



# GHRA In Action

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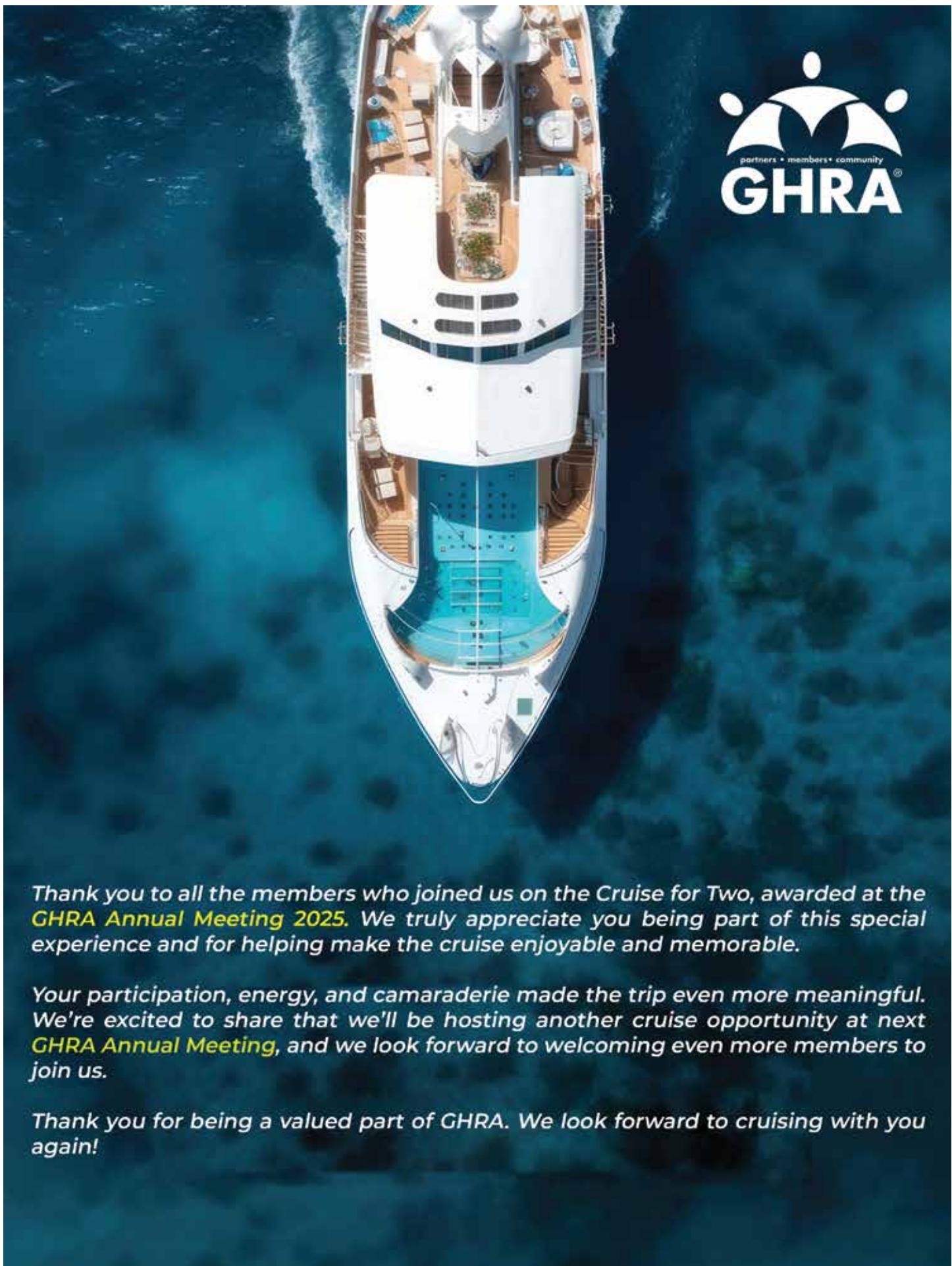


★ WE SHALL OVERCOME ★

# MARTIN LUTHER KING DAY



**IN OBSERVANCE OF MARTIN LUTHER KING JR. DAY,  
THE GHRA OFFICES WILL BE **CLOSED**  
ON MONDAY, JANUARY 19, 2026.**



*Thank you to all the members who joined us on the Cruise for Two, awarded at the GHRA Annual Meeting 2025. We truly appreciate you being part of this special experience and for helping make the cruise enjoyable and memorable.*

*Your participation, energy, and camaraderie made the trip even more meaningful. We're excited to share that we'll be hosting another cruise opportunity at next GHRA Annual Meeting, and we look forward to welcoming even more members to join us.*

*Thank you for being a valued part of GHRA. We look forward to cruising with you again!*









# Hershey Identifies How Convenience Retailers Can Win at the Shelf

Learn how the company is doubling down on shopper insights to boost baskets, deepen engagement and drive incremental growth.

By CSNews.com

The Hershey Co. understands the importance of strong collaboration with retail partners, especially within the convenience segment, to elevate shopper engagement through tactical merchandising strategies.

"To drive success in this channel, we work closely with retailers to apply key shopper insights and elevate the overall shopping experience," Daniel Toole, vice president of small format at Hershey, wrote in a recent company blog.

The challenge is a consumer trend toward smaller basket sizes and fewer visits due to higher fuel costs, inflation and changing lifestyles. Therefore, said Toole, bundling is a key strategy. Circana reports that nine out of 10 shoppers purchase an additional item with their convenience store selection, with candy being one of the most common add-ons.

"Through compelling promotions, impactful imagery, clear signage and strategic merchandising, we're helping retailers create bundle solutions that not only deliver value but also encourage shoppers to try new items," he said.

Hershey leans on two approaches to drive growth via promotions, which include:

**Everyday Multiple (EDM):** Encourages multi-unit purchases and rewards loyal shoppers by delivering consistent value.

The company has been using this strategy particularly on king and standard pack types to boost unit conversion year-round.

"Clear signage with shelf strips, blades and danglers ensures shoppers don't miss the deal," said Toole.

**Hi-Lo Promotions:** Toole said these offers generate strong incremental sales and attract non-loyal shoppers.

"By running promotions for four to six weeks and aligning them with peak sales periods, we can help retailers drive meaningful lifts while keeping baskets fresh and engaging," he added.

Presentation should be a core part of the retail execution strategy. Toole recommended that convenience retailers organize aisle flow based on shopper insights, grouping products by usage occasion and type, and leaning on vertical merchandising to further enhance visibility.

"Convenience stores are a unique environment — fast-moving, mission-driven and packed with opportunities to capture shoppers in the moment," said Toole. "For us, the channel represents not only a critical driver of growth, but also a launchpad for innovation, merchandising strategies and shopper engagement." ■

# Most Consumers Worry About C-Store Food Contamination, Spoilage

**Logile survey shows which foods shoppers trust and avoid—and how retailers can close the fresh food quality and safety gap.**

By CSPDailyNews.com

Seventy-nine percent of respondents in a survey said they worry about food contamination or spoilage at convenience stores, according to Logile's 2025 Convenience Store Food Quality and Safety Report.

The survey reveals which c-store foods shoppers trust, what they avoid and how c-stores can close the fresh food quality and safety gap, said Southlake, Texas-based Logile, a provider of AI-powered connected workforce solutions.

"In a rapidly evolving industry, convenience stores are pouring resources into fresh food programs," Logile said. "What was once a quick stop for snacks and fuel is now becoming a direct competitor to fast-food chains, offering fresh meals, premium coffee and budget-friendly bundles. But one challenge remains: earning the trust of everyday consumers."

In the survey, 74% said they trust gas station or c-store food safety less than restaurant food safety, and only 9% feel highly confident eating food from a gas station or convenience store.

Some food items raised concerns for many respondents, Logile said. Sushi led the "think twice" list by a wide margin: 85% of respondents said they would never purchase it from a gas station or convenience store. Respondents were also skeptical about pre-made packaged salads (41%) and pre-cut fresh fruit (40%). Hot-case burritos and taquitos (39%), roller-grill hot dogs (36%) and nachos (35%) rounded out the top six most-avoided items.

"The top reasons for opting out paint a clear picture of consumer mindset," Logile said. Two-thirds, 66%, cited fear of spoiled food, 59% were concerned about cleanliness and nearly half, 48%, were worried about food poisoning.

"Comments from respondents suggest that visual cues, like how clean the prep station looks or how long an item appears to have been sitting, play a major role in their decision making," Logile said. "Foods that are cold but not sealed, warm but not freshly made or served from machines that look poorly maintained tend to trigger the most doubt."

Seventy-seven percent say food that's been sitting out too long is a dealbreaker, and 59% won't touch anything if the prep area looks dirty, Logile said. More than half, 56%, have walked away from a purchase after seeing an unclean machine or service station.

To make a purchase:

- 67% want to see signs that food is freshly made
- 62% look for overall cleanliness
- 54% check packaging for freshness or prep-time labels

Meanwhile, 53% think gas station food has gotten better over time, and 18% say the quality has noticeably improved. But just 10% have had consistently positive experiences.

"Forty percent are more likely to buy food from major chains, 37% say they trust co-branded items more and 53% are swayed by a modern, well-lit store," according to the report.

In addition, 33% say they'd be more likely to buy if cleaning or food rotation schedules were visible in the store, while another 40% say tech-enabled safety systems would boost their trust—but only if they see clear signs the store is following procedure, Logile said.

## C-Store Food Items Consumers Trust

"On the flip side, some items are seen as safe bets, especially when they're sealed, simple or familiar," Logile said.

Topping the list are bottled drinks, with 85% of consumers saying they'd buy them without hesitation, Logile said. Fountain drinks, 64%, and self-serve coffee, 56%, "also inspire relatively strong confidence," the report said.

Pizza, 32%, and items prepared on site like sandwiches and bowls, 30%, are among the options people feel good about grabbing, especially when they look freshly prepared.

"Even pre-packaged sandwiches, while not universally loved, are trusted by a quarter of shoppers (26%)," Logile said.

For the survey, Logile partnered with the third-party survey platform Pollfish, New York, to survey 1,000 U.S. adults in April 2025 about their perceptions and experiences with food from convenience-store-with-fuel operations.

Logile is a retail operations platform provider, delivering intelligent, AI-powered solutions for forecasting, labor planning, workforce management, inventory, food safety and store execution. ■

# Shawnee Grocery, OnCue and Other Convenience Stores Revamp Beverage Strategies

Carrie and Zach McCaw found solutions to better manage the tidal wave of new cold vault beverages arriving at Shawnee Grocery, their Stout, Ohio-based convenience store.

One was activating the age-old premise of “less is more.” As part of a re-vamping of their 10-cooler beverage department, the McCaws—in one fell swoop—freed up precious cold vault space by terminating the supply contract with one large beverage supplier.

The decision was based on unappealing terms of its merchandising contract at the 1,500-square foot store, said Carrie McCaw.

“The supplier pressured us to expand their product lines above that of a competitor and also wanted us to install a smaller satellite cooler merchandiser that we couldn’t accommodate—the store is small,” said McCaw. “The combination of factors made the decision easy.”

From an efficiency standpoint, Shawnee Grocery re-designed the cold vault so customers would pass more doors of its 10 cold vault alignment to reach their beverage purchases—such as core segments of beer, sports drinks and energy.

“From left to right, we put beer to the far left—away from the entranceway—then energy, soda pop, sports drinks and, at the other end, dairy and juice. The rearrangement gets customers walking across the store to spark impulse sales,” she said.

Crafting an efficient cold beverage category management program amid the burgeoning sea of choices and new arrivals has grown vexing with so much inventory to consider.

The c-store non-adult cold vault is stocked with soft drinks, energy and sports beverages, protein/functional drinks, teas, juices, water, cold brew and dairy. The elusive goal is figuring out what works—and what doesn’t—to serve an array of local preferences.

## Crystallizing the Process

To master category management, retailers have long relied on the three-prong approach of scan data, customer feedback and wholesaler-supplier input.

“Retailers are increasingly using POS and shopper data to guide resets and optimize assortments,” said Jordan. “Data sharing between the partners is central: retailers provide

POS data and distributors (including McLane) share unit movement insights to build optimized planograms.”

Promotion tracking and coordinated resets all help retailers respond quickly to trends, he added. “While larger chains have access to resources, there’s a growing opportunity for independent retailers to tap into distributor capabilities and fill gaps in their technology resources. We see ourselves as a data-driven partner excited to support retailers of all sizes.”

Seth Carter, category manager-beer/wine/packaged beverages, OnCue, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, said the c-store chain is “always analyzing data and sales trends to build (cold drink) sets that truly meet customer demand rather than relying on contract-based sets.”

The process of data-driven space planning “is more labor-intensive, but the payoff comes when planograms are designed with both the customer and retailer in mind,” said Carter.

As they obtain granular data to pinpoint trends, retailers must drill down to identify activity segment by segment. Far and away, functional beverages have taken retail channels by storm the way traditional energy had—and continues to do. Retailers that lean in on the functional drink trend often find it reaps benefits.

***OnCue is No. 99 on CSP's 2025 Top 202 ranking of U.S. convenience-store chains by store count. Gate Petroleum Co. is No. 103 and Tri Star Energy/Twice Daily is No. 48.***

“Outside of energy—which continue to lead in growth—we’ve seen strong momentum with functional hydration thanks to their dual appeal to taste great and offer added benefits like electrolytes and vitamins,” said Jordan.

“Flavored and enhanced waters are rising in popularity, protein-forward drinks and modern sodas Poppi and Olipop offer carbonation and sweetness with gut health benefits, resonating strongly with Gen Z and wellness-focused consumers,” added Jordan. “Retailers are tasked with balancing innovation with proven performance.”

According to Sally Lyons Wyatt, global executive vice president and chief advisor, consumer goods and foodservice insights, Chicago-based Circana, “when you look at the beverage universe in c-stores, it’s changed significantly over the last few years.”

Lyons Wyatt acknowledged the tailwinds behind functional hydration and modern soda, and adds that co-branding, new packaging formats such as mini cans, weight control beverages and refrigerated yogurt drinks as trending in consumer popularity.

## ***Redefining Energy***

The traditional energy drink segment has evolved into a growing number of options made with clean ingredients. Brands such as Celsius, Ghost and Alani Nu are gaining significant momentum.

“These brands are capitalizing on health-focused messaging and vibrant flavors to attract consumers seeking functional energy that aligns with their active, health-conscious lifestyles,” said Armin Hadziomerovic, category manager, merchandising strategies/data-driven decision-making, for Bowling Green, Kentucky-based Houchens Food Group.

“As the year unfolds, (manufacturers) are rolling out new, inventive flavors and limited-time offerings to keep their audiences engaged and energized about the category,” he said.

New intake formats have also arrived. Wip is an energy pouch with caffeine, vitamins and minerals that is marketed to support physical and mental performance.

“Wip is redefining how energy is displayed and sold in convenience stores,” said Mike Sweeney, director of sales at Wip, previously a top executive at Bang Energy. “With a pouch format that requires no refrigeration, it unlocks entirely new merchandising possibilities across the store.”

Speaking of the enhanced hydration subcategory in general, it’s taking off, “primarily driven by our concentration of locations in warmer-climate states where the need for hydration products is higher,” said Mary Valenza, category manager/buyer, Gate Petroleum, Jacksonville, Florida. “Brands such as Electrolit and Gatorlyte have proven to be leaders in this subcategory,” said Valenza.

Some retailers are continuing to capitalize upon the growth of rapid hydration. Terry Messmer, sales and category manager for Nashville, Tennessee-based Twice Daily c-stores, is one of them.

“They brought life to the category similar to when Bang Energy came out and created the high-performance subcategory within energy,” said Messmer.

## ***Single-Serve Beverages Proliferate***

Long the domain of c-store retailers, the single-serve packaged beverage format is now making inroads in other types of retail. This is only adding to c-store competition, and the onus is on the channel to wrest back a once-entrenched competitive advantage, experts said.

“Food (grocery), mass and club stores are just three channels expanding single-serve beverages, as it meets a strong

customer need,” said Circana’s Lyons Wyatt.

In the meantime, many c-stores aren’t enjoying the same advantage of selling multi-packs in any great volume due to space limitations combined with the expectations of their customer base.

“At the end of the day, I don’t see multi-packs being a driver of growth in convenience other than for flavored and still water,” said Lyons Wyatt.

Added McLane’s Jordan: “The focus has moved from variety to velocity, with functional-first and premium single-serves playing a key role in c-store margin growth. Placement strategy matters: merchandising tactics like inside-door stickers are boosting incremental sales.”

## ***Exploring Flavors***

For the remainder of 2025 and beyond, flavor innovation is certain to be a major trend that demands attention.

“With growing interest in unique and bold flavor profiles, especially those featuring exotic and global influences, this year has presented an opportunity to further explore flavors that align with evolving taste preferences and cultural trends,” Hadziomerovic said.

McCaw of Shawnee Grocery said ongoing dialogue with customers and understanding what they truly desire in their daily beverages—guerrilla marketing so to speak—helps greatly.

“We’re in a rural town. Most locals like what they like and don’t want a lot of ‘new stuff,’ like protein or functional drinks. Sports drinks, beer and soda pop move the fastest,” she said.

Understanding packaged drink desires of both local and traveling customers is another challenge for c-stores to master to compete more deftly for share of thirst.

“I would suggest zeroing in on the types of beverages to carry based on who lives nearby, but also who are the people passing through and entering a particular store: marry the buying trends of both. And retailers have to know that what works in mass or club stores might not resonate in the c-store environment,” said Lyons Wyatt.

On the other hand, c-stores “can often serve as the testing ground” for new brands and line extensions. “They have to take advantage of that exclusive opportunity,” she said.

With so much movement in the segment, some believe this is a terrific time to be a packaged beverage category manager.

“Consumer trends are evolving like never before,” said Carter of OnCue. “I appreciate the challenge of finding the next big thing. Of all the convenience store categories, I believe the beverage segment offers the most opportunity for trial and exploration.” ■



# Be Food Allergy Aware

By CSNews.com

## Foodservice, Operations, Training

“Are your glazed donuts nut-free?” “Does that sandwich have mayonnaise?” “Where are your gluten-free snacks?” When you hear questions like these from your customers, it might be tempting to write them off as high-maintenance. Before you do that, though, consider this: 1 in 25 Americans has a food allergy. When your customers seek you out to ask a question about your foodservice items, it could very well be that their life (or at least their temporary well-being) depends on it.

## Food Allergen Training

Food allergies are a safety issue that threatens the health of both your customers and your business. All staff members who interact with customers should be trained in food allergy safety, even if their main role isn't in foodservice. Your best bet to train your staff is with an online food allergy awareness course that allows you to assess and track employees' learning. On the job refreshers help reinforce what your employees learn online. Teach them these five simple rules about food allergies:

### 1. Listen

When a customer asks how a particular food is prepared or what its ingredients are, listen carefully. If they don't mention they're asking because of an allergy, ask them if that's the concern. They'll feel more at ease when you clarify their question — it shows you've heard them and you understand the importance of responding accurately.

### 2. Identify

To help spot allergy concerns, know the eight foods that account for 90% of all food-allergic reactions:

**Milk:** This category includes chocolate milk, butter, yogurt, cheeses, and ice cream.

**Egg:** or any product containing egg.

**Peanuts:** or any product containing peanuts, even trace amounts.

**Tree nuts:** this includes walnuts, almonds, hazel, cashew, pistachio, and pecans.

**Fish:** for example, flounder, salmon, bass, and cod.

**Shellfish:** this includes crab, lobster, and shrimp.

**Wheat:** wheat can be found in bread, flour, roux, breading, cakes and cookies, soup bases, and some flavorings.

**Soy:** for example, tofu and soy sauce.

### 3. Know

Know the ingredients in all the store's foodservice products and understand how they're prepared. Preparation can be as important as the actual ingredients. Fried foods, for example, can be dangerous to a person based on the type of oil they were fried in or what other types of foods were fried in that same oil. Remember that even trace amounts of a food allergen can trigger a serious reaction.

### 4. Inform

You may not know the answer to every question, and that's okay, but assuming you know is never okay. If you're not sure of an answer, find someone who is. If you can't do that, be honest with the customer. Let them know you're not sure and recommend against that particular item. If possible, suggest an alternative you're sure is safe.

### 5. React

An allergic reaction can occur within minutes. Symptoms can range from mild to life threatening and include hives, flushed skin, rash, a tingling or itchy sensation in the mouth, swelling of the lips, tongue and throat, vomiting, diarrhea, abdominal cramps, coughing or wheezing, dizziness and/or lightheadedness, difficulty breathing, and loss of consciousness. If a customer is experiencing a serious reaction, call 9-1-1 and notify your supervisor immediately. While you wait for emergency services, keep the victim where they are. Movement can sometimes cause allergic reactions to increase in severity.

Above all, the safety of customers is every staff member's responsibility. Food allergen training protects your customers, your staff, and your store. ■



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BE POSITIVE.  
BE TRUE.  
BE KIND.**

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**Ray T. Bennett**