March Storefront Set-Up

MARCH SPANNER BOARDS

20 ft.

GET 2 FOR $2.00

15 ft.

GET 2 FOR $2.00

Pepsi Cola
20oz Bottles
Retail Buy 2 for $2.00
Invoice Cost $20.25

MARCH POSTERS

Gatorade
28oz Bottles
Retail 2 for $3.00
Invoice Cost $15.03

Red Bull
12oz Cans
Retail 2 for $5.33
Invoice Cost $44.65

Fiji
1-Liter Bottles
Retail 2 for $4.00
Invoice Cost $16.45
Dear Members,

As brash and big new competitors contemplate the Houston market for new stores, Ghra is positioned to compete through its prototype offering and its latest endeavor, its very own food service offering.

Convenience stores range between 4500 and 10,000 sq feet. New locations go up and are sure to include food service as part of their offering. This effort not only drives hungry shoppers to our locations but it also gives members a new revenue stream to mitigate any declines you may experience in cigarette sales and margins.

Food service is also a draw for female shoppers. These shoppers look for modern, well lit convenience stores to stop, eat and refuel. Today’s modern store formats includes a food service offering that is appealing and offers a more quality food than the industry reputation of the past.

In April, GHRA will launch your very own food service brand and offering, Big Madre Tacos Y Teta’s. I encourage you to contact the GHRA office and register as an interested party. Big Madre will instantly be the fastest growing food service brand in south Texas because of the support of our member and because of how it will connect to our shoppers.

As you can see, we are thinking ahead. We not only want to compete in this market but we want to send a message to those big brash competitors that we can dominate this market in a way that independents have never done. That should be a concern they think hard about before coming here.

Keep thinking ahead and thank you for your continued support

Thank You,

Lehjatali Momin
Dreams come true depending upon your Aptitude and Inspiration and how much Intensity they contain! I am filled with this inspiration and on fire with intensity! For a moment though, rather than seeing me as a GHRA director, I want you to see me as an objective voice. Someone like you who has worked hard in this business from humble roots and as a result has absorbed a lot of knowledge about it. Someone who has the benefit of being one of you but also an insider in our newest venture, clearly seeing how we stack up against the competition in the wholesale grocery distribution business. As the future unfolds, we will need to be focused and loud and work to compete ferociously! Passion and conviction without action is only theoretical conception.

We have all seen grocery suppliers come and go. How many of you remember Berry Barnett, or Trinity distributors. How many of you know the pains of not having a supplier because you don’t meet the minimum purchase requirements? The reality is, those big wholesalers have left us to the retail warehouses like Sam’s or other small wholesale business’s to find our products. As long as these small suppliers are in business it not a bad thing. But long term, if they close their doors, you will be looking for distribution and you won’t be in a very good spot to get it. Unless you get your suppliers from yourself, from the GHRA warehouse.

You made a statement a few years ago with this warehouse. A statement that says you’ve done the hard work, you’ve put in the time, you’ve learned the business and now you understand. It’s your statement that you understand what Wal mart knows, that you know what HEB knows, that you know what 7-11 knows and you want a piece of that pie! Competitors who enter this market in the future (like Circle K) will not be encumbered by third party grocery suppliers. They will be operating with a larger margin and as a result can set their retail pricing deeper. In the past, we wouldn’t have been able to respond. Now you can! Strength doesn’t come from the physical strength, it comes from an unfailing will. That will will drive us! We understand this business from the ground up, from the sweat and tears we put in to get everything we worked for. Now, we also know that transportation costs and scheduling effects our ability to market the way we want to. We know how the credit system works. We know that shrink is a direct result of all of the different people that touch and delivery your products. We know that your grocery supplier sells you what he carries but what about things you want to carry! You know that we can bring 100’s of new products into the market if those products just had distribution and today, no current distributor will take a shot on them. We know that fresh foods are what our customers want and since no one will deliver them to us, we will deliver them to ourselves! We know what they know but what they DON’T know is that every time we come together as a community, all of us share in the reward. They don’t know our resolve and they don’t know our commitment and as a result, they don’t know what they are up against.

Our warehouse has never been about a building…it is a statement, YOUR statement, that you personally want to take the reins of your future and even more than that, it is our statement to each other, that we trust each other and that we would much rather be in this together vs. allowing outsiders to steer our ship. Man is so made that when anything fires his soul, impossibilities vanish. Energy and persistence conquer all things. We are on the sea of prosperity, sailing toward a 30 million dollar island. An island filled with better margins, the fruit of our labor, an more rebate’s, the joy of our struggle. No winds, no rains, no storms can keep us from landing on this island if all of us stay in formation. As I leave the director’s position that I have held for over 6 years, it has been an honor to serve our community, an honor to be exposed to all of your business’s and the business at a corporate level, too. It’s been a great experience to work with some of the people around the world who want to be a part of this effort and at every corner, at every event, it was an honor to advocate for this great community. I will keep doing it while I am alive and after my death, my dead body will pursue the same goal! Thank you for allowing me this opportunity! ■

Mahemood Momin
Honorary Secretary
GHRA Warehouse and Distribution center

30 MILLION BY OCT.18
A TABC sting operation is an undercover visit to particular location that identifies retail establishments that sell alcoholic beverages to minors. The concept was originally developed for establishments which sell alcoholic beverages for off-premise consumption (package stores, convenience stores and grocery stores). In 1995, the concept was expanded to include on-premise location too (bars, clubs and restaurants). In the past, sting operations found that approximately 35% of the establishments would sell alcoholic beverages to minors. In more recent years the rate has fallen as low as 20%. When the agency conducts a minor sting and the clerk refuses to sell, the agency notifies the owner or corporation and congratulates the clerk. In some cases the corporation or owner have given the clerk a bonus for their diligence. The agency thoroughly endorses that kind of laudable response. The use of minor sting operations in Texas has been a very valuable tool in addressing underage drinking. Working together with other law enforcement agencies, we have been able to make a concerted effort to curb the availability of alcohol to minors. These sting operations are conducted in the same manner throughout the state. A minor is selected by the TABC or volunteers for the operation. The minors used in stings are generally agency employees’ children, civic group volunteers, or recruits from local schools and school groups. Written permission is obtained from the parent before the minor may participate. Minors are in the presence of a certified police officer at all times during the operation. The minor is instructed to dress appropriately for their age. Those who are youthful in appearance are used and are generally 16 or 18 years old. The local prosecutor determines if the minor will carry identification. If identification is carried, it is the minor’s own driver’s license or identification card. The minor is instructed not to lie about their age or coerce the sales clerk in any way. If the sales clerk asks any questions, the minor is to be polite and truthful. The minors may be wired so the transaction is tape recorded. An agent is posted inside to witness the transaction and to maintain the minor’s safety. Another agent outside in a vehicle may video tape the transaction or sometimes the minor is carrying a small video camera. If the minor makes a purchase, the beer is immediately given to an agent for evidence. Premises are usually selected at random. A general area of town is selected and each location in that area is assigned as part of the operation. If a second sting is conducted later in the same area, the agents may decide to only target the establishments which have complaints filed against them or places which are “known” by the minors to sell alcohol. GHRA works closely with law enforcement agencies and supports efforts that help deter the sale of alcoholic beverages to minors. We strongly suggest that any one running a register at a participating GHRA location is TABC certified. Store owners, managers and cashier should take this matter very seriously and be diligent and careful about who they sell these products to. We suggest you ask anyone who you think is under 30 years old for their I.D.. You wont know when a sting will occur at your store. Making it a practice that you ask for identification and only sell alcoholic beverages to adults at the legal times of the day will allow you to pass the sting operation with flying colors!

The following is a paid advertisement

Please support the following
Blue Bunny Distributors

For Service Call
Inside Houston
Tastee Kreme Ice Cream
713-290-0123
PADHRAMANI MUBARAK!

Mawlana Hazar Imam visit to The United States of America
March 13th - 22nd

On Friday, February 16, 2018 The Ismaili Leaders’ International Forum announced that Mawlana Hazar Imam will visit the United States of America in March 2018 in response to official invitations from several state governments.

This will be a memorable occasion for all of us and the GHRA Board of Directors and Staff wish many Mubarakis to you and to your families.
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## 2018 GHRA NCB Plan-o-gram Allocation Sign-Up Form

Fill out this form and fax to GHRA office at 281-295-5399 or present to reset crew prior to reset.

### My Store Allocation Selections

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2018 2018 COOLER RESET FORM

8 Vol. 5 Issue 3
We are off to another busy year! There are a couple of important dates to be aware of: First of all, we will have two presentations on Big Madre, our new Food Service Brand. The dates for those presentations are April 10th and 12th at the GHRA Corporate Office. Be sure to call in and sign up to reserve your spot as there are going to be a limited number of members we can host at one time! Secondly, we will host our General Body Meeting on March 27th at Stafford Centre. As you know this is a very important meeting to have open discussions on our business and to elect several new Board Members for 2018. I look forward to seeing everyone there!

After a slow start on volume in January, February has helped with a great rebound. We fully expect March to be a great month for sales and believe the first quarter to be very positive bringing in a great start to the year. As we begin rolling out the Big Madre brand, continue our expansion of SKUs in our chilled and frozen categories in our warehouse and distribution center and execute a more vigorous promotional strategy on our marketing platforms, we are setting ourselves up for tremendous success through the remainder of the year.

We will also be rolling out a program where by our members can arrange for a professional Operational Assessment to be done on their store by a nationally renowned consulting company. This Operational Assessment is designed to help members determine where there are opportunities to improve their operations in many segments including - facilities and equipment, shopper service standards, inventory management, marketing, merchandising, shopper communications and more! We will be sending out more information on how you can sign-up in the coming weeks.

I am bullish about our businesses for 2018! We have a lot of momentum and business building activities in front of us. I encourage everyone to take full advantage of the opportunities that are afforded to them through this organization. See you at the General Body Meeting…

Before I close, I want to say that it means a great deal to me to share in your excitement on the upcoming joyous occasion of the visit of Mawlana Hazar Imam!

Padhramani Mubarak!
The Future is Bright for GHRA!

The following is a paid advertisement

MADE FOR ATHLETES

Your customer look for Gatorade

Not only do they want to drink it immediately but they also want it for a future need as well.

Building a display in your store increases your sales and makes you a remembered and preferred destination for your customers.

See your Pepsi sales representative to build an amazing Gatorade Display this month!
The GHRA board of director’s outreach committee met with the Indo American Chamber of Commerce of Greater Houston at the GHRA corporate offices. The Indo-American Chamber of Commerce of Greater Houston was established in 1999. The mission of the chamber is to facilitate commerce between the U.S. & India, facilitate access to the Indo-American market, be the voice of the Indo-American Business Community and enable Greater Houston professionals, businesses, and corporations to succeed.

The GHRA board of directors met with IACCGH representatives to discuss their relationship and how the two companies can work together in the future.

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CONTACT US NOW FOR A NEW SETUP!

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The Future is Bright for GHRA

Change is powerful and our company is about to experience change beginning April 1, 2018 as 5 directors step down after many years of great service. As we look forward to the hope of the future we thought we’d also take a look back and review our accomplishments with a deep sense of gratitude to these people and to the many people without who’s generous gifts none of our fine work would’ve been possible.

Today, GHRA is a dynamic and evolving organization. We operate in two closely related and complementary functions - that of the largest retail organization in Houston, Texas and that of the independent retailer. Each bolster and inspires the work of the other. As independent retailers your strength over the last 5 years has been your growth and your support of the efforts of the organization. It is exciting and remarkable to see new members continue to join GHRA and existing members building ground up facilities including your newest Prototype offering. Soon, members will be building our newest offering, Big Madre Tacos Y Torta’s. Over the past years, the company has been hard at work developing and designing an offering that will minimize labor and maximize food service sales in a friendly and clean offering that will drive consumers to our stores. There is nothing of its kind being offered at any other trade association. This effort will change the way we go to business and provide us with additional revenue streams that drive profitability and as a result, allow us to develop more brands.

Over the past years, our collective sales continue to reach new milestones. Our direct store delivery operation is a well-oiled machine. Our suppliers recognize our strengths and embrace our operating model. Sales continue to rise and you supported partner programs that drove revenue leading us to a very important next step in the organization. We approved and built the GHRA warehouse and distribution center. This was a monumental task that took your vision and tenacity and also great leadership. This endeavor was the most challenging in our history and with the guidance of our dedicated board, these people embraced the necessary work and held the weight of the project on their shoulders. It is a tribute to the spirit of commitment and duty and is the direct reason the warehouse is successful today!

We continue to expand our service offerings. We offer an outstanding opportunity for members within our electrical aggregation. Our member benefit program is a quality program at an affordable price. Our insurance solutions are top rated, our outreach programs are recognized now more than ever, our company is represented in our local and texas wide government’s and the initiatives we advocate for are now have a larger voice. Our company has participated in the charitable efforts of the Aga Kahn foundation and the Greater Houston Retailers Charitable Foundation. Together you help fight poverty and you help support families of those in service to us every day. These two endeavors not only provide the greatest reward for those involved but they utter the true value of our company to the many people in our marketing area that otherwise don’t know us.

Your trade shows are the largest of their kind in South Texas and bring companies and account representatives from all over the country. Adding the warehouse products to the tradeshow this year and integrating the two parts of our business puts us on a new path as a group. Marketing has never been so exciting on Houston, Texas!

In short, you can see that our company is in a better place today. It is in a better place because of the dedication of people who take leadership seriously. It is in a better place because of people in the community who had faith in all of them; who entrusted them with their futures. We are here because these leaders accepted the charge and then rose up to meet it. As we move through the change we will experience shortly, today we say thank you to the dedicated people that will be leaving us in a better place with an opportunity to be even more successful. Thank you.
For a decade or more, convenience-store chains have been beefing up their foodservice offerings and posing a growing competitive threat to restaurants. In 2018, GHRA will officially enter the competition!

While C-store chain leaders in Nation’s Restaurant News’ latest Top 100 report, such as Wawa and Sheetz, have been innovating for years with self-ordering kiosks and specialty foods, GHRA has been working aggressively to carve out a unique concept for ourselves that begins with a solid Mexican food offering.

Still, the four chains that are in NRN’s Top 100 C-store segment — Wawa, Sheetz, 7-Eleven and Circle K — continue to get closer to restaurants.

For example, 7-Eleven, which has been the Top 100 sales leader for many years, based on its large number of stores and a growing emphasis on foodservice, has recently been adding more restaurant-quality offerings. The chain once best known for its roller hot dogs, neon-colored Slurpees and Big Gulps, recently added locally made offerings such as chicken parmesan, macaroni and cheese, chipotle chicken bowls and breakfast meals, at stores in select markets.

With the Top 100 C-store segment posting the third-highest year-over-year growth in total U.S. units in the Latest Year, and the third-highest average ESPU growth in the Latest Year among the tracked Top 100 segments, the competitive threat to restaurants appears certain to continue.

In summary times are changing.

Major convenience store chains are already in the game. It’s not about roller grills, nacho’s and soda any longer. People aren’t just visiting C-stores for convenience; they are coming to expect something different when it comes to food service. In short, they expect convenience with fresh offerings of different food options done with fast and friendly service.

The chains that are leading the present and future of C-store food service are looking to Houston as a market to take their offering to. It is the perfect time for GHRA to get in the game. Our food service brand and consumer offering will be a formidable competitor and we look forward explaining our offering to you at one of two meetings in April. Remember to please contact the GHRA office to register for the meetings. We look forward to rolling “Big Madres Taco Y Tortas” out together!

The following is a paid advertisement
Human Resource Planning is Key to Your Business

Include an Employee Development Plan for Each Employee

By Liegh Richards

Human resource planning is a key activity in business. What is human resources (HR)? It includes workforce planning, employee development plans, building basic employee benefits and salary programs, training and development, hiring and firing of employees, and more.

HR planning is a key activity for business; as it is very likely that your business cannot operate without people.

Even a business with the owner as the only employee of the business needs human resources - planning and managing one employee (yourself) is just simpler (or perhaps harder).

Human resource management is an important staff function for business; because of that, the HR plan needs to be part of the overall business plan.

Building an employee development plan for each employee is part of the HR responsibility. What are the employee’s strengths and weaknesses? What training is necessary to improve skills? What specific skills does the employee have? Can those skills be used in other areas of the business (cross-training is important in small businesses)?

Developing a development plan needs to include input from the individual(s) responsible for HR in your organization, along with the employee and the supervisor or manager.

Typically, HR also conducts salary and benefit surveys and builds basic employee benefits and salaries programs. And handles workforce planning and scheduling (usually through a workforce coordinator or scheduler).

If you are a one-person business, still consider human resource planning for the future: it is likely that as your business grows, your human resource needs will also grow.

Then, define your human resources vision and mission: it needs to be closely aligned (if not the same) to the organization’s mission and vision statements. Next, identify the primary (top 5) goals of your plan (workforce planning should always be one of those goals due to the importance of having enough of the right people in the business).

Good human resource planning and management will result in stronger rapport and communications between employees and the management. It will also result in individual employee development plans, low employee turn-over, low absenteeism, low safety incidents, competitive employee compensation programs (including basic employee benefits), high morale, good quality output and efficient operations, well trained employees, and satisfied customers.

Salary competitiveness (within the industry) and basic employee benefits need to be reviewed regularly, likely at least every two years. The plan needs to identify your hiring and promotion policies, and employee development plans for improving employee performance.

Ensure that you spend time and effort to develop strong human resource planning that clearly identifies your present and future needs, policies, gaps, goals and actions.
The (in)Convenience of Clerkless C-stores

By Chris Francis, Worldpay US

Change is coming to the convenience store industry — but it may not be for the best.

Earlier this year, 7-Eleven Inc. announced plans to swap out store associates in Japan with radio-frequency identification (RFID) tagged merchandise. The intention is to place a greater emphasis on payment cards, as well as mobile technology at checkout.

While the setup could alleviate the worker shortage facing Japanese convenience stores, the risks likely outweigh the rewards in the U.S. market. From the ongoing importance of register clerks to a wide range of security concerns, here’s why convenience store owners should think twice before going clerkless.

THE HUMAN TOUCH

Make no mistake, RFID and payment card technology frees up associates to focus their attention on more than just the checkout process. Whether it’s streamlining back-of-store operations or improving the customer experience, clerks would likely no longer be tied to the register. Self-checkout technology, however, may not be enough to replace workers altogether.

Clerks still play an important role in the brick-and-mortar ecosystem, especially when it comes to purchases that require additional human interaction. Think alcohol or cigarettes. Rather than relying on technology that may add friction to the checkout process, convenience store owners can continue delivering a shopping experience loyal customers have come to expect.

As far as payments go, register clerks provide options modern-day technology simply cannot. If, for example, a customer wishes to make a purchase using cash, he or she might be better off shopping at a convenience store that still employs human workers. After all, RFID and mobile technology aren’t adept at accommodating customers who opt for cash.

Staff-less stores may also cause convenience store owners to miss out on valuable sales in the event of a technological failure. While retailers can be rest-assured register clerks will work to resolve a payments issue, stores operated exclusively by technology provide no such luxury. If a payments system fails, retailers may be forced to turn away customers until the problem is resolved. Continued issues over the course of several weeks or months could put a significant dent in a store’s bottom line.

FEWER PROTECTIONS IN PLACE

Security remains an important concern for convenience store owners. A rise in fraud at the pump coupled with delays in chip-card compliance have turned up the pressure on retailers to guard against cybercriminals. But embracing clerkless stores may be a step in the wrong direction.

Although technology can help speed up the checkout process, some innovations leave much to be desired when it comes to security. RFID tags, for example, could be covered up in aluminum foil, thereby blocking the signal and making it easy for shoplifters to steal valuable products.

By instead opting for a combination of RFID technology and limited human intervention, retailers can reap the rewards of automated scanning while also stopping thieves in their tracks.

BUT CULTURE CAN COMPENSATE, SOMETIMES...

The 7-Eleven trial, however, may very well succeed in specific environments. The pilot is likely to work in Japan because culturally, Japan has less of a challenge with petty theft and shoplifting. Also, the Japanese historically have been at the forefront of technological adoption, and their interpersonal interaction is typically more formal.

Although the vast majority of retail locations in the United States are not likely to be good environments for a clerkless experience, certain establishments may be able to...
support this new model. For example, a corporate campus with developers working late hours, military installations, or other specialized shops in controlled environments with unusual hours of operation and regular customers.

**AS ALWAYS, KNOW & SERVICE YOUR CUSTOMER**

A staff-less convenience store is guaranteed to generate plenty of headlines. The buzz surrounding 7-Eleven’s recent announcement is proof of just that. But as intriguing as the concept may be, it isn’t a good fit for all retailers. Ultimately, register clerks still play a vital role in the success of brick-and-mortar stores in most businesses.

From handling a wide variety of purchases to accepting different payment methods, retailers who keep human workers onboard will be better prepared to handle any challenges that come their way. The presence of register clerks can also help deter fraudsters from taking advantage of technological glitches that pop up from time to time.

By complementing new technology with workers who can better accommodate customers and ramp up security, convenience store owners can increase their chances of success moving forward.

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The following is a paid advertisement

![Lays Display Ad](image)

**GHRA All-in-one Rack**

**$2 Value Line**

**Shippers on Sides**

**Lays Prepacked Weekender**

$2 Hot n Spicy Baken-Ets, Hot Fries, Sabritones

The Lays display will be backed by local advertising to help drive customer purchases

*Place in high traffic location*
10 Convenience Store Safety & Security Ideas

By Tracy Alldaffer

As a business owner of a 24 hour convenience store or gas station, your first priority should be the safety of your employees and customers. That’s why it’s imperative to come up with a comprehensive security plan for all of your employees to follow.

If you follow the appropriate security and safety plan, you’ll be going a long way to prevent a potential robbery, as well as ensuring your employees are prepared to do the right thing in case of a robbery.

Keep Up With Training
The convenience store and gas station industry (and all retail for that matter) experiences a higher level of turnover, so it’s important to stick to a regular training schedule to make sure everyone has the same level of experience should a robbery situation occur. If your employees aren’t trained, that could lead to injury.

Employees should be Visible From The Outside
While it’s important to make sure your store is stocked with merchandise and floor displays, make sure they do not block the view to the outside. If the potential robber can see the employee while outside and the employee can see the parking lot, the would-be criminal will be less comfortable following through with the robbery.

Great Lighting
If you don’t have your parking lot well lit, you’re giving the robber more coverage. A brightly lit parking lot area will make the robber lose confidence in his ability to sneak up onto your store.

Having a Good Video Camera System
Don’t skimp on your video camera system. Sure, newer systems are more expensive, but the picture clarity they offer will help law enforcement identify the perpetrator much easier than a grainy recording from an old VHS camera system. You can even get cameras that integrate with your POS system now as well.

Employees in Uniform
If your employees are not wearing an approved store uniform, this could cause confusion in the case of a robbery. This confusion on who works in the store may possibly lead to injury.

Not Too Much Money Available in the Register
If you’re not using a Smart Safe system, or you have one and you’re not using it correctly, you’ll be left with more money in your register than necessary. If you’re robbed with a large amount, then the perpetrator will think they can get the same score at another store and it will encourage them to try again. If you work for a franchise store, this could put your colleagues at risk, especially if they’re using proper procedures. The robber will think the clerk is lying when they don’t score as much from that store.

Having Proper Items in Place to Deter Robbery Attempt
If you have safety elements in place in your store, put a sticker on the front door. Bullet Resistant Barrier? Cash Management System? Let the robber know up front. If they know the robbery will be a challenge, they’ll get discouraged and leave. (contact the GHRA office for robbery deterrence kits)

Employee Cooperate With Robber
This is a big one. To keep everyone in the store safe, give the robber your full cooperation. The store is insured and will recoup the loss. You don’t want to do anything to increase the odds of injury. Cooperate even if you’re in a bullet resistant barrier. Sure, you might be safe behind it, but if there’s a customer in the store, you’ve just put them in harm’s way. Also, don’t be a hero. Even if you think you can overpower the robber, doing so could put you in a deadly situation. The best thing to do is cooperate completely and use the height strips on the doors to estimate the robber’s height and fill out your robbery description form as accurately as possible once the robber leaves. ■
Expect Gasoline Prices to Increase into Spring, Maybe Summer
Fuel Marketer Intelligence: Supply Chain Dynamics to Retail Fuel Prices

By Brian Milne

In the wholesale gasoline spot market in southern California, trading moved to the low summer-grade Reid vapor pressure rating on the last day of January, well ahead of the rest of the country, with RVP measuring the release of volatile organic compounds into the atmosphere. The higher the ambient temperature, the greater the release of these emissions, which is why RVP ratings are lowest during the summer months.

Sunny southern California will remain at the summer-grade RVP through late October, although the region is an outlier, with most of the country transitioning to low RVP ratings at the bulk wholesale level in March and April. Suppliers must have summer-grade gasoline at retail outlets no later than June 1, although in southern California the deadline is April 1 and a month later on May 1 in northern California.

These are important dates for anyone in the business regardless of where you sit on the supply chain, as the transition to lower rated RVP gasoline affects operations at refineries, terminals, and in the back office amid the supply rotation. The transition is also a key factor in why gasoline prices increase from winter to spring historically, although not the only reason.

Firstly, it costs more to produce the summer specific gasoline blend, which takes longer to manufacture because of the extra processing required to reduce harmful emissions that also diminishes the yield from a barrel of crude. Refining costs can run 5 cents to 15 cents per gallon more for the summer grade blend compared with winter quality product.

During late winter ahead of this transition, refineries move into seasonal maintenance known as turnarounds, which are carefully planned periods of extended maintenance that can last a month or more. Refiners stagger turnarounds, which can take up to two years to schedule. Maintenance conducted during this period can also be less extensive and for shorter durations.

The first quarter is chosen for this maintenance to help refiners prepare for the transition to summer gasoline blends. It’s also a time when gasoline demand is lowest. Still, refinery downtime can boost gasoline prices since there’s less production.

The winter-to-summer blend down for gasoline can also cause price swings, especially if suppliers need to drop prices to flush out winter-grade product only to hike them again when summer specified gasoline is stocked. These at times swift price swings are mostly realized at the wholesale level, and more gradually passed through to retail.

As this transition occurs, gasoline demand usually begins marching higher from typically lower consumption levels in January and early February, amid the winter thaw. Gasoline demand peaks during the summer months, with the summer driving season running from Memorial Day in late spring to Labor Day.

Greater demand typically means higher prices.

Another dynamic at play is that this seasonal trend is well known in the trading community. Frequently, those speculating in the gasoline market get ahead of the seasonal uplift in prices, and
buy futures contracts. Climbing futures prices can amplify the seasonal increase in gasoline values in physical markets.

At more than 50%, crude acquisition costs make up most of the price of gasoline, with crude oil traded globally. Supply disruptions which can be caused by a myriad of issues can push those costs higher, which would, in turn, lift the price of gasoline.

In the current market, several factors have merged to goose-step crude prices to better-than three-year highs, including a pipeline issue in the North Sea in early January, affecting the international Brent crude price, and an ongoing issue at a pipeline from Canada to the United States, that has underpinned an advance in West Texas Intermediate, the U.S. oil price benchmark.

Periods of extreme cold weather also drove up demand for heating fuels that boosted crude prices, while the geopolitical landscape has turned more violent. Street protests in Iran, war in the Middle East, on and off militant attacks in Nigeria and Libya, and an economic and humanitarian collapse in Venezuela all threaten oil supply, with all of those countries members of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries.

A primary factor in pushing up crude prices in January has, however, been expectations for strong economic growth globally, including the United States. Growing economies use more oil, underpinning higher prices.

In the United States, gasoline demand accounts for about 40% to 45% of total demand for oil products. So, expectations for a strengthening economy translate to an outlook for higher oil demand met largely by an increase in gasoline consumption. A healthy employment picture ties into greater demand for gasoline, and the U.S. unemployment rate is sitting at a 4.1% 17-year low. Consumer sentiment is also very strong, increasing in January, with a confident consumer typically driving and spending more.

In early 2018, these underlying features joined with speculation that prices would move higher to push retail gasoline prices up to multi-month highs in January. In fact, there were only three weeks in 2017 in which retail gasoline prices in the United States were higher than where they ended January, and those weeks were in September when Hurricane Harvey had caused widespread supply disruptions after slamming into the heart of the U.S. refining complex in Houston.

Speculators have amassed the largest net-long position in gasoline futures in a year, with a long position taken on the belief that prices would move higher. This can overheat the market and spark a sharp selloff, many times triggered by less-than-expected demand rates due to high prices at the pump. This year however, gasoline prices will likely “correct” lower before again climbing to multiyear highs in late spring.

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The following is a paid advertisement

Please contact Saman Distributors LLC for your snack and candy needs at (323) 786-7865
ALEXANDRIA, Va. — On the heels of U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) raids on multiple 7-Eleven locations, it’s more important than ever for convenience store retailers to school themselves in immigration compliance.

Under the Trump administration, there is an increased focus on enforcement and compliance. For instance, ICE has been told to increase its worksite enforcement by 400 percent, according to Guidepost Solutions CEO Julie Myers Wood and Managing Director John Connolly, who co-presented a recent webinar titled “What Every Convenience Store Should Know About Immigration Compliance.” The webinar was hosted by NACS, the Association for Convenience & Fuel Retailing, and sought to answer retailer questions about the impact on the industry, how to prepare for ICE arriving at locations, the current administration’s focus and efforts pertaining to immigration, and what the future of immigration under Trump’s administration holds.

As ICE expands its reach, it will zero-in on repeat offenders of employing undocumented workers, as well as companies that are deliberately hiring those who are undocumented.

ICE’s worksite enforcement strategy consists of a three-pronged approach:
• Inspections, fines and debarments;
• Employer and employee arrests; and
• Outreach and education through IMAGE, a formal membership certification program.

Retailers who should be most concerned about an ICE raid are those with a previous criminal record or on the receiving end of administrative action by ICE or the Department of Labor (DOL).

Wood and Connolly warned that every worksite enforcement investigation is “unique” and involves many contributing factors, such as:
• Knowingly hiring unauthorized workers.
• Evidence of trafficking, harboring, fraud, money laundering and mistreatment of employees.
• Threats of deportation, coercion, substandard wages and unsafe working conditions.

So, what’s a retailer to do? They outlined the following measures:

**I-9 FORMS**

A basic and imperative measure that retailers must take is ensuring that every individual hired has completed an I-9 form, including U.S. citizens, permanent residents, and immigrants authorized to work in the U.S. The only exempt groups are employees who were hired prior to Nov. 7, 1986, independent contractors, and those employed by a contractor providing contract services.

Section One of the I-9 must be completed by the employee on or before the first day of work commences. Section Two of the I-9 must be completed and signed by the employer within three business days.

Wood and Connolly noted that the I-9 form was revised last summer. With the revision, employees must now certify whether or not a preparer and/or translator(s) was used.

For more information on the I-9 form, employers can visit USCIS.gov.

Due to the possibility of fraudulent I-9 forms, employees need to be on the lookout for them, lest they be held liable. One way an employer can know if a document is real or not is the “reasonable test,” which merely means that the document in question appears to be genuine and relates to the prospective employee.

An employer should also look for any indication of fraud. Does the document reflect the proper agency that issued it? Does the information on the back of the card match the information on the front?

Other I-9 warnings: Employers cannot accept photocopies of I-9 documents and must personally examine the original document themselves. Employers cannot request I-9 documents during an interview or at anytime before hiring, nor can they require more documents than required by law or refuse to honor acceptable documents.
Employers must keep employees’ I-9 forms for three years after the date of hire or one year after the date of termination — whichever is later.

**PENALTIES**

In terms of civil or administrative penalties, employees who are found guilty of knowingly hiring and continuing to employ undocumented workers can face anywhere from a $548 to $4,384 fine per violation for a first offense. Failing to produce an I-9 form or other violations could incur fines from $220 to $2,191 per instance.

These sorts of violations are divided into “Technical Violations” and “Substantive Violations.” The former include incorrectly completed I-9s and a failure to enter date of hire, and may be granted a 10-day grace period to correct. The latter include missing I-9s, an employee’s failure to sign, and an employer’s failure to review a document.

In the case of criminal activity, such as engaging in a pattern or practice of hiring, recruiting or referring undocumented workers, the penalties are more severe.

An employer could face a $3,000 fine per undocumented worker employed and up to six months in prison.

**MITIGATING FACTORS**

If employers have the resources to do more than the minimum of staying on top of their employees’ I-9 forms, there are a number of other options to stay in the good graces of ICE and the DOL.

Wood and Connolly suggest employers do the following:

- Participate in the Department of Homeland Security’s E-Verify program.
- Establish a “level of cooperation” with ICE and Homeland Security Investigation agents.
- Seek assistance through ICE and participate in IMAGE.
- Have a robust internal immigration compliance program.

The E-Verify program is a government system that’s meant to aid in confirming employment authorization. However, it doesn’t eliminate the possibility of identity fraud, nor does it guarantee I-9s are accurate.

**IF ICE COMES**

If ICE raids your stores, the key is to be prepared and have a strategy in place. An employee onsite should be designated to handle the visit, should one occur. Other staff members should be informed that they’re to divert any investigators to this person.

It should be determined early on whether ICE is acting on a subpoena, arrest warrant, search warrant, or nothing. The designated staff member should also obtain the name of the ICE agent leading the operation. A call should be placed to the business’s counsel or compliance advisor.

Looking ahead, Wood and Connolly believe it’s more than likely that there will be additional changes to immigration and labor laws and how they will be enforced. While Trump has detailed a plan that he would like to see put in place, it’s uncertain how exactly that will be translated into policy. Regardless, employers must be vigilant to ensure they’re keeping up-to-date with the latest changes.
Government Relations: News Update

By Steve Koebele – Attorney & Government Relations Counsel

Austin, Texas – Eleven months ago, members of the state legislature deliberated a bill that would impose a statewide ban on “sanctuary cities,” which basically means local laws and actions that do not enforce or acknowledge state and federal immigration laws. While in the House Chamber, the bill moved like a large and slow vehicle so that willing passengers could jump on for the ride. Sure enough, a legislator from a conservative district in East Texas successfully placed amending language on the bill with the following impact:

A law enforcement officer may ask a person questions about their immigration status – namely, whether the individual is in the country legally or not – when the person is properly held by the officer, such as being pulled off the road for allegedly exceeding the speed limit.

The government officer may be working for a wide range of local governments, such as a city, county, high school or college campus police, and more. Local officials can be removed from office if they fail to comply with this new law. Local governments, including the City of Houston, sued the State of Texas in federal court as an attempt to block the legislation. That lawsuit continues as federal appellate judges consider the merits of the arguments delivered by all sides in the controversy.

Acting like a pincer with the new state law, the federal government simultaneously engaged in – and will continue to pursue – new tactics that result in arrests and deportations of undocumented individuals. A component agency of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security, the United States Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), has engaged to identify, arrest, and deport unauthorized immigrants. ICE operates under a unique combination of civil and criminal authorities that are designed to protect national security and public safety. ICE has more than 20,000 employees with a presence in all 50 states and 48 foreign countries.

Previously, ICE maintained a priority focus only on the most serious criminals. Likewise, the Trump administration elected to prioritize serious criminals, such as felons. However, the current administration is increasingly arresting and deporting unauthorized immigrants who have no criminal history at all. Earlier this year, federal agents targeted and appeared at specific 7-Eleven convenience stores in order to check the citizenship and immigration status of the employees. The headquarters of 7-Eleven is located in Irving, between Fort Worth and Dallas. As another example, ICE agents focused on a Southwest Houston apartment complex parking lot and arrested a worker from Guatemala. United States Border Patrol agents also recently boarded a greyhound bus to conduct document check operations. Still, individual immigrants who have prior criminal convictions formed 74% of all ICE arrests during 2017. Updated information for current year 2018 is not yet available.

Arrests by ICE in the City of Houston increased 5% last year compared to 2016. That percentage is significantly lower relative to the Texas Metroplex area. For example, the City of Dallas experienced a 71% increase in arrests last year. Nationally, the increase was at about 40%. Without citing a quota, ICE will perform more targeted enforcement operations during coming months and the foreseeable future.

Taken together, the new state law and the enhanced federal operations will result in still more inquiries – whether at work, near residential areas, or on public transportation – into the immigration status of individuals.

As always, the GHRA will closely monitor new laws, policies, and other matters that are of interest to you. ■
Welcome Members

On behalf of the board of directors and staff at GHRA, please welcome our newest members as of March 2018:

AM PM EXPRESS
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SHOP N CARRY
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TIP TOP FOOD MART #1
REFUEL MARKET
FUEL STOP

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24 SEVEN #10
Z K L FOOD MART
FAYRIDGE EXPRESS
KOOL KORNER FOOD MART
ZOOM MART

LONG DRIVE FOOD MART
ON THE WAY FOOD MART
LABANJEE EXXON
SHOP N GO
FLEMINGO SUPERMARKET
EVERGREEN FOOD STORE

The following is a paid advertisement

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1-800-888-2129
cashmanagersales@dunbararmored.com
TCEQ Mandated Underground Storage Tank (UST) A/B Operators Training

GHRA is excited to provide this online training, for the price of only $65.

- Members purchasing online training will receive a unique code from GHRA.
- This training takes about 4-6 hours and must be completed within 30 days from start of training.
- Payment options: Money order or deduct $65 from your quarterly rebate.

REGISTRATION FORM IS AVAILABLE at www.ghraonline.com
BIG MADRE IS COMING!

GHRA will host information days on April 10th & 12th 2018. Please contact the GHRA office at (281) 295-5300 by Friday, March 30th to secure your spot. Thanks for your support!

Due to the upcoming visit of His Highness the Aga Khan, the dates have been changed.

bigmadre.com