

AHEAD OF THE GAME

This year's **Outstanding Independents** show how they outplay the competition.

By Katie Martin

Being successful in the supermarket industry means that you have to be on top of your game and outplay your competition. This year, *Progressive Grocer* honors several companies that are doing just that in different categories. Companies are honored for outstanding single-store operator, outstanding multi-store operator, outstanding new concept, bakery, center store, deli/prepared foods, meat/seafood, produce and technology.

All of this year's Outstanding Independents have found success in their own ways; however, they all have had to differentiate themselves from the competition, and some common themes have emerged.

More than in previous years, the winners stressed their commitment to being a neighborhood store. While they all wanted to attract as many customers as possible, they were all keyed into what their immediate neighborhood needed, and tried various ways to meet those demands. As locally owned stores, they all emphasized their dedication to bringing in local products and developing tight relationships with local producers.

Creating an enjoyable experience also was a high priority. Whether this was through the customer-facing technology they offered to create a variety of shopping options or ensuring that the store was easy to navigate, all were committed to taking the hassle out of shopping.

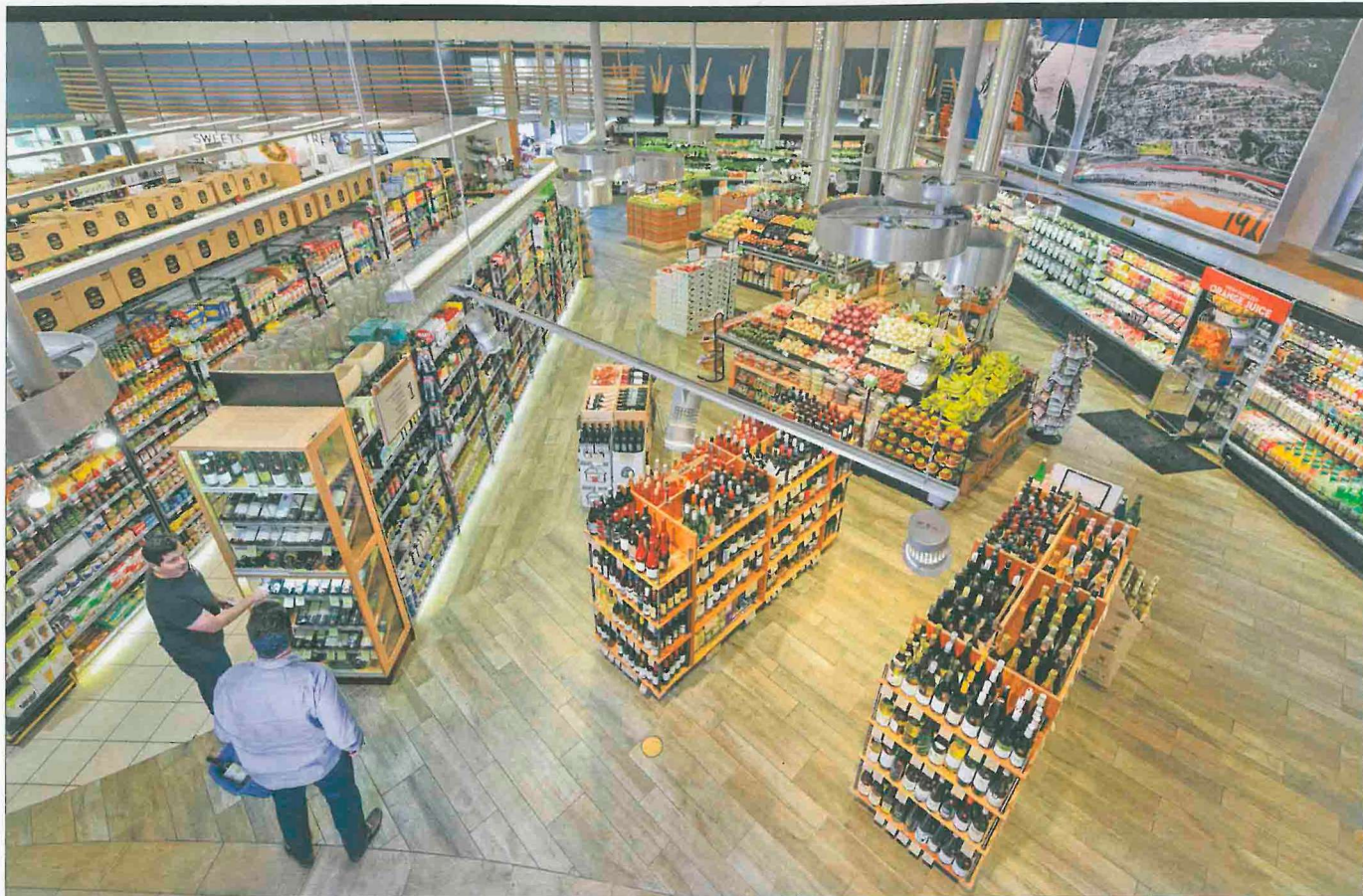
This year's winners all have ideas that can work in a variety of other stores to improve customer experience and, in turn, increase sales. Congratulations to a successful group of independents!





 **OUTSTANDING MULTI-STORE WINNER**

Barons Market's new North Park store, in San Diego, is the independent grocery chain's first urban-format location.



OUTSTANDING SINGLE STORE
Cardiff Seaside Market,
Cardiff, Calif.

Expansion doesn't always mean a second location. Instead, Cardiff Seaside Market owners John and Pete Najjar decided to remodel and expand the location they had, growing it from 13,000 square feet to 18,500 square feet. (The market does operate a small store inside Pet-Co Park, San Diego's major-league baseball stadium.)

"We decided long ago not to expand to a second location," says John Najjar. "That was our big deal. We live and work in the neighborhood — I live a block and half away — and we just wanted to be the best community market anywhere. We don't consider ourselves upscale, which everybody says we are ... We consider ourselves good and better than anybody."

In addition to supporting the community through several civic opportunities, the store offers a variety of unique items that can only be found at Seaside Market. One such item is the Burgundy Pepper Tri-tip that's sold nationwide through ecommerce. It has become known as "Cardiff Crack" and is extremely popular — it even has its own Wikipedia page. The tri-tip is made from Stone Porter bone-in pork chops marinated in either the exclu-

sive Burgundy Pepper or Spicy Chipotle Marinade, both of which are also bottled and sold separately.

The department managers are given a lot of leeway to make decisions on what the store should carry, and without a corporate buyer to give approval, they can make decisions quickly, notes Tim Muleady, store director. Even in the winter, the store is able to offer locally grown strawberries. "We know the growers," Muleady adds. "We're able to secure these types of items, so that really is what separates us."

That decision-making ability enables department managers to bring in the products that customers request. "We can go right out and produce that product," Muleady explains. "We're listening to our customers, and we're really able to change on a dime, so to speak."

The Najjars also work to eliminate any fear of failure. "Managers are encouraged to try, and we are going to make mistakes, or we are going to miss on opportunities that we thought would be successful," Muleady says. "But going through that, every so often, we will also hit home runs. That's what it's really about."

Creating a pleasant shopping experience for the customer also is a key element in Seaside Market's success. The philosophy is that the store should



look as good at 9 p.m. as it does when it opens at 7 a.m. Displays are always kept full and fresh with the highest-quality product. “The owners are committed to that philosophy and provide the tools to the departments, but at the same time, the department managers are encouraged to come up with new ideas,” Muleady says.

Perishables are really what sets the store apart, though. The produce department focuses on locally sourced items. In addition to the strawberries, the store recently had local persimmons and Meyer lemons. The full-service meat department allows customers to interact directly with the staff to select the exact cut of meat they want, which can be cut down if needed.

Seaside Market also is well known for its gourmet cheese department, as well as the prepared food or cuisine department, where everything is made fresh in-store. “We have a grill where they can order food to go, from breakfast all the way through to sandwiches and burritos,” Muleady notes. “We’re a destination for people. Obviously, we have everything a full-service grocery store would have, but we are definitely a destination for those looking for quality produce, local, and gourmet cheese. My vision is just to improve us day to day, that every customer comes in and finds the item they are looking for, are happy with the quality they can get, and so the next time they have to go grocery shopping, Seaside Market is the first thing that pops into their head.” ★



OUTSTANDING MULTI-STORE
Barons Market, Poway, Calif.

Setting your stores apart is a tough business. “We really had to be very forward thinking in this industry,” says Rachel Shemirani, VP of marketing for the seven-store Barons Market, based in Poway, Calif. “The grocery industry, especially in Southern California, is just so competitive. For us, what makes us stand out is our customer experience. We put a lot of time, energy [into] creating a really exciting and engaging — we call it taste-bud-tempting — customer experience.”

Barons’ customer experience begins with the way the stores, which range from 15,000 to 18,000 square feet — the sweet spot is about 16,000 to 17,000 square feet, notes Shemirani — are arranged so that shoppers have a 10-minute shopping experience. “People are busier than ever,” she points out. “They love food, they love to shop, but they hate food shopping. It was a real challenge for us to create an experience where they love coming to Barons.”

Part of that is to make sure the selection of products is competitively priced through careful sourcing, and to keep the prices in range with the rest of the market. The product selection also is finely honed, down to about 9,000 SKUs, which helps create a satisfying shopping experience by eliminating some of the choice.

To ensure that the products in the store are the best of what’s available, Barons gathers about 30 managers and buyers to participate in a taste team meeting. About 80 to 120 products are tasted every week to select the best items — about five to 10 items usually make the cut — and if the product is in a category already offered in the store, the potential new item is tested against what’s already on the shelf to ensure that customers are always getting the best product available in the category. “It’s like a big family Thanksgiving dinner where we eat everything, and then we talk about it,” Shemirani explains.

“We get very passionate sometimes.”

Products are evaluated on taste, ingredients — Barons looks for clean labels — packaging and price. Shemirani explains: “We always ask, ‘How much would you pay for this?’ and also, ‘Would you buy this product again?’ Because you might like something and think, ‘Okay, that was fine and that was fancy, but would I ever buy this again?’”

For new products, the stores automatically begin demoing — demo stations are operated for eight hours a day in the store. “That’s the best way for someone to learn about the products, is to go in, taste it, but also talk about it with our demo staff,” she notes.

Further, the stores are always looking to add new features to improve the shopping experience; this has included olive oil and balsamic vinegar bars that were put in as novelties, but have ended up providing steady sales that doubled over the holidays, and cookie bars that offer a variety of locally made cookies by the pound. Next year, Barons is looking to add hot-food bars.

Produce is one department that the stores really are known for. Many of the products are sourced from local farms that the grocer buys from directly. “That’s money-saving; we save on transportation costs because it’s right down the street,” Shemirani says. “Most of these local farms, even though they’re not USDA organic, are pesticide-free and also have great quality.”

Part of the produce program is what she calls “the ugliest. We have the ugliest oranges, but they are so sweet and so good. We have some ugly watermelons, too. We like the uglier, the better. They’re not made with pesticides. We’re pretty proud of our ugly oranges and ugly watermelons.”

An extension of the in-store customer experience is the community at large, which each Barons Market does its best to support. The grocer is opening a new store later this year, and when a location opens, Barons goes into the surrounding area to find out what’s important to that neighborhood, because it’s different in each one. “Anything we can do to partner with them to help raise money for their organizations,” Shemirani says, “that’s something that’s really important for us.” ★



OUTSTANDING NEW CONCEPT

My Fresh Basket, Spokane, Wash.

When My Fresh Basket owner Ramona Higashi was approached about building a supermarket from the ground up along the river in Spokane, Wash., she and her team knew that the concept would have to play off the location.

“We have a great view, so we thought, all right, we’re going to highlight the perishable and fresh part of grocery shopping, try to take the chore out of shopping,” says VP Dave Yount. “Be a destination for people to come in, grab a snack or lunch or dinner, and have a glass of wine up on the veranda and overlook the river.”

The team hired a James Beard Award-winning chef to create the fare for the prepared food department, including a hot bar and carving station surrounded by the produce department that lines the large windowed outside walls, which offer views of the river as well as letting in a lot of natural light. At the end of the store is a fresh bakery, a fresh juice bar, a charcuterie and cheese display, an olive bar, a poke bar, and a fresh meat case.

The team wanted a bit of an upscale look, so the store features marble countertops in the deli, hot bar, salad bar, juice bar and espresso bar, and, to soften the marble and exposed ductwork in the ceiling of the store, rough-

hewn wood was used as an accent.

The store, which opened June 30, 2017, has developed a nice culture, Yount notes: “We get a lot of customers that come in and spend their lunch hour here with co-workers, and they tend to come back after work to either grab a pre-made meal out of the carving station or do their shopping.” The in-store dining area seats about 50, and in the summer, an upper-level veranda seats another 30, along with a ground-level outdoor area with about 30 seats.

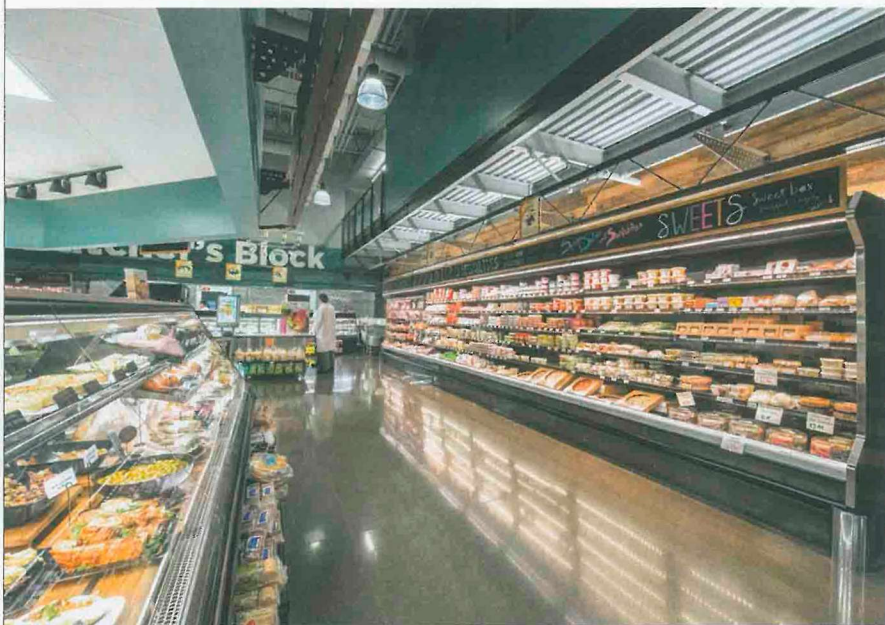
The construction process was planned to last about eight months, but as anyone who has ever dealt with building or remodeling a store knows, that number wasn’t hit. Yount wishes that he had added more time to that phase of the project. Planning and design of the store actually took about 18 months. “I’ve been in the industry now for about 35 years, so I had a good idea of how I wanted the flow of the store,” he says. “I think that was a huge part of how it turned out, doing a lot of research and reading up on trends, what people are looking for.”

The 25,000-square-foot store is just the right size for customers to feel comfortable in when they enter, without seeming too large and overwhelming, he observes: “As you’re walking in the doors, there’s enough service-oriented departments that you hit right away, so the customer feels like there’s actually employees here that want to help and are excited to see them.” And offer them samples.

The center store features wide-open aisles with enough variety that customers can find what they need and have a few choices. “We looked at trends on organic and conventional CPG items: shoppers want to eat better but they don’t want to pay a ton of money for it,” Yount notes.

The team also was aware that the store couldn’t be everything to everybody, but hit upon dividing the offerings into one-third organic, one-third natural or clean label, and one-third conventional to try to meet as many needs as possible.

“That’s about as well as you can do to try to be everything to everybody,” Yount asserts. “They aren’t going to find everything, but they are going to find a nice cross-mix. They can pick and choose what they want to spend their money on.” ★



BAKERY

Geissler's Supermarkets, East Windsor, Conn.

Competition is everywhere, and Geissler's Supermarkets, with six stores in Connecticut and one in Massachusetts, is in one of the more competitive markets in the country. "In Connecticut, you can have five supermarkets within a square mile of each other," notes Jim Williams, bakery supervisor. "We try to keep everything as fresh as possible and keep things a little unique."

The bakeries use a combination of mixes and frozen dough, but Geissler's adds its own touch to the products, such as incorporating herbs like garlic, or butter, and employing decorations like a touch of chocolate drizzle or streusel on top. "We bake in all the stores; everything's made right there," Williams says. "Nothing is sitting around for a day or two



waiting for the truck to take it to a different location."

Geissler's bakeries are known for their muffins, of which the grocer offers a wide variety. During the winter holiday season, the apple cider flavor is popular, but year-round, blueberry comes out on top, with corn and banana nut also popular choices. However, flavors like cranberry orange wal-

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FEATURE

Outstanding Independent Awards

nut, lemon toffee and apple cinnamon showcase the department's ability to go beyond the basic flavors.

The staffers — each bakery department has between seven and 12 employees — also are given leeway to create products that they think will sell in their particular store. "That's what a lot of employees love about the bakery department," Williams asserts. "You have the ability to be creative, try new things. You never want to shoot down an idea that might sell a lot." Family members also provide inspiration, with Williams' wife's Pinterest habit inspiring some new brownie varieties for the stores that include s'mores and peanut butter coconut.

While Geissler's seven stores are fairly close together geographically, the bakeries' product lines differ — Italian bread sells better in one store than another, for example. The one thing that



remains the same, though, is the freshness. "That's what our big draw is," Williams emphasizes. "Everything is always fresh, fresh, fresh." ★

BAKERY

**Roche Bros.,
Wellesley, Mass.**

What sets Roche Bros.' bakeries apart from the competition is the bakers, says Josh Naughton, director of deli, seafood and bakery. "We've got some of the best bakers in the industry running our departments," he notes. "They're very passionate; it shows with the quality of product they put on the shelf and the quality, personalized service they give our customers." The bakeries have up to 30 associates working in the department to provide that top-notch service — all staffers, even the bakers, are trained for customer service.

The service case generates a lot of business in the department — about a quarter of sales — with a large selection of specially decorated cupcakes, cannoli and tarts. The top-selling product is muffins,



with blueberry, coffee cake and chocolate chip the top three varieties. "On any given day, [muffins] are the No. 1 perishable item sold throughout the whole company," Naughton notes. "One day it's muffins, the next day it's bananas. It's always muffins and bananas." The one item that's unique to the department, however, is the Key lime pie. "I really haven't seen it in any other market," he adds. "It's a great item. We sell a ton of it."

The departments do a lot of merchandising on self-service tables that were specially designed for the company, and Naughton likes them to be laden with product. "When you see a table stacked 10 high of whatever it is, you're going to walk over there; you want to see what it is," he explains. "I think it needs to look full, and it needs to scream, 'You need to buy me.' If you have a table display on the floor, and there's only five loaves of bread on it, I think the perception is that it's old; we already sold what we were going to; [the product] is old for the day. I like everything overflowing and big, bold, aggressive, high displays."

Undoubtedly, the bakery products bring in customers. "Our bakery is a total destination for the consumer," Naughton says. "Our bakeries are one reason why customers come to our stores." ★

CENTER STORE

C.E. Lovejoy's Brookwood Market, Bend, Ore.



To succeed in center store, grocers have to think outside the box. C.E. Lovejoy's Brookwood Market, in Bend, Ore., also has begun thinking outside the keg. "We've definitely had our battles, but we've found the best thing we can do is keep a good variety of what's hot on tap, and at the same time keeping our fingers on

the pulse of our own neighborhood," says Chris Whaley, store manager.

The growler station at C.E. Lovejoy's — amusingly dubbed Love Handles — keeps on tap 11 beers and one kombucha that are regularly rotated. The store receives five to six kegs a week to keep up with demand, so varieties can change quickly. "We're changing half our taps every week to new beers," Whaley notes. "We have a nice fluctuation of beer in there all the time, and every three months, a new seasonal will come out, so we'll have that on tap."

Love Handles' varieties are posted on the store's website so customers can easily see what's on offer. C.E. Lovejoy's also recently changed its

liquor license to sell beer by the pint, so customers can now buy a pint to drink as they shop or try a small sample before they invest in the larger growler. The varieties also tend to be hyper-local. Of the 11 beers available when PG spoke with Whaley, five were from Bend, two were from towns around Bend, two were from elsewhere in Oregon, and the other two were from the West Coast, one from Washington state and the other from California. The kombucha also was from Bend.

Whaley credits the "beer connoisseurs" on staff with staying on top of what customers want. With its location away from downtown Bend, C.E. Lovejoy's is truly a neighborhood market and has to meet the needs of that neighborhood. Part of that means hosting twice-monthly beer gardens during the summer that also feature live music and food like sausages made in-house in the store's meat department. "That's a great way for people to come down and try a beer," Whaley says. "To get it on their mind and get them thinking about what they want and what they like." ★

Olsen's Market, Ajo, Ariz.

Competition had created a real challenge for Olsen's Market's center store, so owner Bryanne Olsen's husband encouraged her to add Ace Hardware to the product line. The couple had explored the idea more than 10 years earlier, but it wasn't the right fit. Several years later, however, the 4,000-square-foot option for the 20,000-square-foot store was exactly what the location needed.

Olsen credits Ace with helping create the new floor plan for the store with the least amount of rearranging. "Each year, Ace gets stronger and stronger sales for us," she says. "It's a good feeling to be in the checkout line and I see a toilet seat and a loaf of bread going through together." The hardware section takes up four aisles in the store, and products can be purchased from the store's main checkout or from a cash register located in the section.

The store, which is located right off a busy interstate, serves a large camping community whose members stop in the town on their way to various locations in

Arizona and beyond, so Olsen's Market carries a variety of RV- and camping-related items that travelers might have trouble finding elsewhere, like the smaller propane canisters that are used in camping equipment. The store also stocks a variety of travel-size products.

With the decline in customers coming in for center store items like health and beauty, Olsen further reduced the selection. "We're down to two SKUs of toothpaste or soap," she notes. "Just enough that if they need it, they can grab it." Instead, she now stocks a variety of small electronics like coffee makers or slow cookers, also supplied by Ace.

In the winter, especially for holiday shopping, Olsen's Market offers a larger variety of specialty and natural products like specialty olives or free-from flours.

To attract the large tourist shopping segment, Olsen uses social media to promote the store, so those travelers doing research ahead of time can find the store and know it will provide the items they need. ★



DELI/PREPARED FOODS

Belmont Market, Wakefield, R.I.

In Belmont Market's busy prepared food department, Chef Ginger Costa and her staff of up to 36 people take to heart one of the store's taglines: "We're real people making real food." The kitchen sources the best-quality food ingredients it can, and does the seasoning and prep work on-site.

"We take so much pride and put so much work into making sure everything is just wholesome," Costa says. Customers are taking note, with the department bringing in about 10 percent of store sales and selling 25 gallons of soup a day year-round.

The kitchen uses some of the same ingredients that customers can find in other departments of the store, but some items, especially cuts of meat, are available only in the prepared food department. Costa notes, however, that meals she's offered have occasionally introduced customers to new ingredients, like quinoa or farro, that are then brought into the store aisles.

The department's menu is fairly fluid, but offers everything from tuna and egg salad to butternut lemon-grass risotto. "Even though you might see some of the same things every day, it changes every day because of demand," Costa notes. She additionally oversees all of the catering activity and can dictate what's on offer in the department. "It also gives us a chance to try new things," she observes. "We might see something in a magazine, and we get to play with it." When *Progressive Grocer* spoke with Costa, for instance, she was experimenting with a vegan stroganoff.

Belmont Market, which is owned by Jack Siravo, has been in business for more than 75 years and started as a produce stand. The prepared food department was added in 2003, but has quickly established itself as a destination. "Belmont Market has a strong reputation locally," Costa asserts. "You get people that come in here because of the name, and you get people coming in here because of this department." ★



Busch's Fresh Food Market, Ann Arbor, Mich.

Like many other independents, Busch's Fresh Food Market, operating 17 stores in southeastern Michigan, works to create stores that draw consumers' attention. To do that, the Busch family opened J.B.'s Smokehouse in its new Canton store. The barbecue restaurant can be accessed through the supermarket or its own separate entrance, but the door from the store is situated within the deli/prepared food area with gelato and juice bars as well as a Starbucks, creating a bit of a food court feel, according to John Busch, chairman.

"We try to be fairly synergistic with the store," he adds. A barbecue-style restaurant fits well with the other offerings in the store's prepared food department. Both the store and restaurant order from the same suppliers; they place separate orders, but the products used in the restaurant's menu can typically be purchased in the store, including the beer selection. Even the barbecue sauce developed for the restaurant is bottled and sold on the store shelves.

Some of the restaurant's offerings are prepared in the meat department's smoker used for briskets, pork shoulders and other products that require a long cooking cycle. Shorter-cooking items, like chicken and ribs, are prepared in the two wood smokers at the front of the store.

The store and the restaurant also use some of the same prepared foods. "The potato salad that we sell in the deli is the potato salad you would get with your meal in the restaurant," Busch says. Customers also can purchase wine in the store and drink it in the restaurant for a \$5 corkage fee.

"It's an evolving concept for us," he notes, "but both feed off each other. Sometimes, they're here for different purposes and different meals." Customers can eat in the in-house restaurant or come in and get a meal for carry-out. JB Smokehouse also offers online ordering for quick pickup. "If you need to grab some detergent and a gallon of milk while you're at it," Busch adds, "it's easy to do." ★

MEAT/SEAFOOD

**Lakeview
Supermarket and Deli,
Lucerne, Calif.**

Lakeview Supermarket and Deli, with its tagline of “You can’t beat our meat,” bills itself as a meat store that also sells groceries. Owner Kenny Parlet claims that the store does four times the national average in meat sales, and more than triple the sales per square foot of the average supermarket. Any way you slice it, that’s a lot of meat.

Parlet brings in restaurant-quality meat not often found in retail stores, and the quantity sold ensures that the meat is always the freshest available, he notes. The store’s mission is to offer customers the highest-quality chicken, pork and beef, along with the ultimate in personalized service, while still offering the best possible value.

Lakeview offers 14 meat packs in eight sizes, which offer a variety of beef, pork, chicken, breakfast and specialty items that range in price from \$49.95 to \$349.95, to fit any family size and quality demand, and provide savings of up to 20 percent over the retail price. If customers are unfamiliar with a certain cut or aren’t sure how to prepare an item, Lakeview also offers cooking instructions. The meat packs range from an introductory sampler to BBQ & Broil Meats to luxury meat packs with high-end cuts.

The Monthly Meat Experience program allows customers to set a standing order (although the store goes over the order every month with shoppers) to have frozen meat delivered to their homes. Holiday meat items, like turkey, ham and prime rib, are delivered fresh, with the delivery schedule adjusted to ensure that customers get the products before the festive occasion. ★



**McKinnon's Supermarket,
Portsmouth, N.H.**

When you claim to be home of the super butcher shop, you’re setting the bar pretty high, but McKinnon’s Supermarkets follows through on the claim. One Yelp reviewer exclaims that the Salem, N.H., store (the company operates four stores total — two in New Hampshire and two in Massachusetts) has three aisles of meat. “We pride ourselves on having the biggest selection in New England,” says co-owner Ed Penta. “It’s very important to us. Meat is center of plate, and it’s a good percentage of our business.”

McKinnon’s stores feature large meat displays. The Portsmouth store, for example, has a 240-foot meat case, and while the choices abound for customers, including Certified Angus Beef, it’s the staff that keeps them coming back, according to Penta.

“We have extensive knowledge” when it comes to meat, he says, adding: “We have real meat cutters on staff. Real meat cutting and knowing how to cut from the carcass down to the plate.” The two New Hampshire stores, which are larger in square footage, have service meat counters that allow customers to get the exact cut they want, although about 80 percent of sales come from the self-service cases. Portsmouth has 20 employees in the department alone.

Some of the department’s best-sellers include sirloin tips, sirloin flat meat and marinated chicken. (The marinade is so popular that McKinnon’s now bottles it and sells it separately.) Penta sees a lot of growth potential in oven-ready products like the marinated chicken. ★



PRODUCE

Farmhouse Market,
Fall City, Wash.

While most food retailers tend to have the same produce variety, it's often one of the departments used to create distinction in the minds of consumers. How Farmhouse Market goes about that is where it sources its product. "It comes direct from the farms in our truck," says owner Jay Blucher. "We get whatever we can locally, based on what's in season, of course."

Every March for the past 12 years, Blucher and his wife, Melissa, have erected a 15-foot-by-30-foot tent in the parking lot right in front of the store's doors. "The first local produce isn't available until mid-April, but we'll still put it up," Blucher says. "People get excited; that's the first sign of spring, when they see the tent going up at Farmhouse Market." The tent remains up through the end of October, when pumpkin season fades away. "Every June, people start asking when the local tomatoes, corn, cantaloupe or whatever their favorite is will be arriving," he adds.

The bulk of the local produce, defined as originating within the state of Washington and coming from a handful of producers, is found within the tent, although products that need refrigeration are housed in the store's year-round produce department. The in-store department remains stocked throughout the year, continuing to carry a full line of products, including those that can't be sourced locally.

The Bluchers were a bit ahead of their time with the local movement, but the reason for their embrace of regional produce was the desire to be different. "To have so much growing that close to home, it just doesn't make sense to not use that and take advantage," Blucher explains. "It's just such a different product. Tomatoes, for example, when they're coming in, picked that day, compared to something that's being ripened in a truck while being transported." ★



Treasure Island, Chicago

In a competitive market like Chicago, quality becomes important, and Treasure Island takes that challenge to heart in its produce departments. "Quality is No. 1 on our priority list," asserts Bob Zenawick, VP of operations. "We have three buyers that go to the market for us on a daily basis. They work seven days a week trying to procure only the best of quality at the best price possible." The majority of the produce is purchased at Chicago's Water Street Market, "so it's as local as it can get," he adds.

Depending on the time of year, the grocer also sources some product directly from local farmers. Most are able to supply all seven Treasure Island stores, to keep the selection the same.

Aside from quality, one of the biggest trends in Treasure Island's produce departments is convenience. Customers are looking for pre-cut, pre-washed and pre-trimmed products, Zenawick notes: "Everybody is leaning to that now, regardless of the generation, because everybody's time-starved." The fruits and vegetables are cut on a daily basis at the company's Montrose store, but when the newest location opens next summer, it will feature an on-site produce butcher, so customers can select what items they want cut and how they want them cut when they want them cut.

Treasure Island is committed to produce — it's the largest category in the stores in terms of square footage, with at least 1,000 SKUs available at any time. The departments also feature salad bars, and certain stores have two salad bars to accommodate the influx of customers.

The departments also do a lot of business in healthy beverages like smoothies, juices, chai and infused water, all of which are prepared on-site at the stores. A variety of fruits are cut up and placed in bottles of water, with varieties like strawberry, kiwi, blueberry, lemon, lime and orange. "Customers can't get enough of them, especially in the warmer months; in the spring and summer, it flies," Zenawick notes. "Our roots and our foundation are built on the produce department, and that's something we take a lot of pride in." ★



TECHNOLOGY

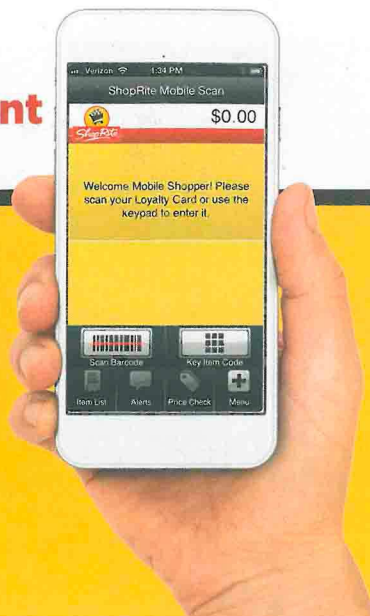
**Foodtown/Freshtown
(PSK Supermarkets),
Mount Vernon, N.Y.**

PSK Supermarkets, a 13-store independent family-run grocery chain in the New York metropolitan area, uses technology in a variety of ways to deepen relationships between customers and team members to drive sales and remain competitive.

Foodtown has offered an ecommerce site for online shopping for three years. Its stores face fierce competition when it comes to online shopping, but PSK has been steadily building its online shopping business to compete with an array of rival internet shopping services in their marketplace. The key to the service is personal shoppers, who get to know their customers, and go up and down the aisles shopping the orders. “By providing our customers a state-of-the-art platform and combining it with personalized service, we can outcompete all the other companies in the online space,” affirms Noah Katz, co-president.

PSK Foodtown also “has been fully invested in loyalty marketing for years,” notes Katz. With the help of its loyalty vendor, PSK uses the vast amounts of data it collects to reward shoppers in the ways they want. “Our program is as extensive as what you see in the casinos and credit card industry when it comes to loyalty marketing,” he adds. Best Customers earn higher levels of rewards, based on their shopping patterns in the store — the more they spend, the more they get back.

On the back end, PSK updated its human capital management system to the Ceridian Dayforce platform, which provides a real-time, cloud-based, single HR record for each associate. VP Ed Hunt notes: “I can view, in real time, how much money we are spending, by region, by store, by department, by day on payroll, compared to what our managers promised us they were going to spend when the schedules were posted.” ★



**ShopRite Supermarkets,
Florida, N.Y.**

How consumers shop is changing, and supermarkets have to ensure that they’re offering the technology those consumers want. At Florida, N.Y.-based ShopRite Supermarkets (SRS), which operates 35 stores, that includes the ability to shop from home, using an app or in-store kiosk to place deli orders or use another app to scan items as they shop.

In its newest store, ShopRite of North Greenbush, along with seven other locations, SRS offers Mobile Scan, an app that allows shoppers to scan items as they shop, and then pay. To use, customers log onto the store’s WiFi, scan the items they want with the app, and then go through the self-checkout by using their loyalty card to pull up their order and pay by whatever method they choose.

The Mobile Scan required training of both staff and customers. The stores did a lot of in-person outreach to let customers know that the app was available, which included a table set up with information, and the staff even would walk through the store with customers to show them how to use the app. “Yes, there was a lot of hand-holding, but the rewards on the backside have been very nice,” says Jim Shivers, director of retail technology.

On the staff side, associates had to learn both the customer-facing function and the back end of the app. They had been aware of some of the common mistakes customers may make, such as whether they’re using the store’s WiFi.

For customers who might not have time to walk through the store, SRS also offers Shop From Home, an ecommerce website. Not all of its stores offer the pickup option, but the company’s entire market area is covered by a store, so if the customer’s local store doesn’t offer pickup, they can get delivery from another SRS location.

“We have Shop From Home to meet the need of every one of our consumers, whether they’re time-starved or home-bound,” notes Sarada Bernstein, manager of community affairs and public relations, “or we have all the avenues for the fast-paced customer to the customer who wants to take their time and enjoy the service we provide at ShopRite.” **PG**