Employee well-being is further supported through nutritional services, health fairs, the Health Smart Challenge, champions course trainings and internal sports leagues that promote camaraderie.

Recognition is embedded in the company culture through the Inafa’mâolek Awards, Service Excellence Awards, Employee of the Quarter and Year, Perfect Attendance recognitions, “In Li’e’ Hao (We See You)” peer acknowledgments and in-store competitions that celebrate teamwork.

Pay-Less also embodies the spirit of Inafa’maolek (to make good) by advancing community well-being through health, sustainability, education and charitable giving. Its Health Smart program empowers customers with the knowledge and resources to



make healthier choices, while eduKitchen offers cooking demonstrations that inspire nutritious living.

Through Go Green, Pay-Less champions sustainability by reducing waste and encouraging environmental responsibility. The Pay-Less Markets Community Foundation, established in 2006, supports initiatives in health, education, social services and the environment.

Its signature Kick the Fat 5K and 10K, Guam’s largest race, has raised more than \$185,000 for local nonprofits. The Circle of Care program provides free cancer support services for patients and caregivers, with 796 service attendances in 2024. Each year, Pay-Less donates over \$100,000 in financial and in-kind support to strengthen the island community.

As Pay-Less celebrates its 75th year through the “Pay-Less Kâpera (Journey)” campaign, it honors its proud legacy while charting a future rooted in innovation, sustainability and care for Guam and its people.



## Rosauers Markets

Rosauers Supermarket had its beginning in 1934 when J. Merton Rosauer, just out of school, bought a little grocery store on the corner of Sprague and Lee streets in Spokane, Washington. The purchase was financed by a \$1,000 loan from his father and mother. This was during the Great Depression and it was four years before the loan could be paid back out of profits.

Since the first supermarket, Rosauers has expanded its operations to include conventional supermarkets, price impact super stores and natural and organic markets serving the inland Pacific Northwest in Washington, Oregon, Idaho and Montana.

Since 1990, Rosauers has made several acquisitions to expand and add to the total number of stores in operation. These included Market Time Drug in Lewiston, Idaho; Drug Fair in Moscow, Idaho; Super 1 Foods in Spokane, Washington; the Monroe Street Market and Spokane Wine Company in Spokane, Washington; Super 1 Foods in Walla Walla, Washington; Super 1 Foods in Colville, Washington; and the Excel Food Store in Colfax, Washington. New stores have been built in Yakima and 9 Mile Falls, Washington; Bozeman, Montana; and Meridian, Idaho.

By unanimous vote in June 2000, employees resold the company to URM Stores. Today, Rosauers Supermarkets consists of 17 Rosauers stores, four Super 1 Foods locations and a freestanding Huckleberry’s Natural Market. The company has about 2,100 employees.

Rosauers has continued to stand by its founding principles of providing the highest quality products, largest selection, cleanest stores and friendliest, professional service.

Commitment to valuing its employees and customers will continue to guide the company toward the future. Mert Rosauer would be proud of the legacy he founded so many years ago.



## Rudy's Markets Inc.

With the support of her 170-plus colleagues in the employee-owned company, Rudy's Markets President and CEO Lauren Redman has advocated for the industry locally, around the state with the Northwest Grocery Retail Association and at the federal level with the National Grocers Association.

This advocacy work has included Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program funding and reform, encouraging enforcement of the Robinson-Patman Act and modernization of Oregon's bottle bill.

Rudy's Markets continues to create value for its employee owners by reinvesting in stores, including total department remodels and new equipment and display cases. Unique store designs, such as the Oliver Lemon's location, are the result of partnerships with local contractors and referencing extensive resources found while traveling globally for business.

Innovation drives store experience, which drives sales. The company has a generationally rich view of experience

for the customer, not just for the sake of it.

The family opted for an employee stock ownership plan (ESOP) structure back in 2015. Goals included continuity in the community for generations to come and rewarding long-term employees that make the brand, as well as providing another track for retirement savings.

In that belief, Rudy's offers the ESOP, free to the employee and the option for employees to participate in the 401(k) and take advantage of up to 5 percent matching dollars from the company. In one example of the value of the program, some cashiers have more than \$200,000 in their ESOP accounts. This offers another way for working-class people to save for their retirement.

The year 2026 marks the company's 50th serving



Central Oregon. Redman made the decision to celebrate not with a party but with the goal of matching customer donated funds throughout the year, up to \$100,000.

This money will be used to buy food at cost for four food-focused, hunger-related nonprofits in the area. What better way to celebrate 50 years of community involvement than by continuing to give to those who have supported the company's stores and employees.



## Superior Grocers

Superior is an independent grocer built on a simple belief: if you invest deeply in people and community, exceptional operations will follow. That philosophy starts with leadership.

CEO Richard Wardwell is consistently present in stores, spending time with team members, listening to their experiences and aspirations and engaging with them. This people-first culture is reinforced with extensive training opportunities that help employees grow skills, advance in their careers and deliver outstanding service to customers every day.

That investment in people shows up in the in-store experience. Superior's stores are known for being clean, welcoming and well run, with high standards for in-stock performance and customer service.

Teams are empowered to take pride in their work, which translates into fast, friendly checkout, well-merchandise departments and a shopping experience tailored to the needs of their neighborhoods. Superior also continues to invest in destination departments that differentiate them from larger chains, including bakeries and their house-made tortillas and chips that keep customers coming back.

Superior's commitment extends far beyond the four walls of the store. The company believes that strong

communities are built from within and that all people should be served with care, dignity and respect.

Superior encourages environmental stewardship by promoting reusable bags, helping reduce plastic waste and educating customers on the impact of small, everyday choices. Each reusable bag has the potential to eliminate hundreds, if not thousands, of plastic bags over its lifetime.

Through Community Re-Engineering Inc., dba Superior Foundation, a 501(c)(3) established in 1995, Superior has turned that belief in community into sustained, tangible impact. The foundation has distributed more than \$1 million to local youth programs and schools, supported by the company's annual golf tournaments and the generosity of vendor partners.

Beneficiaries include organizations such as Alliance Charter Schools, American Cancer Society,



CGA Educational Foundation, City of Hope, Esperanza Scholarship Foundation, Muscular Dystrophy Association, National Guard Youth Foundation, The Music Center Education Program and United Negro College Fund.

By combining strong operations, a people-centered culture, environmental responsibility and long-term investment in youth and education, Superior exemplifies what it means to be an exceptional independent grocer.



## Vallarta Supermarkets

Vallarta Supermarkets started 40 years ago as a dream for a family believing in hard work, opportunity and community. Vallarta continues to honor its roots while embracing innovation – blending culture, community and technology to best serve customers and empower employees.



The leadership and vision from the teams has been incomparable. The company continues its growth trajectory in California and has expanded into Arizona, where it opened a store in January.

Vallarta is becoming one of the premier retailers in the nation. As the company grows, its mission remains the same – bring fresh, high-quality ingredients, authentic flavors and exceptional service to the communities it serves.





# Shelby Publishing's salute to 'backbone of our industry'

On the following pages, Shelby Publishing is proud to present its fourth annual Exceptional Independents Awards. Nominations were open to independent retailers, wholesalers and technology and other service providers.

"Independents are the backbone of our industry, and this awards program is an opportunity to recognize them for their contributions," said Stephanie Reid, Shelby president and COO.

"Independents are a vital part of their communities and lead the way in caring for their customers. Our Exceptional Independents Awards shine a light on these businesses that continue to help feed our communities."

Coverage of the award winners will appear by region in the March editions of *The Shelby Report of the Midwest*, *The Shelby Report of the Southeast*, *The Shelby Report of the Southwest*, *The Shelby Report of the West* and *The Griffin Report of the Northeast*. Award winners also will be featured on [theshelbyreport.com](http://theshelbyreport.com).

## Bradford General Store

Andrew Costello and his wife, Amanda, are first-generation grocers who stumbled upon the opportunity to purchase a run-down supermarket deep in rural Maine over a decade ago.

Being the go-getters they are, they jumped on the opportunity and purchased the store. Since then, they have worked incredibly hard not only on updating/upgrading their first store but acquiring three more.

Their passion is serving their community. Due to their remote location, they have unique challenges that other grocers may not face. The stores are crucial to their customers. For many, they are the only full-line supermarket within a 15-20-minute drive.

They run their stores with a kindness and compassion that often is lost in retail today. Their management team is made up of friendly local folks who have lived in these communities most if not all of their lives.

Most recently, the Costellos gave a longtime store manager an opportunity to become a minority partner in their growing business, with the goal of transitioning ownership as the couple gets closer to retirement.

They have built a wonderful business, passed on the skills and knowledge they have



learned as entrepreneurs and grocers and share that opportunity with their most dedicated team members, which is rare in the modern world.

In addition, they have made improvements over the years to the services they offer their customers. They have opened a fuel station; invested in a new point-of-sale system (LOC SMS); launched a full loyalty solution (RSA America) that allows customers to earn and save as they spend; and begun clean-energy initiatives, such as implementing solar power at some stores.

Lastly, they continue to be advocates and educators within Associated Grocers of New England, where Andrew Costello sits on the board of directors, sharing his knowledge and experiences with other grocers in the region.



## Cingari Family Markets

Cingari Family Markets, a fourth-generation, family-owned grocer rooted in southwestern Connecticut since 1929, blends long-standing community commitment with forward-looking investment across stores, people, products and sustainable operations – all centered on elevating the customer experience.

Cingari is executing a multi-year capital program to modernize its footprint. By early next year, 10 of 12 locations will have been remodeled. These projects are designed not only to refresh aesthetics but to future-proof operations for the next 10-15 years.

That means improving department flow, expanding prepared food and private-label and integrating energy-efficient refrigeration and lighting.

Renovations (completed and underway) deliver tangible benefits, including higher customer retention, larger basket sizes and the flexibility to meet shifting shopper needs from value to premium.

Over the past year, Cingari also has significantly expanded its Cingari Family Markets private label portfolio, adding premium pantry staples, chef-quality prepared meals and locally sourced items inspired by family recipes.

The private label line has repositioned the brand in customers' minds, delivering superior perceived quality and driving cross-category lift in produce, deli and bakery. This private label also reinforces the chain's commitment to local sourcing and sustainability.



Customer service remains Cingari's north star. The company consistently ranks at or near the top of cooperative customer engagement scores by investing in front-line training, empowerment and role-specific certifications.

Cingari pairs in-store excellence with omnichannel convenience – maintaining robust Instacart and its own proprietary Order.Pickup.Deliver. services that drive higher-value, repeat customers.

Social content and short how-to videos further bridge in-store and at-home experiences, showcasing chef-prepared meals and family recipes that inspire purchase and loyalty.

The Cingari Family Foundation has donated more than \$5 million to local nonprofits, hospitals, schools and food banks. The company's sustainability program diverts about 12,000 tons of unsold food annually for composting or animal feed and installs energy-saving equipment



across stores.

Associates serve on Green Teams, leading beach cleanups and local landscaping projects. Annual fundraising events, including a long-running Autumn Golf Outing, contribute meaningfully to regional causes.

Cingari has more than 2,200 employees across its stores and invests in training and career pathways, from CPR certification to department-specific professional development. That investment in people translates into stronger service, operational excellence and community trust.

Cingari Family Markets demonstrates the hallmarks of an exceptional independent grocer: meaningful capital reinvestment, brand innovation through private label, relentless focus on service and employee development, measurable sustainability outcomes and local philanthropic engagement.

## Clements Marketplace

As a family-owned and community-centered grocer, Clements Marketplace in Rhode Island has consistently invested in its stores, operations and people while demonstrating a commitment to strengthening the neighborhoods it serves.

In 2025, this commitment reached new heights through a partnership with Hope & Main, Rhode Island's food business incubator, creating a national model for how independent grocers can elevate local economies and empower emerging food entrepreneurs.

Clements has long been recognized for its investment in infrastructure and customer experience. The company's stores are modern, welcoming and equipped with technology that enhances both operations and consumer engagement.

Yet what truly sets Clements apart is their vision for community impact. They understand that grocery stores are more than retail spaces – they are anchors of local identity and engines of economic development. This philosophy has guided their extraordinary collaboration with Hope & Main, where they have opened their shelves, their expertise and their hearts to small and early-stage food producers.

Through this partnership, Clements has not only

carried Hope & Main member products but actively promoted them. Dedicated in-store displays showcase these local brands alongside video features of entrepreneurs at work in Hope & Main's kitchens, giving customers a window into the makers' stories.

Clements has hosted periodic "Local Maker Days," where entrepreneurs sample and sell their products to shoppers, building brand recognition and consumer loyalty. It has gone further still, providing individualized coaching to entrepreneurs on packaging, pricing and merchandising and even sharing sales data to help businesses understand how their products are performing.

For fledgling food businesses, this kind of access and mentorship is game-changing, transforming what may otherwise be a daunting leap into retail into a guided pathway toward success.

Clements also has sponsored Hope & Main's weekly Makers Market, encouraging the community to discover new brands, meet the makers and connect with the stories behind the products.

This investment has created a virtuous cycle. Consumers gain access to emerging brands they may not encounter in traditional grocery channels, while

entrepreneurs gain visibility, sales and invaluable feedback. The result is a stronger, more resilient local food economy that reflects the character and diversity of Rhode Island communities.

Beyond the partnership with Hope & Main, Clements continues to demonstrate leadership in employee training and advancement. Staff members are known for professionalism, hospitality and deep product knowledge – qualities nurtured through ongoing investment in workforce development.

By prioritizing employee growth, Clements ensures that team members are not only delivering exceptional service but also building meaningful careers in the grocery industry.

Clements shows how an independent grocer can strengthen communities while elevating local entrepreneurs. Their partnership with Hope & Main is a national model for economic mobility and community pride.



## Elias Farmers Market

Elias Farmers Market in Allentown, Pennsylvania, exemplifies what it means to be an exceptional independent grocer. The company's leadership has made major investments in modernizing operations and improving accessibility for all customers, including a strong commitment to offering and supporting SNAP, EBT, WIC and OTC payment programs. This ensures that every member of the community has reliable access to affordable, quality groceries.

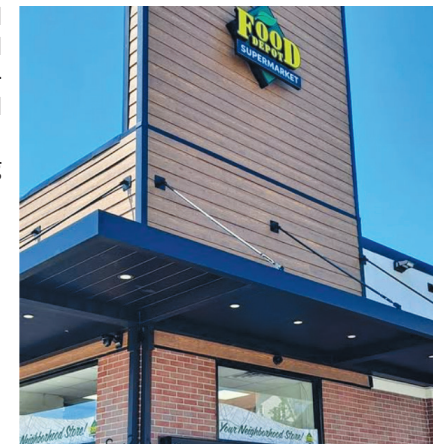
Elias Farmers Market also has invested in electronic shelf labels to enhance price accuracy, reduce discrepancies and deliver a more trustworthy shopping experience.

Beyond technology, the store remains deeply rooted in community involvement, supporting neighborhood charities, food drives and local initiatives. It also prioritizes employee training and professional development, ensuring the team has the tools and opportunities needed to grow.



## Food Depot & Extra Supermarkets

Newark, New Jersey-based Food Depot & Extra Supermarkets has focused on opening stores in struggling communities and helping those who have not had easy access to groceries. It also has been very invested and involved in revitalizing communities and giving back.



## Foodtown

Michael Mignosi of Foodtown is an exemplary independent grocer in New Jersey whose commitment to industry innovation, local communities and the Allegiance Retail Services cooperative distinguishes him as a true asset.

A member of the ARS Board of Directors, Mignosi contributes his expertise to several of the co-op's most important committees – finance, advertising and technology and ad planning. His leadership and willingness to test new ideas help shape decisions that benefit more than 140 independent supermarkets across the cooperative.

Mignosi has earned a reputation for being a forward-thinking, solutions-oriented operator whose input strengthens both the ARS co-op and the independent supermarket model.

His investment in technology and operations is



exceptional. As early as 2024, he was one of the first co-op members to launch Caper Carts, smart-cart technology that enhances convenience, accuracy and speed for shoppers.

He also was among the first to implement updated POS systems, expand self-checkout options and optimize his online shopping platform. His willingness to invest in modern infrastructure ensures that his Foodtown store not only meets but anticipates customer expectations, positioning his business at the forefront of independent retail.

Equally impressive is Mignosi's commitment to community service. His leadership extends beyond his store into the very fabric of his hometown.

He has served the Stroudsburg Fire Department since 2007, currently holding the rank of assistant chief and serving as treasurer. He also is a board member of the Relief Association. His long history of service includes being a second lieutenant, captain and assistant engineer, reflecting his dedication and the trust placed in him by fellow firefighters.

In addition to his public safety service, Mignosi has devoted more than a decade to supporting local students through coaching and school involvement. He is the freshman football coach for the Stroudsburg School

District and previously coached middle school and elementary-level teams for 15 years.

He also served a four-year term as a school director and is volunteering for a second year as the assistant lighting designer for the district's school plays. His passion for developing young people goes beyond athletics as he is committed to fostering confidence, teamwork and perseverance in every student he mentors.

And if that weren't enough, Mignosi serves as president of the Mountaineer Foundation, a philanthropic organization dedicated to raising funds from community members, civic groups and local businesses to enhance educational outcomes for students.

A former Boy Scout leader of six years, Mignosi has long demonstrated a deep commitment to service, mentorship and civic responsibility. His strong moral compass and generous spirit define his personal and professional lives.





# Congratulations to Our Exceptional Independents Award Winners for 2026!

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## G&E Hocker's

In 1971, Gerald Hocker and his wife, Emily, purchased Jake's Grocery from his uncle, Jake Hocker, and started G&E Inc. with five employees. From that one small, mom-and-pop grocery store, they have grown their Bethany Beach, Delaware-based company to include 10 different businesses: two grocery stores, two hardware stores, a convenience store, car wash, boat/RV and commercial storage complex, restaurant, 60-lot mobile home park and commercial rental properties.

The team of five employees has grown to about 250 year-round workers. All five of their children worked in the grocery store as teenagers and young adults; all their sons and daughters-in-law and grandchildren who are of working age also have worked in the business at some point, truly making it a family affair.

Currently, three of their five children work alongside the Hockers, carrying on the family business.

Providing full-time employees with opportunities to participate in 401(k) and health insurance plans that contribute to the well-being of the employees and their families and their quality of life is important to Gerald Hocker and is something he strongly values. He also takes great pride in employing many local teenagers, who often are seeking their first jobs, and helping them have a successful entry into the workforce.

Although the business has grown over the years, Hocker strives to ensure customers continue to receive the personal care and attention he built the business upon. This is probably best demonstrated by the numerous times he has received phone calls at home from customers after closing or on holidays, asking for his help with getting a much-needed item to save that family's event or holiday dinner. No matter the hour, he always tells the customer, "Meet me at the store, I'll be right there."



Giving back to the community that has given so much to the family is of utmost importance to Hocker. When his oldest son was playing Little League, he noticed the baseball fields needed improvements. So he decided to help meet those needs by organizing what would come to be known as the Springtime Jamboree, a musical show featuring singers and musicians from the local community.

The Jamboree ran for 38 years and is estimated to have contributed more than \$400,000 to various local nonprofits, including Lower Sussex Little League, Millville Volunteer Fire Company, Bethany Beach Volunteer Fire Company, River Soccer Club, Pop Warner Football, Lord Baltimore Lions Club, Selbyville Lions Club, Fenwick Lions Club, Millsboro Little League and Delaware Hospice.

Hocker also gives back to his community by serving in the Delaware Legislature. He has worked as a public servant for 24 years, first in the House of Representatives and currently in the Senate. He has held leadership positions in both chambers.

His passion and commitment to serving his employees, customers and community have been the foundation of his success and the Hocker family businesses for the past 24 years.

## Gristedes

Gristedes has been feeding New York City for more than 120 years. The company offers fresh meat, produce, dairy products, baked goods, frozen and gourmet foods and nonfood items.

Gristedes strives to make every shopping experience a great one. Customers have come to expect the best products and the largest selection in the city.



## *Congratulations to LaBonne's Markets!*

Warmest congratulations on being named a Shelby Report 2026 Exceptional Independent. This well-deserved honor shines a spotlight on your leadership and commitment to nourishing families and communities.



*Wishing you continued success and community impact in the years ahead!*



# Congratulations

to *The Shelby Report's*

## EXCEPTIONAL INDEPENDENTS

Award Winners



**Arteaga's Food Center**

**Piggly Wiggly 310**

**Oliver's Market**

**Chester's Markets**

**Border Town**

**Vallarta Supermarkets**

**McKay's Markets**

**Savers Cost Plus**

**Harvest Market IGA**

**Piggly Wiggly 191**

**G&E / Hocker's Supermarket**

**Seabra Foods**

**Piggly Wiggly 272**

**Clements' Marketplace**

**Lewis Food Town**

**Oleson's Food Stores**

**Food Depot & Extra Supermarkets**

**Teloloapan Meat Market**

**Polly's Country Markets**

**Rudy's Markets Inc.**

**Fresh Encounter, Inc.**



*C&S Family  
of Companies*



**SpartanNash**

## Karns Quality Foods

Karns Quality Foods in Mechanicsburg, Pennsylvania, was nominated for the Exceptional Independent Award because of its bold, innovative approach to incorporating practical uses of artificial intelligence in its business.

Jeff Fackler, the company's director of business applications, stands out as a shining example of dedication, curiosity and continuous growth to support Karns' continued success.

His commitment to intentional collaboration with ECRS' data and analytics team has helped shape ECRS' AI and business intelligence tool, Catapult Cognition, by beta testing and sharing results on automating customer segmentation for intelligent promotions, enabling further



refinement of the product. Fackler understands the importance of innovation to

keep independent retailers competitive and his willingness to test and provide insightful feedback will allow other independents to thrive with this refined solution as they take steps to leverage AI tools.

Beyond leading the charge in advanced retailing, Karns Quality Foods cares about its community. The company hosts an annual charity golf tournament to raise funds for local organizations. In the past year, it raised several thousand dollars for more than 850 local charities.



## Kinsley's ShopRite of Brodheadsville

Christopher Kinsley Sr. and the ShopRite of Brodheadsville, Pennsylvania, are an example of what it means to be an exceptional independent – demonstrating leadership, innovation and a commitment to the community they serve.

The store has deep roots in the community and consistently goes above and beyond to support those in need. Through ongoing partnerships with the local food pantry, the Salvation Army and the Partners in Caring program, the store helps address food insecurity and supports vulnerable populations.

In addition, it supports local schools, first responders, churches and nonprofits through donations, fundraising initiatives and hands-on community involvement.

As a major local employer, the store is a cornerstone of the regional economy, providing employment to more than 400 people. It is committed to fostering a workplace culture built on respect, opportunity and growth, offering stable jobs, career advancement and a sense of belonging to hundreds of families throughout the area.

It also stands out as a forward-thinking and environmentally responsible independent retailer. The store recently completed the installation of a 10-acre solar field, now supplying 85-90 percent of the store's power and reducing its environmental footprint.

Looking ahead, plans are under way to introduce solar-powered electric vehicle charging stations, further reinforcing the store's long-term commitment to sustainability and innovation.



## LaBonne's Market

LaBonne's Markets, a family-owned and -operated grocery store chain in Connecticut, exemplifies the qualities of a standout independent grocery operator. With a deep commitment to community involvement, sustainable practices and employee development, LaBonne's Markets is a prime candidate for recognition as a leader in the independent grocery sector.

LaBonne's Markets has consistently invested in its stores to enhance the customer experience. The chain has undergone significant renovations to modernize its stores, ensuring that they are not only visually appealing but also functional and efficient.

The stores are equipped with technology that streamlines operations, improves inventory management and enhances customer service.

LaBonne's has made substantial investments in sustainable practices, including energy-efficient lighting and refrigeration systems. This commitment reduces its environmental footprint and lowers operating costs, allowing savings to be passed on to customers.

Markets prioritize high-quality, locally sourced products that support regional farmers and enhance freshness. This investment in local agriculture strengthens community ties and boosts the local economy.

LaBonne's Markets has a long-standing tradition of supporting neighborhood charities and community initiatives. The markets regularly donate food and resources to local food banks, shelters and community organizations. This not only helps those in need but also fosters a sense of community solidarity.



LaBonne's also participates in and sponsors local events, such as farmers' markets, school fundraisers and community festivals. This engagement strengthens relationships with customers and enhances community spirit.

In addition, the stores host health and wellness events, offering free nutritional workshops and cooking demonstrations. These empower customers to make informed food choices and promote healthier lifestyles.

LaBonne's recognizes that its employees are its greatest asset. The company prioritizes training and advancement opportunities, ensuring staff are well-equipped to serve customers.

Employees receive thorough training in customer service, product knowledge and food safety. This investment ensures that customers receive the highest level of service and expertise.

LaBonne's encourages internal promotions and provides pathways for career advancement. Employees are supported in their professional development through mentorship programs and continuing education opportunities.

The company fosters a positive work environment where employees feel valued and engaged. Regular team-building activities and recognition programs contribute to high employee morale and retention.





## Congratulations to The Shelby Report's 2026 Exceptional Independents

You are the backbone of your communities and the driving force behind independent grocery. The early mornings, long days, and commitment you bring to your stores make a meaningful difference for the families who rely on you every day.

Through your leadership and dedication, you create welcoming spaces, keep shelves stocked, support local teams, and strengthen the neighborhoods you serve. Your impact goes far beyond transactions; it's about trust, service, and community.

From all of us at LOC Software, thank you for your passion and perseverance. We are proud to stand beside you and celebrate everything you have accomplished today and in the future.



LOC Software is proud to continue to sponsor the Exceptional Independents Awards presented at The NGA Show.

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## Lincoln Market

Lincoln Market is a rapidly growing hybrid gourmet/main-line grocer in the New York City metro area.

With eight stores, the grocer focuses on customer-facing technology, customer experience and affordability. It also participates and supports local community and charitable organizations.



## Market Basket

While many rush toward the latest trends, Massachusetts-based Market Basket takes a different path – one guided by purpose and care.

Every technological decision begins with two simple questions: “How will this impact the customer experience?” and “How will this affect our cashiers?” This deliberate, customer-first mindset ensures that progress never comes at the expense of people.

The result? A seamless, uninterrupted shopping experience that feels as dependable as it is modern.

Running thousands of transactions daily, reliability is non-negotiable. Market Basket leverages ECRS’ retail automation and POS software, Catapult, to keep operations smooth and stress-free. With features like RegisterGuard and Store & Forward, lanes stay open and transactions flow – even during network interruptions – so customers and cashiers never miss a beat.

Market Basket proves that innovation doesn’t have to be flashy; it just has to serve people. The company’s intentionality, practicality and heart for customers and employees makes it a true standout among independents.



## Uncle Giuseppe's Marketplace

Uncle Giuseppe's Marketplace was nominated for the Exceptional Independents Award for its dedication to the communities it serves.

Known for creating warm, welcoming stores that celebrate authentic Italian traditions, Uncle G's has expanded thoughtfully – bringing jobs, supporting local charities and fostering a true sense of neighborhood connection.

It encourages community giving through donation programs and local event partnerships, demonstrating how operational efficiency enables reinvestment in the area.

By embracing ECRS’ innovative technology, Uncle G's has streamlined operations and elevated the shopping experience, freeing resources to focus on what matters most – its customers and communities. This blend of tradition, generosity and forward-thinking sets Uncle Giuseppe's apart as a true leader among independent grocers.





Michael Mignosi embodies the spirit of The Shelby Report's Exceptional Independents Award through his retail leadership, commitment to innovation, and dedication to community service. As an independent Foodtown grocer and Allegiance Retail Services board member, he champions operational excellence and emerging technologies that strengthen the independent supermarket model and enhance customer experience. His early adoption of advanced retail solutions from smart-cart technology to modern POS systems and expanded e-commerce keeps his business competitive in a rapidly evolving marketplace.

A leader in his local fire department, sports coach, and president of a foundation supporting student success, Michael devotes his time and energy to public safety, youth development, and philanthropy, reflecting a rare combination of innovation, leadership, and heart.

