Dear GHRA Members,

I would like to extend to you my wishes for a safe and happy holiday season and I look forward to seeing you all at our town hall meetings this month. It has been a very productive year at GHRA and I am pleased to share with you my positive outlook for 2015 and beyond.

Modern retail outlets replacing the traditional unorganized retail outlet has led to the widespread popularity of convenience stores again. The convenience store industry has grown rapidly over the past few years, with consumers' lifestyle heading towards modernity and large participation from market players. An increase in the number of convenience stores have also been fuelled by various factors like changing lifestyles, growing hectic schedules, favorable economic growth and increasing per capita income of the people. All of this goes on around us as we work hard to keep our business open and operating. Knowing all of that, the key take away for us is that large market players see the same growth and are developing modern formats to enter the convenience store market. Additionally, they are looking to enter the game geographically, too. One market that is ripe for large market players is the Houston and surrounding markets. It is the one market in Texas that is not proliferated by chains and it’s a growing market too. GHRA works very hard to make those chains think twice about coming here. I cannot stress enough the importance of our unity going into 2015. When we think about all of the things we execute on a daily basis, the potential for new revenue and new opportunities that our warehouse proposes, it’s clear that we make a statement in the market and that statement makes it very hard for a chain to picture themselves here.

Thank you for your support in 2014 and we look forward to another successful year in 2015.

Sincerely,

Rahim Momin
I would like to wish everyone a very happy and safe Holiday Season. Our Town Hall Meetings are around the corner and I hope to see you there. We have a multitude of important topics to discuss and we look forward to getting your feedback and opinions.

It has been a busy year at GHRA and next year will be even busier. With the growth of our membership, administrative responsibilities and the addition of the Warehouse and Distribution Center, GHRA will be hiring over 100 new employees in 2015. Get the word out! There will be some great jobs available including operational staff, marketing positions, IT to financial and retail positions. These jobs will be posted on the GHRA Website beginning in the first quarter of 2015 and continue until all positions are filled. Our General Contractor is making great progress on the construction of the Warehouse and we are looking forward to opening day!

Remember, as we enter our slower volume months after the Holidays, take the time to look at your store maintenance needs. Sometimes we are too busy in the summer months to take care of the daily wear and tear on our facilities so have your HVAC system checked, check for plumbing or electrical problems, paint, clean walls/windows, pull down old promotional signs, refresh the area around the register, have the floors professionally cleaned, check restrooms (would you use it?). It is all about maintaining a pleasurable shopping experience for your customers. If we don’t do this, they will find a better place to shop.

We have a lot coming your way next year! The future is bright for GHRA!

Mike Thompson
Chief Executive Officer

TOWN HALL MEETINGS

Friday, December 5th
Beaumont – 9:30 PM

Tuesday, December 9th
Clear Lake – 8:30 PM

Wednesday, December 10th
College Station – 2:30 PM
North – 8:30 PM

Thursday, December 11th
Southwest – 8:30 PM

2015 Program and Pricing Updates, Warehouse News and More!
From the Desk of the Senior Vice President

Zulfikar Ali Maknojia

Under MasterCard EMV guidelines, U.S. retailers need to upgrade point-of-sale devices to contain chip-and-PIN or chip-and-signature EMV readers by October 2015, ATM machines by October 2016, and pump dispensers by October 2017 in order to avoid financial liability for transactions involving lost or stolen debit and credit cards. Speak with your credit card processor, ATM provider and gasoline wholesaler about what their companies are doing to be ahead of this mandate. Look forward to seeing all of you at the town hall meetings this month. Thank you for your support.

Sincerely,

Zulfikar Maknojia

From the Desk of the Vice President - Negotiation Chairman

Rafique N. Ali

We look forward to sharing updates to our 2015 programming at the town hall meetings. We appreciate your continued support of the 2014 programming and we look forward to seeing you at the town hall meetings this month.

Sincerely,

Rafique N. Ali

From the Desk of the Honorary Secretary

Ahmed Hasora

We have a total of 1357 users signed up on our portal. We are at approximately 76% of the total organization signed on. There are a total of 856 users with 151 sub accounts set up (Managers or employees with access). GHRA communicates it’s programming, pricing and other pertinent information using this platform. Thank you for your support and we look forward to seeing you at the town hall meetings this month.

Sincerely,

Ahmed Hasora

From the Desk of the Treasurer

Mahemood Momin

Thank you for your continued support of the programing we have in place. Each year your support not only ensures our plans are met but allows us to look to the future and get ahead of important trends in our business. Thank you for your support in 2014 and we look forward to seeing you at the town hall meetings this month.

Sincerely,

Mahemood Momin
Sandwiches are the new cigarettes, at least as far as 7-Eleven is concerned. Traditionally a reliable source of profit for convenience stores, cigarette sales are waning—and food, from fresh fruit to mini-meals, is rising to take its place.

"Over the course of the next 10 to 20 years, we fully expect for cigarette sales to continue to decline," spokesman Scott Drake writes in an e-mail. "We are planning for cigarettes to not be a part of our long-term business model." Cigarettes still make up about 38 percent of non-gasoline sales for convenience stores. Yet, even with the generous rebates offered by tobacco companies, gross margins have dropped from 20.8 percent in 2002 to 14.6 percent in 2011, as consumers turned to lower-cost brands and started buying on low- and no-tax reservations, putting a squeeze on prices, according to the National Association of Convenience Stores.

At the same time, strict laws on how tobacco products are displayed and sold have made them less appealing to retailers. Cities such as Boston and San Francisco even banned cigarette sales in pharmacies, leading to lawsuits from Walgreen (WAG) and Safeway (SWY).

Food, on the other hand, is far more profitable, with gross margins of more than 55 percent. Prepared food and fountain sales now account for 30 percent of profit for Casey’s General Stores (CASY), more than double the 13 percent generated by cigarettes, according to the company’s annual report. In 2012, the Midwestern chain began a remodeling program for its 1,700 stores to accommodate expanded coffee bars and seating, and added made-to-order sandwiches. Casey’s started pizza delivery service in 2012 and sold tens of millions of pizzas last year.

At the Pantry (PTRY), which operates 1,572 stores (including Kangaroo Express) in the Southeast, food service through its own brand and such restaurants as Subway and Krystal now represents 10.4 percent of revenue, compared with 4.4 percent in 2008. 7-Eleven plans to double sales of fresh food, including refrigerated, warmed, and freshly made comestibles, to 20 percent of sales in the U.S. and Canada by 2015.

"Food is the future," says Jeff Lenard, a spokesman for the NACS.

BLOG: A New Year’s Recipe for Fixing the Food System

Why food and not booze? Alcohol as a share of convenience store revenue has seen steady during the past five years, says IBISWorld analyst Doug Kelly. "They are focusing on convenience and looking at overall health trends taking place."

The challenge, says Lenard, will be greater for single-store operations, which are more than half of all convenience stores. They will need to find suppliers of fresh, nonpackaged foods who are willing to do business with a little guy. “Even sticking out some bananas, you run into a problem with the distribution system,” he says. “You might have to get them at the grocery store and sell them, which makes it hard to be competitive.”

Alas, the new food-stuffed stores might make it tough for former smokers to avoid those post-quitting pounds—unless, of course, they opt for some fruit which is also becoming a c-store staple.
Evolving eating habits and generational dynamics are changing the way we look at snacking. There’s no traditional time when Americans are looking for snacks—say, the middle of the afternoon. It’s the late morning, early evening, and late night, too. It’s as if there are as many dayparts for snacking as there are for full meals, if not more.

Millennials, ranging in age from late teens to mid-30s, often perceive dining as eating small portions and sharing food throughout the day. And restaurants are striving to be the go-to spot for Millennials and other folks seeking to satisfy their in-between-meal munchies with a wide range of items, including indulgent options that remove the guilt factor because they are smaller portions.

“Snacks have become a much bigger part of the restaurant mix,” says Paul Pendola, senior foodservice analyst for market research firm Mintel. “So much of the restaurant experience is about a treat, rewards, and celebrations.”

Restaurants feature more creative baked goods and ice cream products, snack-sized savory sandwiches and sides, and a variety of hot and iced drinks, from flavored lattes and green tea coolers to smoothies and milkshakes.

Part of the growth may be due to the way consumers now view snacks. “How you define a snack these days gets fuzzy,” says Justin Massa, founder and chief executive of Food Genius, which provides market intelligence. “You can look at so many things on the menu as a snack, because of the way the consumer sees it.”

He points to Taco Bell’s success with its line of Doritos Locos Tacos that use various types of Doritos chips as the shells. “They are small, snacky, and indulgent, but what’s just as important is they are marketed as a food experience” that can be shared on social media, he says.

This appeals to Millennials who are seeking more food adventures “and want to extend that by having smaller bites of more things,” Massa says. “Think of an indulgent snack as a unique and different food experience.”

The Doritos Locos Tacos are also part of a trend of using brand-name snacks in a new item. This includes Taco Bell’s Cinnabon Delights—bite-sized Cinnabon pastries filled with frosting—and Burger King’s Cinnabon Minibon Roll and Oreo milkshake.

Despite the growing snack availability at restaurants, there are plenty of opportunities for operators to garner even more of the snacking market. According to a recent survey from Technomic Inc., only a fifth of consumers say they snack at restaurants.

“It’s not that the restaurants aren’t doing well with consumers looking for snacks, but there’s still room for more expansion,” says Kelly Weikel, senior consumer research manager at the market research firm. The survey reports that more than half of snacking diners do so at a quick-service burger place. Coffee cafés and other fast-food eateries drew a third each, while bakery cafés and mall-based snack sites were both around 20 percent.

Increasingly, limited-service operators promote snacks either by using that word or by positioning some menu items, including value meals, as a between-meal treat. “Many consumers are looking for something filling between meals,” Weikel says. “They may not order chicken tenders as a meal, but they may as a small indulgence.”

Snacking makes up some 40 percent of sales at Checkers and Rally’s, says Terri Snyder, chief marketing officer for the sister double-drive-thru chains. “I define snacking more broadly [than just a light bite],” she says. “Millennials aren’t eating three [meals], and over 20 percent of our sales are late night. It’s those mini-meal occasions that we’ve done so much with snacking, both sweet and savory.”

The Tampa, Florida–based chains’ value menus are driving much of these snacking occasions, and there are other innovations, such as loaded potato skins and the $2 boxes with fries and a protein. Checkers and Rally’s are also testing churros, which Mintel’s Pendola says are gaining steam nationally. “They’ve
become familiar enough that there is no problem with their approachability,” he says, adding that they can be offered with various seasonings, sugars, and dips.

McDonald’s counts numerous items as snacks, including several varieties of Snack Wraps. Arby’s Snack ‘n Save value menu includes small sandwiches, fries, shakes, Mozzarella sticks, turnovers, and the chocolate molten lava cake.

White Castle has long been a site for snackers, in part because its menu items are small and in part because the chain’s restaurants are open all day.

“We live in the greatest age ever in terms of choices available,” says Jamie Richardson, vice president at the Columbus, Ohio–based company. “In terms of snacking, it’s easy for consumers to experience a whole range of tastes without over-committing or feeling full.”

In addition to its well-known Sliders, the company has chicken and fish versions of the small sandwiches, Chicken Rings, and Fish Nibblers, which are like bite-sized fish sticks.

“Snacks can mean a lot of different things for different people, and there’s something fun about them,” Richardson says. “A snack denotes taking a break, and we all need a little emotional respite to get us through the day.”

There are four major times of the day for snacking, according to Technomic. As expected, most consumers (71 percent) get a bite mid-afternoon, while 37 percent do so mid-morning, 39 percent mid-evening, and 40 percent late at night.

Snacking periods have specific profiles, Pendola says. “We need to think about the a.m. snack, the p.m. snack, and the night snack, and we need to think of them as different dayparts, just like breakfast, lunch, and dinner.”

Morning is about energy, fueling up, and on some occasions is a lunch replacement, he says. The afternoon snack is about taking a break and treating oneself, while the evening “is when you see more sharing, more social occasions when people get together.”

A Food Genius survey indicates that people tend to eat healthier in the morning and less so as the day progresses, becoming most indulgent after 9 p.m.

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Retailers should be particularly excited for Monday’s debut of Apple Pay, which promises to be an excellent tool for separating shoppers and their money.

Apple’s (AAPL) mobile payment service will let iPhone users buy things by simply pulling out their device. Researchers have long found that shoppers spend more the further they get from handling actual currency and tend to better remember cash transactions. These tendencies help explain why credit card balances tend to bloat and why casinos use chips in place of money. It’s also why companies such as Starbucks (SBUX) encourage customers to load money onto apps or prepaid cards.

Behavioral economists have a term for this dynamic: decoupling. The card or app or casino chip mentally separates the consumer from his bank account. The payment is both delayed and bundled with other charges so it doesn’t seem so painful. Citibank tested the research in 2009 and found a mobile “tap to pay” pilot program significantly boosted both the number and size of consumer transactions.

Buying things without cash is simply more fun. Richard Thaler, a behavioral economist at the University of Chicago, proved such transactions are more pleasurable experiences (PDF). Anyone who has ever walked away from an Uber ride knows this feeling well. With credit card data embedded in the app’s settings, someone using the service never actually pays or even tips—at least not in any physical way.

The question with Apple’s new payment service is whether it’s an additional degree of distance from credit cards or merely taking the well-established place of plastic in the psychology of shopping. Apple Pay doesn’t require any swiping or tapping, which seems to suggest a new level of abstraction. With a fingerprint on the iPhone button and a little wave at the cash register, the deal is done. “Now paying in stores happens in one natural motion,” Apple says in its pitch. “You don’t even have to look at the screen.”

Some 220,000 stores are already set up to accept the payments, including Bloomingdale’s, Foot Locker, Macy’s, McDonald’s, and PetSmart. The list also includes RadioShack, a retailer desperately in need of a revenue boost. The other brick-and-mortar companies in that troubled camp—J.C. Penney (JCP), Sears (SHLD)—would do well to get onboard.

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Now Under Construction!
For most coffee drinkers, the first beverage consumed in the morning is a cup of coffee. In fact 68% of them drink one cup within the first hour of waking up. This should tell you that coffee is still a growing consumed beverage in the U.S., and with 54% of the U.S. population over the age of 18 consuming coffee every day, sales can only continue to climb.

According to CSP Daily News, the convenience store industry reported its highest coffee sales in five years. Net coffee sales for 2012 were more than $2.85 billion, according to a report by Study Logic Long Island, N.Y. With 65% of coffee drinkers adding flavor, creamer or sugar to their coffee, a varied selection of flavorings, sweeteners and creamers is a true necessity for a viable coffee bar. For the retailer, it is important to consider what types of coffee you are brewing and also when you are brewing them. There is not just one typical coffee consumer, so it is important to offer different styles of coffee to meet consumer needs and make sure that it’s fresh and hot when it counts. Breakfast represents 65% of coffee consumption in the U.S., and 30% is consumed between meals. This statistic alone shows that, even though coffee is consumed most in the morning, there is still a need to keep the pot hot in the afternoon. The retailer must track and determine what times are best for their region and make coffee available during those times. Traditional coffee will always be a focus of many retailers; however iced coffee is one of the fastest growing segments in the category. According to the NPD Group, Americans consumed 300 million servings of iced coffee in 2001, and by 2012, that number increased to 1.2 billion servings. While 52% of all iced coffee servings are consumed by Americans between the ages of 25 and 49, women make up 64% (Source: NPD). With these statistics, retailers should continue offering a variety of coffee to their customers. Brewing a simple cup of coffee is no longer the solution to capturing the needs of the true coffee drinker. Variety is key to bringing in new customers and growing the overall business.
Fast food kitchens must protect restaurants against food borne illness.

Food Safety, Kitchen, In the Store

Stories surrounding food-borne illness outbreaks in national quick-service restaurant chains have become very common, with many national brands having suffered at least one major food-borne illness outbreak. Whether the cause of the outbreak is due to contaminated food or unclean surfaces, food safety at these quick-service chains, which feed nearly all Americans at least once a week, needs to be regarded as a top concern and priority. Restaurants have an obligation to ensure customers are protected against food borne illness which affects too many Americans.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) estimates that 48 million Americans suffer annually from food-borne illnesses, which lead to 128,000 hospitalizations and 3,000 deaths. Of those reports, 68 percent are attributed to restaurants and delis and, as many people know, it only takes one incident to destroy a reputation and a chain.

On top of the damaged reputation caused by an outbreak, the financial costs incurred by quick-service restaurants from food-borne illness outbreaks can be tremendous. According to a study done by Ohio State University consumer science professor, Robert Scharff, “The basic cost-of-illness model includes economic estimates for medical costs, productivity losses, and illness-related death. Using this basic model, Scharff estimates the total annual cost is $51 billion.” The cost of the top five food-borne pathogens alone is estimated at $6.9 billion annually.

The cost of the top five food-borne pathogens alone is estimated at $6.9 billion annually.

So how can these national brands strengthen their food-safety practices without incurring significant costs in time and money?

There are a number of things restaurants can do in their efforts toward enhanced food safety to help elevate their restaurants to top food safety standards.

Reduce human error
This can be a restaurant’s biggest concern. Human error is impossible to eliminate entirely and is bound to happen. In a perfect world, employees would stay home until they fully recuperate from being ill, and customers that are sick with something as mundane as the common cold would stay home instead of going out for food.

But we don’t live in the ideal world, and new microorganisms are constantly being introduced into the environment, allowing diseases to spread. Compounding the problem is the fact that entry-level employees performing the cleaning and disinfecting of surfaces have been insufficiently trained (or ignore directions for application). One single and very effective way a quick serve can approach this problem is by reducing and/or eliminating microorganisms once they are introduced, through an RTU product, with no requirement to dilute or test levels of concentration. The benefit of an RTU product is the ability to deliver a consistent, effective dose with each application, with no mixing or testing required. Additionally, increased rigor and discipline in employee training in food-safety practices is critical.

Simplify practices
By simplifying and focusing sanitation practices and protocols, and by increasing training, national chain restaurants can reduce the risk of non-compliance from employees throughout the system. By selecting one common product and one set of common standards, corporate management can have an easier time watching and ensuring that food-safety standards are reducing risk across the board.
Safety

Use less harmful cleaning products

Many disinfectant products on the market can be toxic and irritating to those who use them. This may lead to employees’ reluctance to properly use the cleaning products, so as to avoid coming in contact with them. This, in turn, may result in improper and inconsistent cleaning of food contact surfaces, which can ultimately lead to the spread of food-borne illnesses. By replacing irritating products that cause skin and eye irritation, restaurants lower the risk of improper and inconsistent cleanliness.

Find products that are all encompassing

Most no-rinse sanitizer products on the market do not completely eliminate microorganisms from surfaces that come in contact with food on a daily basis. Moreover, most products are irritating, as mentioned above, which can lead to a lack of enthusiasm and care for food safety in quick-service restaurants. Restaurants need to find products that are all encompassing, ones that have low toxicity, are not irritating or harmful, and, most importantly, disinfect a broad range of microorganisms and harmful bacteria, with fast kill times, to minimize or eradicate the possible spread of food-borne illnesses.

Help to establish food-safety laws that are universally accepted

Recently, California made an attempt to pass a bill that would require all chefs and bartenders to start wearing gloves when cooking and preparing food. The bill caused major outrage among chefs and bartenders, many citing that it would hinder their ability to cook, prepare, and properly plate dishes. After much pushback, California lawmakers decided to revoke the law and permit chefs and bartenders to work barehanded. Since it is evident that laws like that will not pass without major pushback and outrage, lawmakers must find ways to push for food-safety practices in quick serves that can and should be universally accepted throughout the industry.

Implement new technology to support food-safety initiatives

Implementing new forms of technology to support restaurants’ food-safety initiatives is getting easier with the creation of various initiatives and devices. In Minnesota, for example, Stearns County recently launched a digital effort to educate restaurant workers on food safety, including proper hygiene, safe temperatures for food, and dangers of food-borne illness.

Another example of a plan to implement is the Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) program designed to help safeguard against the development and spread of food-borne illnesses. By following the program, restaurant owners and employees can greatly reduce the risk of unsafe food conditions in the restaurant.

Ensure supply chain compliance with strong food-safety practices

Many pathogens are introduced to the restaurant environment on food and ingredients from their suppliers. When these items are then prepared in the restaurant, the surfaces and equipment used can then become contaminated. Quick-service chains should work with their suppliers, and apply rigorous standards in their supplier selection process, in order to minimize these risks. Suppliers must be required to meet the food-safety standards established by the quick-serve chain, especially regarding the disinfecting of all food contact surfaces within the supplier’s operation, as well as the appropriate use of antimicrobial processing aids and interventions.

When all is said and done, however, no matter how quick-service restaurants choose to go about their food-safety practices, owners and managers must remember how much is at stake. When someone gets sick after eating at a restaurant, they are not likely to return soon, if ever. And, more importantly, that person is likely to tell family and friends that they got sick from their dining experience. Worse, in most cases, the restaurant chain is not likely to ever know. Word of mouth and social media have the potential to spread the bad news faster than the food borne illness can begin showing widespread symptoms, and it can have devastating effects with regard to major losses of customers, and thereby revenue, brand equity, and economic value.
It’s no secret that our industry has a high turnover rate, and the time and money businesses spend to hire new employees add up fast. But some operators are turning to mobile platforms to change employee hiring and retention strategies, thanks in part to a high percentage of Millennial workers.

“The trend out there is to accommodate certainly the newest generation of worker … with as much of an ability to interact with you as a potential employer via their phone,” says David Lewis, president and CEO of Operations Inc, a human resources consulting firm.

For example, Jobaline.com offers Web-based apps through which applicant’s complete applications through a mobile device, Web browser, or even via text message. Luis Salazar, CEO of Jobaline.com, says advantages to a mobile-based hiring platform include the option to search for a temporary employee when a staff member calls in sick. “It’s like having your own virtual staffing agency,” he says.

Some mobile apps offer streamlined communication between operators and employees. For example, Red e App offers a direct network-based communication and can also store content like training manuals.

“On the company’s end, they get to see when you come in when you read your messages,” says Jonathan Erwin, CEO and founder of Red e App. “They get to welcome you, train you, onboard you, and get compliance and regulatory information to you. It’s never been possible before.”

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Finding Love in a Gallon of Gas
Give me a double of that diesel and a bottle of your finest CNG

By Mitch Morrison, Vice President & Group Editor | CSP Daily News

NASHVILLE, Tenn. -- There are some strange things happening in the world of fuels lately. If you haven't noticed, gas prices are down--big time.

Across the nation, motorists are filling up for less than $3 per gallon, a far cry from the $4 and more of recent memory. And there's another surprise--motor fuel consumption is up, not by a lot perhaps but still 1%--a reverse from recent downtrends.

The reason these vignettes are so newsworthy is they underscore something sort of fun about fuel--it's hard to forecast.

So when the Society of Independent Gasoline Marketers of America (SIGMA) 2014 Annual Meeting kicked off Monday afternoon in the country's backyard of Nashville, Tenn., few could be heard belting a song about heartache or lost love. Rather, it was a strumming session with simple beats about fuel profits being good so far and Chicken Little standing on the sidelines.

That doesn't mean there wasn't some forecasting, some prognostications and sentiment-sampling.

Nick Jones, energy advisor at ExxonMobil's corporate strategic planning department, said don't dump your pickup truck or feel like a tree killer if you believe energy consumption is going to grow in coming years.

In fact, he forecasted global energy demand to spike 35% by 2040, spurred by rapid development in Asia Pacific. As for the United States, interesting changes are afoot, including:

- Gasoline consumption will fall from eight million barrels a day to five million by 2040, due to improved technologies, superior fuel efficiencies and a more diverse vehicle fleet.
- Consumers in the United States will continue to love their pickup trucks, SUVs and other big vehicles. The good news is that these vehicles will deliver twice the mileage by 2040 as they do today, climbing from about 21mpg to 40.

In the heavy-duty truck sector, diesel will remain dominant with natural gas (compressed natural gas, CNG, and liquefied natural gas, LNG) incrementally growing share to more than 10% over the next 25 years. But don't expect diesel to win the day on small vehicles, even though such offerings are more popular in Europe.

Some highlights:
Kloza asked for their biggest worry. Spinks said regulation from local all the way to the feds. "Even in South Carolina, we are getting more and more intrusion." Robinson said he worried about the car battery, noting how little it has changed. And Ports feared the demise of the commercial licensed driver. As for Kloza' biggest concern? "Losing my hair."

Kloza brought up Marathon's acquisition of Hess's retail network and wondered whether we may be seeing a return of big oil company's infatuation with retail outlets—at least from the super refiners. "I've seen the cycles," Spinks said, "And I didn't think this was going to come back." Ports said, "One thing for sure is history will repeat itself in this business. I think you'll see a reintegration" at some point.

And about these mercurial gasoline prices and gas demand climbing. Spinks said it's true--"South Carolina is up 3%. I'm seeing a vibrant economy all over the state." And Ports, the Ohioan speaking of the Rust Belt, agreed: "We've actually seen a significant uptick" in fuel traffic.

Of course no SIGMA event would be memorable without some entertaining contemplations from the industry's version of John Bon Jovi.

Tom Kloza, the glib, ubiquitous co-founder of Oil Price Information Service (OPIS), moderated a panel with three downstream vets: Tom Robison of Robinson Oil, Michael Ports of Ports Petroleum and Stewart Spinks of The Spinx Co.
Fuel Maxx’s goal is to provide the community with a warm environment filled with amenities and a friendly staff. Its Store No. 6 in Spring is no different. The recent renovation at the 4,300-square-foot store draws in customers with vibrant, colorful wall graphics highlighted with warm LED lighting in an open-ceiling concept. Running along the walls are coolers with 3-D directional signs for beverages and snacks. Anchoring the corner of the cooler is a true gem: the Fuel Maxx Beer Vault, which is designed to look like a see-through bank vault. The Beer Vault is a walk-in cooler where customers can choose their favorite beers by the case — already pre-chilled.

Beyond the cooler walls is the Fuel Maxx Wine Cellar boasting 20 shelves of fine wines. Other offerings are easily spotted, including a coffee bar, fresh deli counter with breakfast and lunch items, a self-service soda fountain, and a large array of frozen drinks. “Our design goal is to give our patrons the feeling they have entered a store with a solid foundation that wants to be an extension of the community itself,” according to Zul Maknojia. “We want to be part of their daily routine with more than just competitive prices, which is why we have made our interior graphics visually pleasing and even fun to look at. From the animated bubbles coming from the fountain area to the steel walls of the Beer Cave, our goal is to make their daily visit with us a moment to look forward to every day.”
On behalf of the board of directors and staff at GHRA, please welcome our newest members as of December 2014:

Startran Fuel • New Caney, TX
Pick N Go • Pearland, TX
Shop N Go Food Store • Baytown, TX
Xpress Mart • Houston, TX
Aydin’s Shop & Go • Houston, TX
Fuel Maxx #13 • Houston, TX
A J Food Store • South Houston, TX
Country Food Mart • Pearland, TX
2818 Sona Food Mart • Bryan, TX
Cartwright Food Mart • Missouri City, TX
Grant Express • Houston, TX
Stop N Go • Victoria, TX

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**Authorized Representative Enrollment Instruction**

2. Click on Member login (top right)
3. Click on Authorized Rep Enrollment tab
4. Enter in all the information requested accurately. For multiple stores, just enter one of your GHRA member#. All stores will be listed once successfully logged in.
5. After all information is entered press the Continue button.
6. You will see a green confirmation box upon successful enrollment.
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- Finance Manager

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TOWN HALL MEETINGS THIS MONTH

BEAUMONT
Date: Friday, December 5
Time: 9:30 PM
Venue: Ridgewood Church
2920 Lake Arthur Dr
Port Arthur, TX 77642

HOUSTON NORTH
Date: Wednesday, December 10
Time: 8:30 PM
Venue: Tempura Grill (North)
10640 FM 1960 Road West
Houston, TX 77070

HOUSTON SOUTHWEST
Date: Thursday, December 11
Time: 8:30 PM
Venue: Tempura Grill (Sugar Land)
16305 Kensington Dr
Sugar Land, TX 77478
(Behind Super Target)

CLEARLAKE
Date: Tuesday, December 9
Time: 8:30 PM
Venue: Mogul Indian Restaurant
1055 Bay Area Blvd
Houston, TX 77058

BRYAN/COLLEGE STATION
Date: Wednesday, December 10
Time: 2:30 PM
Venue: Holiday Inn
1203 University Drive E
College Station, TX 77840

AGENDA ITEMS TO BE DISCUSSED

2015 Negotiations Recap

• GHRA Warehouse Update

• Member Portal Update

• Food Service Program