



The Shelby Report of the Southwest salutes 2026 Retailer of the Year

The future is bright: Albertsons Southern Division steps into new South Region

The Shelby Report of the Southwest's Retailer of the Year recognition arrives at a defining moment for Albertsons Cos.' Southern Market. The Boise, Idaho-based grocer announced July 23 that it is moving from 11 divisions to four regions under a new operating model it calls the ACI Edge, placing the Southern Market – home to the Albertsons, Tom Thumb and Randalls banners across Texas, Louisiana, Oklahoma and Arkansas – in a new South Region alongside the Southwest and United markets.

Carl Huntington leads the South Region as regional EVP. Bill Neve, previously Southern Division president, now serves as regional president of operations for the South Region, with Eureka McCrae as VP of operations for the Southern Market.



Carl Huntington



Susan Morris

associates serve customers across four states. Four new Tom Thumb stores have opened in North Texas, with two more planned for the back half of 2026.

Randalls, founded in Houston in 1966, is marking its 60th anniversary this year, while Tom Thumb and Albertsons have served the Dallas-Fort Worth area since 1948.



John Scucimarra

John Scucimarra serves as regional president of merchandising and marketing for the South Region, with Ashley Canonica as VP of merchandising and marketing for the Southern Market.

The company said it has no plans to realign stores or districts, and its 22 banners will retain their identities and community ties.

In a press release issued by the company, CEO Susan Morris said the restructuring is about turning the company's national scale into greater impact for customers.

"By consolidating 11 divisions into four regions and centralizing center store merchandising, we can make faster decisions, improve in-stocks and move accountability closer to our stores, where fresh, service and local execution matter most to customers."

That future is already taking shape in the Southern Market, where 146 stores and more than 14,000

Brands built on trust: Company's heritage provides competitive advantage

Editor's Note: This interview was conducted prior to Albertsons Companies Inc.'s announcement that it was restructuring its 11 divisions into four regions. The Southern Division, now the Southern Market, is part of the new South Region for ACI.

Albertsons Cos.' Southern Market, formerly the Southern Division, operates 146 stores across Texas, Louisiana, Oklahoma and Arkansas under the Tom Thumb, Randalls and Albertsons banners – and no two markets shop the same.

That range, paired with disciplined execution, is what Bill Neve, who led the Southern Division as president and now serves as regional president of operations for the South Region, points to as the division earns recognition as The Shelby Report of the Southwest's 2026 Retailer of the Year.



Bill Neve

"This recognition reflects the strength of our team and the consistency of our execution," Neve said. "The Southern Division stands out because we combine strong local relevance with disciplined performance."

"We've delivered solid growth, expanded our digital and omnichannel capabilities, and continued to elevate the in-store experience. Most importantly, our teams bring a daily commitment to service that truly differentiates us in the markets we serve."

The division's banners carry deep roots in the region. Tom Thumb and Albertsons have served Dallas-Fort Worth since 1948, and Randalls marked 60 years of serving the Austin and Houston markets at the end of July.

"Our heritage is a competitive advantage," Neve said. "These brands are built on trust, quality and deep community ties."

"We honor that legacy by staying true to what customers expect from us while continuously evolving how we serve them – through e-commerce growth, fresh innovation and ongoing store reinvestment. It's about building on a strong foundation while positioning the business for the future."

Local flavors, hyper-local execution

The Dallas-Fort Worth metroplex is one of the most dynamic and fast-growing regions in the country, Neve said, and now the fourth-largest metro area in the U.S.

"What makes our division unique is the incredible cultural, socioeconomic and ethnic diversity across our communities – there is no single majority population,"

Neve said. "That diversity is reflected in both our customers and our associates, allowing our teams to stay closely connected to what matters most locally."

A key part of that connection, he said, is a commitment to local products and partnerships. Across Texas and Louisiana, the division prioritizes sourcing from local growers, producers and makers while also working with national and regional CPG suppliers. In Louisiana, the division recently held a vendor summit that drew almost 75 local CPG companies looking to get products on shelves.

"It's not just CPG partners, farmers – it's everybody that is relevant inside of this market," Neve said. "It's really important that we have local flavors on site on our shelves, and we really represent the communities that we serve. It's a big deal. We work hard on that."

Neve said the customer response has been "absolutely fantastic." The offerings shift from market to market – fried pies in Oklahoma, head-on shrimp and seafood boils in Louisiana and brisket sandwiches in Texas.

"There's a different customer base in Lafayette than there is in Baton Rouge, than there is in Argyle, Texas, than there is in Oklahoma," Neve said.

"If you look at our division as a whole, what we do in North Texas versus what we're doing in Houston versus what we're doing in Austin versus what we're doing in Louisiana, it's truly like four divisions inside of one big division. They operate completely different, and that's the great thing about the division."

Field managers are called on to shape assortments in their own departments, and long-tenured associates help guide those decisions.

Neve pointed to the division's new spicy chicken, developed in Louisiana and launched division-wide, as an example of how local input drives innovation. Teams in a Louisiana store worked through taste profiles with associates and customers to dial in the paprika, Cajun seasoning and breading flavors.

"Once we found the magic recipe, we launched it with a CPG partner, and then we ran it to everybody inside of the division, into all 146 stores," he said. "I would tell you it's more hyper-local than just local."

That localization extends to center store, where grocery sets differ between Texas and Louisiana while fresh departments carry more flexibility.

"Like Blue Runner beans. Those are 16 feet inside of Louisiana [stores]," Neve said. "We still have them inside of Texas. We still sell them, but it's nowhere near the shelf power that we need farther down south."

Leadership built on different perspectives

Neve said building a diverse and experienced leadership team – including what he called "the incredible group of women helping lead this division" – was a deliberate decision.

"Different perspectives drive better decisions, stronger engagement and ultimately better business results," he said. "Diverse teams challenge assumptions, bring broader perspectives and lead to better decision-making, stronger innovation and deeper connections with the customers we serve."

"In grocery, where our communities are diverse and customers expect us to understand their needs, having women leaders at the table isn't just important – it's a competitive advantage."

The team has been together just under a year, with Eureka McCrae, VP of operations, arriving from the West Coast, and Ashley Canonica, VP of merchandising and marketing, bringing long experience in Texas.

"I'm not looking for a leadership team that is just always yes and agreeing, I am really looking for folks that think differently and that challenge the status quo," Neve said.

"When we walk out the door, we have a good, solidified answer on what we're going to do, what the focus is and how we're going to business, and it's a mutually agreed upon decision as well, after everybody has been heard."



'The only job I've ever had'

Neve stepped into the division president role in October, but his history with the company stretches back decades – he celebrated his 35th anniversary with Albertsons Cos. at the first of July.

"This is the only job I've ever had," he said. "I started off bagging groceries, and it's turned into just an incredible career."

Neve has worked across most banners within Albertsons Cos., holding leadership roles in marketing, merchandising and operations in multiple regions. Before his current role, he served as SVP of marketing and merchandising for both the Seattle and Southern divisions, as well as VP of operations for Northern California.

That kind of longevity runs throughout the division. On a Fourth of July store tour that covered a number of locations in outlying markets – from Galveston to Lafayette, Shreveport and Texarkana – Neve met associates who had been with the company for decades, including a liquor sales manager in Louisiana who just celebrated her 50th anniversary. Average cashier tenure in some stores runs 30-plus years.

"They're truly the difference makers that make it happen every single day," Neve said. "It's just so important that our associates represent the neighborhoods that we serve, and when you have tenured associates like that ... it just shows that people love what they do, and they do what they love."

Those associates also feed the division's hyper-local programs. "We go to the stores, and we ask, 'What are



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Locally great: Operations aims to balance consistency, community across 3 banners

Editor's Note: This interview was conducted prior to Albertsons Companies' announcement that it was restructuring its 11 divisions into four regions. The new South Region contains the Southern Market, formerly the Southern Division.

About nine months into her role as VP of retail operations for Albertsons' Southern Division, now the Southern Market, Eureka McCrae oversees 146 Albertsons, Tom Thumb and Randalls stores and more than 14,000 associates across four states.



Eureka McCrae

McCrae came to the division after more than two-and-a-half years as area VP of operations for the Safeway banner in Northern California, where she oversaw half of that region.

"I've spent my career leading retail operations, developing leaders, improving execution and delivering strong financial results," she said. "That work has always been in service of our company's mission to help people across the country live better lives.

"My passion is building high-performing teams that create exceptional experiences for our customers and bring that mission to life in every store, every day."

Her top priority for the division reflects that focus.

"Our top priority is driving consistent execution across every store," McCrae said. "That means improving fresh performance, reducing shrink, growing e-commerce and

delivering a great customer experience.

"That priority is a direct extension of our companywide strategy to be locally great and nationally strong, and we do this by using the scale and resources of Albertsons Companies to support strong local execution in each of our communities.

"When we execute the fundamentals well every day, we improve profitability, strengthen customer loyalty and support the kind of profitable, sustainable growth our company is working toward."

Getting stores right

The division has recently opened new stores in Argyle and Midlothian, Texas, and remodeled store No. 120 in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. McCrae, who has been involved with those grand openings and remodels, said getting a store right begins well before the doors open.

"It starts with understanding the community," she said. "Every market has different customer needs and shopping habits, and our company's approach has always been to make a meaningful difference neighborhood by neighborhood, not with a one-size-fits-all model.

"We focus on the right assortment, strong operational execution and the development of great teams so customers immediately see that we're invested in serving their community. Freshness, quality and community are at the center of that work, and they're what customers should feel the moment they walk into an Albertsons,



Tom Thumb or Randalls."

From an operations perspective, new stores and remodels each bring their own energy and their own hurdles – from the age and size of a building to navigating construction.

"The new stores are pretty fun because they're from the ground up," McCrae said. "You get to see it from beginning to the end stages, and there's so much excitement and momentum built around those.

"The overall excitement from the community and the customers outweigh any type of challenge that we face, whether it's a new store or remodeled store. The folks and the communities are so excited to see it come alive."

When the division enters a new community, McCrae said, much of the groundwork happens backstage. "A

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Marketing, merchandising efforts rooted in cities and towns across the Southwest

Editor's Note: This interview was conducted prior to Albertsons Companies' announcement that it was restructuring its 11 divisions into four regions. The Southern Division is now part of the South Region, operating as the Southern Market.

Just under five months into her role as VP of marketing and merchandising for Albertsons' Southern Division, Ashley Canonica oversees marketing and merchandising for a footprint that spans five operating areas – Dallas-Fort Worth, Houston, Austin, Louisiana and a continued expansion into Oklahoma.

"This is probably one of the most challenging and rewarding jumps I've made in my career," Canonica said.



Ashley Canonica

Before stepping into the role, she served as senior director of marketing for the Southern Division and, prior to that, held marketing roles on the national team in Northern California.

"My path to where I am today with Albertsons looks a little bit different than most, not following the traditional path through the ranks of working in the stores," she said.

Canonica began her career out of college at a wine company, calling on retailers, an experience she said drove her to think differently and build a rounded skill set as she grew in leadership.

"I made it my goal when I got here and into the marketing roles in Texas to really engage with, listen to, invest my time learning about the store operations, what they did at every level, meet the teams, understand the challenges they had," she said. "It was very important to me because they're the backbone of what we do."

That effort earned her what she calls one of the best compliments of her career, from one of the company's leaders: "If I didn't know you, I would have never thought you didn't work in stores."



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Immersing in local flavors

Albertsons Southern Division's commitment to local relevance is on display in Louisiana, where a recent campaign spotlighted hyper-local vendors and products.

"Louisiana is probably one of our most diverse and exciting markets. Local cuisine is the cornerstone, really, of that culture," said Ashley Canonica, VP of merchandising and marketing. "Bringing families together around the joys of food is really one of our ultimate goals.

"And in addition to that, our goal is really centered around positioning ourselves as a store that celebrates and reflects the community by immersing ourselves into strengthening our local presence, our relationship with vendors and customers alike, bringing them the local flavors that they crave."

Canonica said the division aimed to bring the community together not only through its partnership with LSU athletics but also with in-store events, including live bands, face painting for children and sampling of new and local items.

"People normally kind of run in and run out when grocery shopping, but it kind of made people linger and enjoy not only the entertainment but the different items we could sample, and then knowing that their feedback was helping us build

this program out, I think really brought the community together," she said.

One standout was a spicy fried chicken the division developed for the Louisiana market. "Our deli team went through tastings of probably hundreds of different spicy chicken [recipes], and it was so well received in Louisiana, we brought it up to Texas in our markets and banners up here, and it performed exceptionally well as well," she said.

Across the division, merchandising is tailored by market – from the items stores carry to how they are displayed and signed to store layouts – to connect with the demographics each store serves.

This effort included a vendor summit, where local vendors set up cooking and tasting stations in a hotel ballroom and shared their companies' histories. Louisiana store directors and the operations team took part in the tastings.

"We want to be able to deliver regional flavors that reflect the unique communities we operate in at a good value, while balancing innovation and differentiated offerings, because food is the center of so much in Texas and Louisiana, from local barbecue to Cajun cuisine," Canonica said, noting Louisiana's influence continues to push into Houston, Austin and now DFW.



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For nearly four decades, Silver Vase Orchids has been dedicated to growing and sharing the beauty of orchids with the world. Founded in 1988 in South Florida, Silver Vase has grown from a family-owned orchid greenhouse into a leader in the orchid industry, known for quality, innovation, and creating unique products that bring beauty into everyday moments.

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Through the years ...

Randalls opened its doors on the Fourth of July 1966. Tom Thumb was carved out of a failing seven-store chain in the boom years after World War II. Albertsons predates the war entirely, born on a Boise, Idaho, corner in 1939 with a scratch bakery, an automatic doughnut machine and one of the first magazine racks in the country.

Across nearly nine decades, the three grocers now gathered in Albertsons' North Texas-headquartered Southern Market have opened, expanded and rebuilt alongside the cities they serve – outlasting rationing, recessions and the arrival of every national competitor that came for their aisles.

That endurance is the throughline of the Southern Market, and it is why *The Shelby Report of the Southwest* has named the operator its Retailer of the Year. The Southern Market runs Albertsons, Tom Thumb and Randalls stores across four states, including the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex, one of the fastest-growing regions in the country.

The stores can be described as a tapestry of the cities themselves – fixtures that have stood through each community's history and continued to meet shoppers where they are. The people behind the counters, company leaders say, are a reflection of the neighborhoods they serve.

The story of how three separate grocers came together under one division is, in many ways, the story of Texas retail itself: independent operators betting on service against national scale, merging and consolidating as the industry reshaped around them, and

holding onto the local identities that made them fixtures in the first place.

The oldest of the three began the farthest from Texas. In 1939, Joe Albertson, a former Safeway district manager, put \$5,000 of his own savings and \$7,500 borrowed from his wife's Aunt Bertie into a single store at 16th and State streets in Boise.

It was roughly eight times the size of a typical grocery of the day, and Albertson filled the space with ideas the industry hadn't seen – a scratch bakery, an automatic doughnut machine, in-store ice cream and one of the first magazine racks in the country. The store opened as the nation stood on the edge of World War II, and through the war years its shelves and staff bent to the moment, promoting bond drives and collecting scraps for the war effort.

By the late 1940s, the supermarket was becoming an American institution, and two brothers in Dallas saw an opening. Robert and Charles Cullum, along with partner J.R. Bost, took over Toro Super Markets – a struggling seven-store chain the Cullums were owed money by – and in April 1948 rebranded six of the locations as Tom Thumb. The bet was bold for its moment – the small operation cast itself as a “little giant” going up against Safeway and A&P, and later Kroger, the national

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Produce department's focus on quality is 'our duty' to customers

After 38 years in the grocery industry and with Albertsons Companies, Cathy Fields has been promoted to produce sales manager for the company's Southern Market, formerly the Southern Division, overseeing produce across 146 Albertsons, Tom Thumb and Randalls stores in Texas, Louisiana, Oklahoma and Arkansas.

Over the course of her career, Fields has served as a floral sales manager, district manager, center store operations specialist and store director.

Quality is rated the No. 1 focus item as a company, as a division and down to every store, Fields said.

"Focusing on quality is our duty for our customers and the neighborhoods that we serve – it is what determines where our customers shop as their primary store of choice," she said.

Sourcing is an important part of the role and of serving the communities, according to Fields, who said the division focuses on procuring local Texas and Louisiana products throughout every season.

"Anytime we have local items, we showcase them to our customers through our dynamic merchandising planning, displaying our produce in a way that truly connects the customer to local items that remind them of home or

inspires them to try new things," she said.

Fields pointed to several trends shaping the departments. She cited organic fruits and vegetables, along with growth in root and tropical categories that serve South Asian and Hispanic customers.

She also listed salad dressings and bagged salads that contain protein, as well as snackers that have protein. Seasonal fruits are in demand, she said, and customers are looking for more variety in them.

Asked what she is most proud of, Fields described a push on quality that starts with leadership and carries through the stores.

"It really starts at the top and elevating the communication and setting expectations from our leadership. Most importantly, visiting stores and checking for quality in every store visit has elevated the quality of our produce departments," she said. "This doesn't happen without the commitment of our produce managers and with their team.

"To sum it up, it's everyone's responsibility to serve our customers, and the team is what I am proud of, because without them, we cannot deliver the quality to our customers, and the customers deserve the very best."



Cathy Fields



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Thanks to loyalty, trust cultivated with customers, pharmacists, pharmacy teams 'anchor the store'

Julie Spier's first day with Albertsons Companies was the day the computers went in. That was 1987. Since then, she has held positions including grad intern, staff pharmacist, pharmacy manager, district pharmacy manager and patient care services manager.

And for the past 19 years she has served as director of pharmacy operations for Albertsons' Southern Division, which operates 146 Albertsons, Tom Thumb and Randalls stores in Texas, Louisiana, Oklahoma and Arkansas.

"Pharmacy and the offerings have changed so much in almost 40 years," Spier said. That first day set the pattern, she added, recalling how the computers allowed pharmacies to bill insurance for patients' prescriptions.

Immunization services arrived in 2004, moving pharmacy into the wellness arena. "Never were these services more needed than during [the pandemic], where pharmacies gave more COVID-19 immunizations than any other health care discipline," Spier said.

Screening services for cholesterol and A1C, among others, were implemented as well, along with medication administration.

"All these services increased the public's access to health care," she said. "What has not changed is the caring way we approach our patients' care through counseling, checking for drug interactions or duplication of therapy."

For Spier, the pharmacy's place



Julie Spier

inside the store is a clinical asset.

"Clinically being in a grocery store setting is a true advantage because you can see your patients more often than other pharmacy settings," she said. "What really sets us apart though is our people and the caring service they provide. They are truly dedicated to their patients and their communities."

Asked which programs make her proudest, Spier pointed first to the pandemic response.

"I am still in awe of the job that our pharmacists and technicians did during COVID, working to protect the public," she said.

Flu season takes teams beyond the store footprint each year. "I love how during flu season each year we are not bound by the walls of our pharmacies but how we are out in the community (in businesses, schools and churches) providing protection through our immunization program," Spier said.

The division also runs a diabetes program in Austin and with its employees. This "allows these patients to manage their disease rather than it controlling them," she said.

Trust is what ties the pharmacy counter to the rest of the store.

"We anchor the store in some ways," Spier said. "It is always amazing to see the loyalty and trust that people have to their pharmacists and pharmacy teams. They realize the value the pharmacists give in being accessible and always there to be able to ask a question or get advice."



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operators of the day.

The brothers expanded across a Dallas-Fort Worth that was itself booming outward into new suburbs and shopping centers, and by 1956 the company had grown to 20 stores. In 1963, they deepened their North Texas roots, acquiring the Simon David gourmet stores – a Dallas specialty-foods name.

The youngest of the three arrived on Independence Day. On July 4, 1966, Robert Onstead, R.C. Barclay and Norman Frewin purchased two Minimax stores in north Houston and renamed them Randalls, backed by about \$85,000 in mostly borrowed money.

Onstead, the son of a mail carrier, had started in the grocery business at 13, working summers at his uncle's store in Ennis, south of Dallas. Randalls grew into a regional chain over the decades that followed. In 1992, it reached north to acquire the Cullum Companies, folding Tom Thumb and Simon David into the same house. For the first time, two of the division's three banners shared an owner.

Consolidation came in the years that followed. In 1994, Randalls added 15 stores from AppleTree Markets. In 1997, the investment firm Kohlberg Kravis Roberts took a controlling stake in the company.

Two years later, Safeway acquired Randalls – by then a 116-store operation spanning 46 Randalls in Houston, 12 in Austin and 58 Tom Thumb stores across Dallas-Fort Worth – in a deal valued at about \$1.8 billion.

The names stayed on the storefronts. Then, in January 2015, Safeway merged with Albertsons, and three grocers that had started decades and hundreds of miles apart – a Boise storefront, a rebranded Dallas chain, a pair of Houston stores opened on the Fourth of July – finally had a single owner.

Today they operate as Albertsons' Southern Market, headquartered in North Texas. The banners have kept their names because those still mean something in the neighborhoods that grew up around them. That is the legacy the division's leaders return to again and again – stores that have stood through each community's history, staffed by people drawn from those same communities, still meeting shoppers where they are.

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we missing?' or 'What's not working?' And we get some great feedback from the ones that make it happen, and we try to make sure that we abide by that."

Growth and the in-store experience

The division's growth is visible in North Texas, where teams have opened four new Tom Thumb locations in the past several months, with two more planned for the back half of 2026.

Neve said that consistency – "executing at a high level during key sales periods or rallying in challenging moments" – best captures what makes the division special.

The in-store experience reflects the same pride. Deli foodservice offerings include fried chicken, ReadyMeals, more than 400 varieties of specialty cheeses and made-in-store sushi.

Bakeries offer hot bread baked fresh each day, experienced cake decorators, in-store fried doughnuts and pies, along with hyper-local staples such as Blue Bell ice cream cakes. Produce departments feature hundreds of fresh items, including organic options and fruits and vegetables cut in store each day.

Floral departments showcase fresh flowers, custom arrangements, FTD services and a balloon bar. "I think our floral departments are a floral boutique inside of a grocery store," Neve said.

Meat and seafood departments carry USDA Choice and Prime beef alongside organic and grass-fed options. Throughout the store, customers find tens of thousands of grocery and non-food items, including more than 1,000 local products, as well as dedicated space for high-protein and high-nutrition offerings, a feature of the newest stores, in particular.

Wine and beer departments include local craft and non-alcoholic options, pharmacy teams provide care in store and via drive-thru and Drive Up & Go teams take groceries to customers' cars or homes.

Looking ahead, Neve said the division's focus is on "accelerating growth while strengthening the customer experience," including continued expansion into more markets with new stores, growth in e-commerce and omnichannel capabilities, strategic investment in remodels, elevated fresh and in-store offerings and continued investment in the Own Brands portfolio. At the same time, the division is investing in talent and operational excellence to ensure long-term sustainable success.

"You'll see lots of growth coming from the Southern Division here for quite some time," he said.

"We're pretty proud of what we have going on here inside of the Southern Division, and we're going to continue to grow and to get better."





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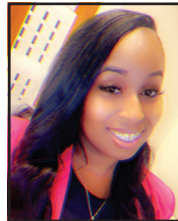
2026 SOUTHWEST RETAILER OF THE YEAR



Not just another department, floral tied to life's biggest moments, celebrations

After 20 years with Albertsons Companies, Amber Ross still frames the floral department around the occasions that bring customers to it.

Ross serves as floral sales manager for the Southern Market, formerly the Southern Division, which operates 146 stores across Texas, Louisiana, Oklahoma and Arkansas. She leads merchandising strategies, promotional programs, operational excellence and a team supporting the market's stores.



Amber Ross

Two decades in, Ross said what continues to inspire her is seeing associates grow, watching stores succeed and finding new ways to elevate the floral business.

"Flowers aren't just another department, they're tied to life's biggest moments," she said. "Whether someone is celebrating a new baby, grieving the loss of a loved one or simply trying to make someone smile, we have the opportunity to be part of that story."

The floral department often is one of the first things customers see when they walk into a store.

"Fresh flowers create an immediate feeling of warmth, freshness and hospitality that sets the tone for the entire shopping experience," Ross said.

"Floral is unique because we get to be part of life's biggest moments – celebrations, birthdays, anniversaries, graduations, weddings, holidays, and even times when customers simply want to brighten someone's day. Every bouquet tells a story."

The department also reflects the personality of the Southern Market, she said, with a focus on quality, value, creativity and genuine customer service.

"Our floral managers take pride in building displays that inspire customers while offering products that fit every occasion and budget," Ross said.

Customer preferences are moving toward ease of purchase without a trade-off in quality, Ross said.

"Grab-and-go bouquets, long-lasting arrangements and plants continue to grow in popularity because they make gifting simple and affordable," she said.

Demand also is increasing for what Ross called unique products – succulents, tropical plants, seasonal decor and locally inspired merchandising.

Valentine's Day and Mother's Day are the department's biggest moments, though Ross' teams shine all year long.

"Preparing for these events requires months of planning, forecasting, merchandising and collaboration across multiple departments," she said. "During peak holidays,

our floral managers work tirelessly to create beautiful displays, manage inventory and ensure every customer can find the perfect arrangement.

"What makes me most proud is watching our teams come together. They consistently go above and beyond while maintaining exceptional customer service."



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Busy maintenance team of 4 supports more than 140 locations across several states

A maintenance team of four supports more than 140 Albertsons Southern Division locations across Texas, Louisiana, Oklahoma and Arkansas.

Viviana Bernal, director of maintenance, leads that team. She joined the company just over a year ago.

"Prior to Albertsons, I served in various corporate leadership roles, gaining hands-on experience in large-scale construction, capital projects, vendor management, day-to-day maintenance, and regulatory compliance," Bernal said.

"I earned my bachelor's degree in business, and that education – combined with my retail facilities experience – helped me transition seamlessly into my current role as director of maintenance."

Bernal's responsibilities span equipment reliability, regulatory compliance and support for store teams.

"I am responsible for ensuring all stores and facilities are safe, compliant, reliable and fully operational so that store teams can focus on serving customers and driving



Viviana Bernal

sales," she said.

Bernal oversees preventive maintenance programs in place "to reduce equipment failures, minimize downtime and protect perishable inventory," she said, adding that reliability in those departments has a direct impact on shrink and food safety.

Compliance work sits alongside that.

"I am also accountable for regulatory and safety compliance, including health department standards, OSHA requirements, fire codes and ADA guidelines, along with all deferred maintenance replacement, projects to drive sales optimizations and tremendous cross departmental communication within the division and with corporate," she said.

Both new construction and remodels involve the maintenance team, at different points in the process.

"My team is responsible for communicating with corporate construction and operations during new store construction," Bernal said. "Once the project is turned over, we lead communication with all warranted vendors and subcontractors to avoid unnecessary expenses while supporting stores so they can stay

focused on driving sales."

Remodel work centers on scope and accountability.

"For remodels, we work closely with the project plans to ensure deferred maintenance is included in the scope and that all parties remain accountable throughout the process," she said. "In addition, my team manages all warranty-related communication to help the division operate as cost-efficiently as possible."

The pace of the business made building a support structure a priority, Bernal said.

"It is a very busy industry, so building structure was imperative to give every store the support it needs," she said. "We use specific programs and platforms, along with full team support, to respond quickly and effectively. My team and I are available 24/7 to provide the necessary support at the store level."

The volume of work is not always visible from the sales floor.

"One thing customers and even colleagues may not realize is how much work happens behind the scenes ... Our focus is delivering strong support to stores while maintaining cost control," Bernal said.

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lot of that research and heavy lifting comes from our construction and our public relations team," she said, pointing to data science, community involvement and council meetings that take place before store teams step in to execute the plan.

Evolving with customers

Meeting customers where they are also means meeting them online. McCrae said the operations side has evolved along with shopping habits.

"Today's customer expects convenience, quality and consistency, whether they're shopping in the aisle or on their phone," she said.

It's an expectation she understands firsthand. "I know for sure, being a mom and when my kids have soccer and football, you're time starved. You just want convenience," she said.

"Our teams balance outstanding in-store execution with a growing digital business, while using technology and data to improve inventory, labor and the overall customer experience," McCrae added.

"We certainly have a commitment to innovation and are continually enhancing our digital and product offerings to make it easier and more convenient for customers to get what they need, wherever they are."

Nationally strong

Running three banners across four

states requires balancing consistency with local relevance, McCrae said – the division's "locally great, nationally strong" philosophy in action.

"While every banner has its own identity and customer base, our operational standards remain consistent across the company," she said. "Our job is to execute those standards while allowing each banner ... to serve its local community in a meaningful way. That balance is what lets us operate at national scale while still feeling like the neighborhood grocer our customers know and trust."

Keeping it simple

Translating the division's growth strategy into day-to-day execution comes down to clarity, she said.

"We keep it simple. We establish clear priorities, measurable expectations and consistent accountability. I spend a lot of time in stores coaching leaders and removing obstacles, because great execution at the store level is what ultimately drives growth."

"Our associates are the ones who bring our mission to life for customers every single day, and building lasting relationships with our customers starts with building strong, well-supported teams. When our leaders are equipped and accountable, that translates directly into the kind of consistent, locally great experience our customers expect, and it's what keeps our division growing in a sustainable way."

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Scrappy for local finds

Local products and partnerships remain central to the division's identity going forward, she said, differentiating store offerings with fresher, region-specific products sourced from local growers and producers.

Finding those local items can come down to being scrappy. A floral sales manager on Canonica's team discovered a Texas-shaped pecan candy in an airport, found the company's name on the package, called and got the item into stores.

"I think we do our best to enable everyone, no matter what role they have in the division, to come to us with cool ideas, something exciting, and it never hurts to try, but always great to listen," Canonica said.

Giving back is a core pillar as well, through the company's Nourishing Neighbors platform and partnerships with food banks and foundations across Texas and Louisiana,



including in areas surrounding the division's most outlying stores.

"The pride our shoppers have in both Texas and Louisiana is overwhelmingly positive and really like nothing I'd ever seen in any other state," Canonica said.

Marking 60 years of Randalls

Albertsons Southern Division also is celebrating a milestone this year, as Randalls – founded in 1966 in Houston and one of the division's three banners – marks its 60th anniversary.

Ashley Canonica, VP of merchandising and marketing, said the banner's three founders promised "great deals, top quality meat and produce, and to always treat you like family" when they opened the first Randalls stores. "I think customers will still see that today if they go into any of our stores," she said.

"Our Randalls associates continue to be the strength of our stores today. I'm very proud of the tenure we have throughout our Randalls stores," Canonica said. "It is not uncommon to meet Randalls associates who have been with the company for 20 years or more."

Randalls, which today operates in the Houston and Austin areas, celebrated with in-store events, celebrations and specials throughout July.

The anniversary joins a legacy that includes the Tom Thumb brand, which started in Dallas more than 78 years ago.

"We really stayed true to that legacy by remembering we're here to serve our local communities with the freshest products while giving our shoppers value in ways that matter most to them," Canonica said, pointing to e-commerce growth, innovation in fresh departments and evolving store layouts as ways the division continues to meet changing shopper behaviors.