

Alabama Retailer

*PRIMARIES 2024
Make Retail
Vote Count*

*SALES TAX HOLIDAY
Severe Weather
Tax Holiday
is Feb. 23-25*

ADVANCING A FAMILY BRAND

Michael Gee

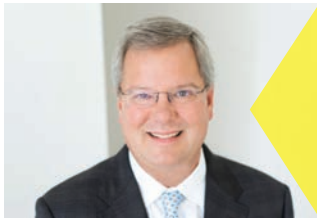
**ALABAMA RETAIL ASSOCIATION CHAIRMAN
PRESIDENT OF THE PANTS STORE**

*MEMBER HIGHLIGHT
JOE AND TYLER DALTON
of Dalton Pharmacy Group*

*EMPLOYMENT LAW
What every
employer should get
ready for in 2024*



From the President



Facing Legislative and Election Seasons Together

It's February 2024. Brace yourselves. We are about to enter state legislative as well as national and state election seasons.

The Alabama Legislature's regular session begins Tuesday, Feb. 6. Your Alabama Retail Association will be at the State House throughout the session, which must end by May 21. Our goal is to protect retailers and support measures that allow you to do business with ease.

Follow our Retail Report email each Friday and provide feedback on the issues that concern you.

On March 5, the nation's and Alabama's futures are on the ballot. Besides the presidential primary, party nominations for all seven of Alabama's congressional seats and state appellate court positions will be decided.

On your behalf, the Alabama Retail Association talks with the candidates about the issues our members face each day. The ideal candidate understands the importance of the retail industry to the state's economy, listens well and rules fairly. Then, your board of directors considers the staff recommendations, discusses the candidates and decides who to endorse.

Early this month, look for an emailed member communication about who your board has endorsed. We will also provide you with an electronic Voter Guide you can share with your employees and others. Learn how you can help get out the vote on Page 6.

Please consider casting your ballot for the candidates in the Alabama Retail Association Voter Guide and ask your employees to do the same.

Rick Brown, Publisher and President

Alabama Retailer

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Publisher
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Brandon Robbins

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February

Contents



4

FOR 121 YEARS
Pharmacy Profession
of Four Generations
of the Dalton Family



8

MEMBER HIGHLIGHT
JBT Power Grows
from Small Shop
to Two Stores,
Employing 25

16

DINERS, DRIVE-INS & DIVES
Four Mobile Area
Member Restaurants
Featured on Show



6 Primaries March 5;
Severe Weather Tax
Holiday Feb. 23-25

7 New Board
Members

10 Advancing a
Family Brand:
Michael Gee

13 Member News

14 Employment
Law Update

17 New Members

18 Socially Speaking

19 ARC

Alabama Retailer of the Year and Centennial Retailer nominations due April 12

The Alabama Retail Association will accept nominations for the 2024 Alabama Retailer of the Year and the Alabama Centennial Retailer awards through Friday, April 12.

In its 24th year, the Alabama Retailer of the Year awards recognize outstanding retailers who have demonstrated a blend of sound business practices and innovation with commitment to their communities, customers and employees.

Nominees must own, operate or manage a retail business with a physical presence in Alabama and that Alabama location must have been in operation for a minimum of




five years. To be considered a retail operation, a business must collect state and local sales taxes.

 **Nominate your favorite retailer at alabamaretail.org/retaileroftheyearnomination/**

Retail businesses that began in 1924 or before are eligible to be recognized as Alabama Centennial Retailers. Retailers nominated will be contacted and asked to provide a brief history and other information about their business.



 **Help us recognize a retailer that has been in business for 100 years or more by filling out the form at alabamaretail.org/centennialretailernomination/**

CENTENNIAL RETAILER

Daltons Have Been Pharmacists in Alabama for Four Generations

DALTON PHARMACY GROUP OPERATES NINE ALABAMA PHARMACIES, INCLUDING ITS 121-YEAR-OLD SLOCOMB LOCATION

Story and photos by Nancy King Dennis.



Joe and Tyler Dalton represent the third and fourth generation pharmacist owners of the Dalton Pharmacy Group. Tyler is the seventh Dalton family member to be a pharmacist. "I fell into it naturally," said Tyler.

Twenty-year-old pharmacist Jep Paul “J.P.” Dalton set up shop in downtown Slocomb in 1903 to support his brother’s medical practice.

The small Geneva County town, known for its timber and tomatoes, had incorporated just two years before J.P. opened Dalton Drug Co. Besides medicines and over-the-counter drugs, the store sold seeds, jewelry, gifts and textbooks. First through 12th grade students at the Slocomb School would buy their books at the store.

J.P. had a stroke while attending a basketball game at the school in 1930 and died at age 49. His wife, Mantye Hollis

Dalton, ran the business as a sundry store, dropping “drug” from the store’s name, until the oldest of her two sons, Charles Hollis Dalton, could graduate from Auburn University with a degree in pharmacy in 1934. Her youngest son, Paul Dalton, followed with a pharmacy degree in 1942. After four years in the Navy during World War II, Paul joined his brother in running the family pharmacy.

Paul practiced pharmacy for 60 years at the Slocomb store. “He never missed work, never complained,” Joe Dalton said of his father. Charles and Paul Dalton ran the store until Charles died in 1997.

Joe figures he started working at the pharmacy when he was six. The back wall of the Tomato Patch, a connected gift store, has a blown-up version of a photo of 6-year-old Joe sitting on a trash can outside the 141 S. Dalton St. store. In 1982, Joe received his pharmacy degree. He and Charlie Dalton, Charles’s son, both were full-time pharmacists at area hospitals, but helped their fathers run the Slocomb store as well.

From 1998 to 2008, Dalton Pharmacy moved to Slocomb Market Place Mini Mall on Alabama Highway 52 West. Joe had taken over ownership at that time and hired a pharmacist outside of the family, but Paul continued to work there until his death in 2006. Elaine King is the current pharmacist.

“We started out as a small family-owned pharmacy,” said Joe, the third-generation owner. “Over time, we changed our name to Dalton Pharmacy and expanded our services to include a broader range of healthcare products and

services.” Those services include vaccinations, over-the-counter medications and delivering to customers unable to leave their homes.

The Dalton Pharmacy group now includes eight pharmacies in southeast and east-central Alabama and a ninth pharmacy in Double Springs in north Alabama. The Slocomb, Abbeville, Hartford, Troy and Opp stores operate under the Dalton name. The Dadeville, Headland, Luverne and Double Springs locations operate under other names. The group, which employs more than 50, bought the Headland and Luverne stores in 2022.



Dalton Pharmacy Group began in Slocomb in 1903. It also has stores in Abbeville, Dadeville, Double Springs, Hartford, Headland, Luverne, Opp and Troy. Visit daltonpharmacy.biz for locations and hours of operation

“We have ambitious plans for further expansion into new markets and communities,” Joe said. “We are actively exploring opportunities to open or purchase additional pharmacy locations. Our aim is to reach underserved areas, preserve small mom and pop pharmacies and support local communities.”

Tyler Dalton, Joe’s son, received his pharmacy doctorate in 2016 and is the seventh Dalton family

member to be a pharmacist, including his mother, Jodi, who is a community pharmacist in Auburn.

“My mother and father continue to inspire and motivate me every single day,” said the fourth-generation pharmacist, who practices pharmacy at the family’s Dadeville store and regularly visits the others. “It is truly an honor to follow in my family’s footsteps.”

While Auburn is home base now for the Dalton family, Joe continues to do his part to keep Slocomb, where it all began, going.

“I renovated this building (the store at the corner East Slocomb St. and South Dalton St.) to close to the original appearance and bought the store next door, totally gutted it, knocked stucco off the wall and uncovered three fireplaces and the original brick walls,” he explained. His 2008 efforts started a renaissance in downtown Slocomb. The store next to the Tomato Patch gift store “renovated their building and then the next two buildings renovated and then, the physician’s office went in across the street.”

“Recently,” Tyler said of his dad, “he bought another old building, renovated it and turned it into his urban loft.” ■

Make the Retail Vote Count March 5

On Tuesday, March 5, Alabamians will go to the polls to begin to select their next president. Also on the ballot will be races for all seven of Alabama's seats in the U.S. House of Representatives and 11 state appellate court positions and the Public Service Commission president.


Your Alabama Retail Association will share its endorsements and its Voter Guide with you electronically in the weeks leading up to the primaries.



For the primaries:

- Encourage employees to register to vote
- Encourage those who can't go the polls to vote absentee
- Give your employees time off to vote
- Ask your employees, friends and family to support candidates who are right for retail

When speaking with employees be careful to explain that no adverse action will be taken against any employee based on his/her political views.

 *To learn more, visit alabamaretail.org/advocacy/elections/*

Last Full Weekend in February is Alabama's Severe Weather Preparedness Tax Holiday

Alabama's 13th severe weather sales tax holiday runs from 12:01 a.m. Friday, Feb. 23, until midnight, Sunday, Feb. 25. During that time, Alabama waives sales taxes on certain common supplies costing less than \$60 that every home and business needs to prepare for a natural disaster or even a general emergency:


- Flashlights, lanterns
- Battery-powered or hand-crank radio
- Batteries
- First-aid kits
- Cell phone charger
- Two-way radios
- Manual can openers
- Tarps and plastic sheeting
- Duct tape
- Fire extinguishers
- Tie-down kits, bungee cords or rope



Other tax-free items include coolers, ice packs, plywood, window film and smoke/fire/carbon monoxide detectors. Generators costing \$1,000 or less also can be purchased free of the state's four-percent sales tax during the three-day tax holiday. Many local governments also waive their sales taxes on the covered items.

Alabama retailers are required to participate in the state's sales tax holidays and cannot charge any waived sales taxes on the items that are legally tax-exempt during the tax holiday.

Tornado season is from March to August in Alabama and hurricane season is from June to November. Having the tax holiday in February comes at an ideal time to stock up on emergency supplies. Local hardware stores are a great source of information on emergency supplies.

 *For more information, go to alabamaretail.org/alabamasalestaxholidays/*

NEW BOARD MEMBERS

Alabama Retail Adds Four Directors to the Board

THEIR TWO-YEAR TERMS BEGAN JAN. 1

Story by Nancy King Dennis. Photos provided.

BRADLEY BAILEY

owns Bradley's Market in Tuscaloosa, which specializes in tabletop and barware, wedding registries, food and wine as well as unique gifts. Trained as a registered dietitian, Bradley worked in clinical nutrition for eight years after graduating from the University of Alabama in 2011. Realizing she needed a creative outlet and inspired by a similar venture by her aunt in Atlanta, Bradley launched Bradley's Market in 2019. The Tuscaloosa native and her seven-person staff tailor Bradley's Market to meet the needs of the community she's been a part of her entire life. Bradley, her husband and two daughters live in Tuscaloosa.

MEMBER
SINCE
2019



MOLLY CAGLE is director of governmental affairs for Target Corp. Prior to her current position, she was senior director of government and public affairs for Shipt, the delivery service owned by Target and based in Birmingham. Target has 24 stores in Alabama, employing 4,882. After studying political science at Troy University, Molly began her career as the Senate liaison for the Alabama Senate President Pro Tempore. She also has served as director of external affairs for Manufacture Alabama and as vice president of governmental affairs for the Business Council of Alabama. Molly, her husband and son live in Pike Road.

MEMBER
SINCE
2004



MEMBER
SINCE
2019

MANDY HENRY owns Queen City Market. Home décor and furnishings occupy one side of the market's two connecting buildings in downtown Selma with apparel and accessories next door. The Selma native is also a real estate agent and developer and a licensed home builder

specializing in renovations. She owns Mandy Henry Properties LLC, Mandy Henry Designs and Construction LLC and is an associate broker with REMAX Tri Star. The Selma Chamber of Commerce honored her with its 2021 Woman of Business Award. She holds a 2002 bachelor's degree in communications and information sciences from the University of Alabama. Mandy, her husband and their daughter live in Selma.



MEMBER
SINCE
2004

KATHERINE RAYNOR is the regional director of state government affairs for CVS Health. Katherine returns to the Alabama Retail board, having served as a director from 2018 to 2020. Since 2014, Katherine has overseen government affairs for Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana and Arkansas for CVS Health. CVS Health

employs 2,971 people and operates 174 retail pharmacies in Alabama. CVS Health also maintains a specialty pharmacy, infusion center, two distribution centers and three Oak Street Health clinics for older adults in Alabama. Katherine, who has a political science degree from the University of Georgia, previously served as director of government relations for the Georgia Hospital Association. She, her husband and two children live in Atlanta. ■

 [Find a full list of ARA directors at *alabamaretail.org/association/directors*](https://alabamaretail.org/association/directors)

EQUIPMENT AND COMMUNITY POWERHOUSE

Eastern Shore Business Goes From Tiny Lawnmower Shop to 2 Outdoor Equipment/Tractor Stores

THE WOOD FAMILY OWNS AND OPERATES
JBT POWER IN DAPHNE AND SEMMES, EMPLOYING 25

Story and photos by Nancy King Dennis



The entire Wood family works at JBT Power. From left are Gregg, Paula and Ben Wood. Megan Wood is a student at Auburn University.

Gregg Wood, a former Marine and Army helicopter pilot, left a corporate chief operating officer position in 2011 to be his own boss.

"I'd been the No. 2 guy for so many companies – VP of operations, COO – I decided I wanted to do something on my own," said Gregg. Plus, he had missed out on much of his two oldest children's childhood activities. "I hardly got to go to school plays and sports events."

He bought the assets of JB Thomas Inc., a two-employee lawnmower shop on Baldwin County 64 in Daphne, without any experience in small-engine sales. "I like mowing grass. I like being outside. I like equipment," Gregg said about his motivation for starting JBT Power.

In 2015, JBT Power moved to its current location at 1204 U.S. 98 in Daphne, which previously was a trailer dealership. At that point, JBT Power began selling and renting utility trailers. Two years later, the business added tractors to its inventory.

In 13 years, JBT Power has grown from a two-person lawnmower shop to a 25-employee outdoor power equipment, utility trailer and tractor dealer with locations in Baldwin and Mobile counties. The entire Wood family plays a role in the business.

Gregg is owner and president. Paula, Gregg's wife of 25 years, works part time as an administrative assistant; and his youngest daughter, Megan, a junior at Auburn University, has worked summers and holidays since she was 14.

Gregg's son, Ben, left a position in distribution sales to join the family business in 2021.

"He had always talked about wanting to open a second location and I had always joked with him saying, 'Well, when you're ready, just give me a call,' and he called," said Ben, who serves as the company's sales manager and manages the Daphne location.

Significant sales in Mobile and Washington counties as well as east Mississippi prompted JBT Power to open its second location in May of 2022 on five acres in Semmes, northwest of Mobile. Gregg manages the new store and "does all of the numbers" for the business, said Ben.

Spring busy for tractor business

Our Daphne customers are "hunting camps and gentleman farmers" mostly, said Ben. "We're selling that 25- to 50-horsepower tractor predominantly. Over in Semmes is more 40- to 100-horsepower for bigger properties."

Gregg adds, "Dollar wise, we sell more tractors and unit wise, more lawnmowers. The tractor market continues to grow for us. Baldwin and Mobile counties are a couple of the bigger tractor markets in the state."

Right now, the business is coming out of its slow period – "Thanksgiving to Valentine's Day," said Gregg.

Spring is busy season at JBT Power. "When we get that first week of good weather, watch out. It gets crazy," said Gregg. "We are very weather dependent."

Community minded

Besides "good frontage" on the main artery through Daphne, Gregg attributes "being active in the community as one of the reasons for our success."

"They donate their time, their location and their manpower," to the community, said Casey Williams, president and CEO of the Eastern Shore Chamber of Commerce. Gregg serves on the chamber board and Ben on its Young Professionals Board. The business sponsors the chamber's Jubilee Festival of Arts in Daphne each year and holds events at the store, such as a Taco & Tractor Ladies Night and a cornhole tournament.

One of the tractor lines JBT Power sells is Kioti, pronounced "Coyote." JBT Power created a company mascot named "JB Kioti." Each week during the fall football season, the business sponsors the high school "Band of the Week" on local television, featuring the mascot with area high school bands.

"I don't think there's any other outdoor power equipment/tractor dealers who are as engaged with the community as much as we are," said Ben.

"We are lucky to have a dedicated team at JBT Power as well as great customers," adds Gregg. ■



JBT Power has two locations at 1204 U.S. Highway 98 in Daphne (pictured) and 9597 Moffett Road in Semmes. Visit jbtpower.com for hours of operation.

"We might expand some, but not much more," said Michael Gee, co-owner of the Pants Store. "Maybe if my children or my brother's children want to come into the business, they can make it bigger."

Advancing a Family Brand

By Nancy King Dennis

AN INTERVIEW WITH

Michael Gee, Alabama Retail Chairman & President of the Pants Store

Photos By Brandon Robbins

In 1950, Taylor Gee drove all over the Southeast selling pants to retailers out of the trunk of his Mercury. People digging through the bins for deals on pants at Taylor's Leeds warehouse dubbed the business "The Pants Store."

Wholesale quickly gave way to retail, and the store's inventory grew to include all types of apparel for the entire family. Even with a diverse inventory, the Pants Store name stuck, and it will stay stuck, says its current president and third-generation co-owner, Michael Gee.

"Sometimes our name is a bit inhibitive because people don't understand exactly who we are, but we have had that name for 74 years at this point. We're proud of who we are. We're definitely keeping the name," Michael says. In 2025, the Pants Store will celebrate its 75th year of business.

Taylor's son, Morris "Mickey" Gee, sharpened the focus beyond pants, grew the footprint, added TV advertising and carried forward the Pants Store's reputation for crazy deals, but it was his sons, Michael and John, who've expanded the business to what it is today. The brothers joined the family business full time in 2001 and bought it from their father in 2008.

Beside its Leeds store, headquarters and warehouse, the Pants Store operates in Mountain Brook (since 2006), Tuscaloosa (2012), Huntsville (2015), Auburn (2022) and Hoover (2022).

The Pants Store name became a viral sensation in 2021. That is when the #bamarush shared by those participating in the University of Alabama's sorority rush included many outfits from the Pants Store's Tuscaloosa location, sending the chain's online sales skyrocketing 600% over 2020 online sales.

"We consider pantsstore.com a seventh location, and it's our third best location right now. In the next five years, it'll be the No. 1 location," said Michael. "It just keeps growing and growing."

Michael Gee is the president and, with his brother, John, the co-owner of the Pants Store, which has locations in six Alabama cities plus an online store – pantstore.com

"My grandfather was a retail legend. My dad was a hard worker with a big heart. I love working with my brother. It's nice to know somebody's got your back all the time."

- MICHAEL

Small = big with amplified voice

Michael, who has served on the Alabama Retail Association's board of directors since 2015 and its executive committee since 2020, began his term Jan. 1 as the board's chairman. "Being a small business owner is tough," he said when asked about the value of belonging to a trade association. "We are the little guys. It's great to belong to an organization that has a voice loud enough for policymakers to hear."

Another benefit is getting "to meet other outstanding retailers and compare notes and become better at what we do. Sometimes you get so focused on what you do, it's nice to see how others operate."

For the same reason, the Pants Store belongs to six chambers of commerce and Michael serves on the board of Leeds Main Street.

Pants and more

Seventy percent of what the Pants Store sells is women's apparel, but when the store began in 1950, its focus was "men's dress pants, because everybody dressed up so much" for church and work, Michael said. The merchandise is much more casual now. "We don't even carry suits anymore," he added.

Continued on page 12

THE ESSENTIALS

Founded
1950

Number of Employees
143

Mentors
My dad, Mickey Gee. He was always the smartest and most charismatic person in the room.

Smart Move
Hire and listen to people smarter than you

Learning Moment
Starting to gain experience and not being afraid to take chances of failure

Wisdom Shared
As my dad always told me, "Don't be afraid to start small."

See more
of this story at
alabamaretail.org



In the early days, the Pants Store also sold industrial clothing for governments and corporations as well as uniforms for schools and businesses. Even though the focus has been retail apparel for decades, “if a customer comes in and says, ‘I own so-and-so company and I need T-shirts and hats and quarter zips, can you put my logo on these?’ We’re more than happy to do that,” said Michael.



The Pants Store is based in Leeds with additional stores in Mountain Brook, Tuscaloosa, Huntsville, Auburn and Hoover. Visit [pantsstore.com](https://www.pantsstore.com)

“We try and give each location its independence, while trying to keep a uniform landscape,” he added.

During an interview in the newest Pants Store location in the Stadium Trace Village development in Hoover, Michael said, “our target market is 16 and up to the hip mom.” A woman trying on shoes nearby raised her hand and said, “hip Mom here.”

“We do still sell a lot of pants. That’s for sure,” he said. In fact, each store has a wall of pants in addition to its stock of blouses, polos, sweatshirts, shorts, pullovers, shoes, boots, dresses, gameday attire, belts and pajamas. “We sell good quality merchandise at a good price” for women, men and children, Michael said.

Customer base gives each store subtle differences

“While there are some subtle differences, most of the stores are 95% the same,” said Michael. “The Tuscaloosa store only sells University of Alabama gear, the Auburn store, only Auburn gear. Sometimes in those college towns, we feel there’s a younger demographic, so we might cater a little bit to those needs, but we try and stay as uniform as possible. In Leeds, the customer is more of an everyday worker. We sell more Carhartt to guys actually on the roof wearing it because it’s durable on the roof, rather than wearing it because it looks cool.”

Online customers beyond and within the state of Alabama create a dynamic of their own.

“We ship all over the country. More than 50% of our business is out of state on [pantsstore.com](https://www.pantsstore.com),” Michael said, adding that in-state customers also take advantage of the convenience of ordering online. “We definitely have customers too who live in Birmingham, Tuscaloosa, Huntsville or Auburn and we’re shipping them stuff from [pantsstore.com](https://www.pantsstore.com). They try it on (and if it doesn’t fit), bring it back or swap it out in store.”

Fourth generation impact already felt

Owners Michael and John both have teen-aged children. The fourth generation of Gees “have worked in the stores at one point or the other – over the holidays, gift wrapping, cleaning dressing rooms, cleaning the stores,” said Michael. “They all pitch in, and it’s good for them to get a feel for what it’s like and see if it’s something they want to consider in the future.”

It was Michael’s daughter who suggested the Pants Store have a presence on TikTok.

“We were already big on Instagram and Facebook, so we started a TikTok account to market and advertise. People were talking about Bama rush and the Pants Store on TikTok as we were starting, and then it just blew up. We had magazines and radio and TV stations calling from all over the country,” said Michael.

“Every year is different on how it blows up, but we see a huge influx from (TikTok during sorority rush) still. It’s something we plan on and start talking about in January” each year, he said.

The reputation the Pants Store gained on TikTok paid off when the Auburn store opened in 2022. “(Auburn University students) already knew who we were and what we did.” His daughter’s suggestion “really helped us.” ■

ALABAMA RETAIL ASSOCIATION’S OTHER 2024-2025 OFFICERS

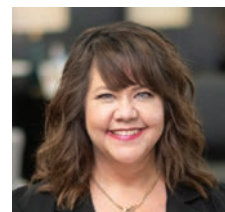
👉 Find a full list of ARA directors at alabamaretail.org/association/directors



Vice Chairman
Susan Anderson
Eagle Eye Outfitters



Treasurer
Bob Akers
Davis Direct



Executive Committee Designee
Melissa Cross
McAler’s Office Furniture



Immediate Past Chairman
Jodie Stanfield
Local Joes

Member News

OXFORD PICKETTE'S OPENS; COMPANY MARKS 20 YEARS



MEMBER
SINCE
2003

Pickette's moved its Oxford location to a new address in November of 2023. The new store is at 1829 U.S. Highway 78 East. When you see the red barn with the life-size bull statue in front of wooden barn doors in Oxford, pull in the parking lot. Founded in 2003, Anniston-based Pickette's offers a variety of animal feed, pet supplies, boots/apparel and more. It first opened an Oxford store in 2009. Jim and Matt Pickette own the business. Matt's wife, Christie, manages the Oxford store, while Matt and Christie's son, Gage Collins, a certified pet nutritionist, is also in management. *Visit pickettesfeedandpet.com*

SHOEFLY BOUTIQUE CELEBRATES 20TH YEAR



MEMBER
SINCE
2004

Shoefly Boutique in Homewood marked its 20th year in 2023. Owner Meg Roebuck and Manager Gina Budny are the dynamic duo behind the multi-generational women's shoe, clothing and accessory store at 2823 18th St. South. "Success comes when you surround yourself with good people," says Meg. Initially, Meg and a partner founded the business in 2003 solely as a shoe store. "We started adding clothes about seven or eight years in ... to offer the whole package for outfits," Meg told *StyleBlueprint* magazine. Gina, a Montgomery native, joined in 2017 as social media manager and became store manager in 2020. *Visit [@shoeflyhomewood](https://www.instagram.com/shoeflyhomewood) on Instagram*

FIND BAMA'S BEST BEEF AT DIAMOND JIM'S & MRS. DONNA'S



MEMBER
SINCE
2006

Diamond Jim's and Mrs. Donna's restaurant in Livingston, owned and operated by the Dial family, won the 2023 Bama's Best Beef contest conducted by the Alabama Cattlemen's Association. The winning dish was Diamond Jim's Famous Ribeye, a hand-cut, 16-ounce ribeye, marinated and seasoned with a secret blend known only by the Dial family. Although the restaurant opened its doors in 2005, its unique recipes are family favorites passed down through generations. After being nominated and voted on by customers on Facebook, Jim, Donna, and JJ Dial, along with the Diamond Jim's crew, were judged in October and received their plaque and roadside sign Dec. 1. *Visit [@DJandMrsDonnas](https://www.facebook.com/DJandMrsDonnas) on Facebook*



HUNTSVILLE COUPLE CHOSEN RESTAURATEURS OF THE YEAR

ChurchStreet Family Restaurant and Hospitality Group owners Matt and Stephanie Mell earned the 2023 Restaurateur of the Year title from the Alabama Restaurant and Hospitality Association. After living in New Jersey and California, the couple opened Huntsville's ChurchStreet Wine Shoppe in 2014. Matt is a native of Scottsboro. The ChurchStreet Family Group now also includes Mazzara's Vinoteca, Purveyor, Pourhouse, Seasalt and Catacomb. "We're truly lucky to work with an amazing group of people every day," said Stephanie. ChurchStreet Family's Brandon Zeller was also recognized as Restaurant Manager of the Year at the Stars of the Industry Awards in late October in Birmingham. *Visit churchstreetfamily.com*

MEMBER
SINCE
2014

Three Major Developments from 2023 that Every Employer Should Be Ready for in 2024

By McKenzie T. Meade, Esq., and Whitney R. Brown, Esq.

Every employer should put these three key action items on your company's front burner in 2024. Here's why:

Revise your Employee Handbook to Include a Unified Request for Accommodation Process

Reason 1: In the late 1970s, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that any religious accommodation imposing more than a de minimis burden on employers was an undue hardship. In *Groff v. DeJoy* (2023), the court said, effectively, "only joking!" The 9-0 decision held that an employer can show undue hardship ONLY if it can prove that the requested accommodation or other viable option would result in a substantial increase in the cost to the employer's overall business.

Reason 2: The Pregnant Worker Fairness Act (PWFA) requires employers of 15 or more employees to provide reasonable accommodations to pregnant workers (employees AND applicants). It's like the ADA, but it doesn't require the pregnancy-related condition rise to the level of disability (e.g., an employee with swollen feet requesting to prop her legs up need not show the swelling is disabling). The EEOC's proposed regulations attempt to dramatically extend the accommodation obligation to include leaves and waiving essential job functions for periods of at least 40 weeks.

For these reasons, employee handbooks should direct employee requests for accommodation on any basis to HR personnel who understand the interactive process and keep up to date on the EEOC's PWFA draft regulations and the inevitable legal challenges they'll face.

Understand Your Company's and Others' Use of AI

Many employers use artificial intelligence for human resources functions like screening applicants. Employers must remember that AI algorithms are only as good as the

information they receive. For example, if an employer uses resumes of top performers in a role historically dominated by men to "train" an AI to pick similar applicants, the AI may place undue weight on common but more masculine and non-job-related items like certain clubs or sports. Even if you depend on third parties for applicant sorting, your company is still the employer, and the primary defendant, so vet these carefully. Unsurprisingly, two of the five key priorities in the EEOC's draft Strategic Enforcement Plan for 2023-2027 relate to employer AI use.

Update Your Union Avoidance Training

In August 2023, the National Labor Relations Board reversed more than 50 years of precedent about how a union comes to represent employees. Instead of the union gathering proof of majority representation and requesting an election, now a union may simply assert that it represents a majority of a unit of employees. According to the NLRB's general counsel, the union can make the claim of representation to basically any officer or manager. Once it does so, the employer has 14 days to request an election. If the employer takes no action and then doesn't meet with the union to bargain, the NLRB will order the employer to bargain without the necessity of an election.

Add to this the "quickie" election rules being reinstated on Dec. 26, 2023, and wins for unions in Hollywood and against the Big 3 in auto manufacturing, and you have a recipe for stealth organization leading to representation without election. The antidote is well-trained managers alert to union activity who are positively engaging employees in ways that diminish the appeal of unions. ■

McKenzie Meade and Whitney Brown are with Lehr Middlebrooks Vreeland & Thompson PC. Members can contact LMVT about workplace issues or other HR questions at alabamaretail.org/resources/employment-law-hotline/

Got An Employment Law Question? Use the Employment Law Resource Center

Did you know Alabama Retail Association members have access to free telephone or e-mail consultation with a team of the state's top labor law attorneys?



Your association partners with the Birmingham law firm of Lehr Middlebrooks Vreeland & Thompson, P.C., to provide the Employment Law Resource Center. You can find the center under Benefits & Services at alabamaretail.org.

Not sure whether you should terminate an employee? Want to double check whether a certain deduction from an employee's pay is legal? Through the center, you can ask such questions without charge.

👉 [Learn more at alabamaretail.org/employment-law/](http://alabamaretail.org/employment-law/)

If You Haven't Already, Print Out & Paste Federal Law Changes to 6-in-1 Poster

Exactly a year ago, every Alabama Retail Association member location received an updated federal poster along with the February 2023 issue of Alabama Retailer magazine. Members who joined since that time should have received the poster in your new member packet.

Since that time, two federal laws prompted changes in the required workplace posters.

The Pregnant Workers Fairness Act and PUMP for Nursing Mothers Act

The Pregnant Workers Fairness Act and the PUMP for Nursing Mothers Act brought about changes in two of the posters included in the 38 x 25, 6-in-1 federal poster you have displayed in your place of business.

The Pregnant Workers Fairness Act applies to private and public sector employers, Congress, federal agencies, employment agencies and labor organizations with at least 15 employees. The law was effective June 27, 2023.

In April of 2023, the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) Minimum Wage Poster was revised. The section previously titled "Nursing Mothers" was changed to "Pump at Work" to reflect the PUMP for Nursing Mothers Act.

Print and Paste Changes

The Alabama Retail Association does NOT plan to reprint your 6-in-1 poster (dated 2023) again until at least the second

quarter of this year (2024). If you haven't already, print out the updated versions of the:

Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) Minimum Wage Poster

👉 [Find at: https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/WHDLegacy/files/minwagep-small.pdf](https://www.dol.gov/sites/dolgov/files/WHDLegacy/files/minwagep-small.pdf)

Place over portion of 6-in-1 poster headlined "Employee Rights under the Fair Labor Standards Act"

Know Your Rights: Workplace Discrimination is Illegal

👉 [Find at: https://www.eeoc.gov/sites/default/files/2023-06/22-088_EEOC_KnowYourRights6.12.pdf](https://www.eeoc.gov/sites/default/files/2023-06/22-088_EEOC_KnowYourRights6.12.pdf)

Place over portion of 6-in-1 poster headlined "Know Your Rights: Workplace Discrimination is Illegal"

The updated versions should be pasted over the posters headlined as shown above.

If the Alabama Retail Association has an email address in our database associated with your business, you should have received emails Nov. 16 and Sept. 29 from no-reply@alabamaretail.org about these poster changes. If you did not receive those emails, please put that email address on your safe senders list and/or get us an up-to-date email for your company. We send important legislative, regulatory and legal communications via that address.

👉 [For more information and links to posters, go to alabamaretail.org/benefits/free-workplace-posters/](http://alabamaretail.org/benefits/free-workplace-posters/)

Noble South, Southwood Kitchen, Roosters and Meat Boss Featured on Food Network Show

Story by Nancy King Dennis. Photos Provided.

In June of 2023, Guy Fieri, host of the Food Network's "Diners, Drive-Ins and Dives" (DDD) show, came to Alabama to attend the grand opening of Chef "Panini" Pete Blohme's **The Waterfront** restaurant in Daphne. While he was here, the DDD crew filmed at six Mobile area restaurants for Seasons 38 and 39 of the wildly popular show. Four of those restaurants are members of the Alabama Retail Association. Their episodes debuted between Oct. 20 and early this year.

"East, South, West"
Season 38, Episode 5
Originally aired Oct. 20, 2023



Chris Rainosek, owner and chef of **Noble South** on Dauphin Street in downtown Mobile, explained to Fieri his process for crawfish etouffee, chicken-fried quail and cornbread made with heirloom cornmeal from a Baldwin County farm. "We explained that we highlight local ingredients and put our own spin on Southern food," Chris said. Noble South opened in the spring of 2014. It will mark its 10th anniversary in April.

👉 *For the recipe for The Noble South's Heirloom Cornbread and more info, go to foodnetwork.com/shows/diners-drive-ins-and-dives/episodes/east-south-west*

"Sandwich-Fest"
Season 38, Episode 6
Originally aired Oct. 27, 2023



"In Daphne, Alabama, Guy (Fieri) digs into a dynamite dip and delicious fall-off-the-bone pork," the lead-in to the episode including **Southwood Kitchen** reads. Chef Jeremiah Matthews says the Snake River Wagyu French Dip sandwich is the most popular item on the U.S. Highway 98 restaurant's lunch menu. The DDD episode also featured the Crispy Kurobuta Pork Shank off of the restaurant's dinner menu. It comes with horseradish Robuchon potatoes, braising jus, heirloom carrots+peas and pork rind gremolata. Matthews is also behind the reopening of Ben's Jr. Bar-B-Q in Fairhope.

👉 *For the recipe for Southwood Kitchen's Wagyu French Dip and more info, go to foodnetwork.com/shows/diners-drive-ins-and-dives/episodes/sandwich-fest*

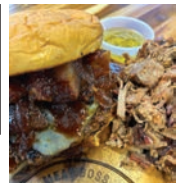
"Wrapped, Pied and Fried" –
Season 38, Episode 8
Premiered Nov. 17, 2023



The DDD crew called another downtown Mobile venue on Dauphin Street, "a funky Latin joint serving craveable carnitas and a surf-and-turf burrito." In January, **Roosters**, owned by Frankie Little, celebrated its 7th anniversary in Mobile. Little grew up on a farm in Foley next to his grandmother, who had lived in Central America as a child, and he traveled extensively in Latin countries to develop his menu. He has plans to franchise Roosters this year.

👉 *For the recipe for Roosters' Torta De Carnitas sandwich and more, go to foodnetwork.com/shows/diners-drive-ins-and-dives/episodes/wrapped-pied-and-fried*

"Smokin' Southern Decadence"
Season 39, Episode 1
Premieres in early 2024



"In Mobile, a family-run barbecue joint puts out a bomb Boss Burger with a side of rib candy and a stellar smoked brisket sandwich," says DDD in this episode. The late Benny Chinnis began the **Meat Boss** as a take-out counter in 2012. The restaurant grew from that small operation that began with just Benny, his wife and his dad. "Since then, Meat Boss has continually grown by increasing the number of employees and expanding our space," his widow, Dara Chinnis says.

👉 *For the recipe for the Boss Burger with Rib Candy and Spicy Carolina Sauce, go to foodnetwork.com/shows/diners-drive-ins-and-dives/episodes/smokin-southern-decadence*

Welcome New Members

4 H Enterprises LLC
DOTHAN

AL68 LLC
SARALAND

Books on Time LLC
HOMEWOOD

Boom Vang Brewing Co.
- Birmingham LLC
BIRMINGHAM

Boom Vang Brewing Co.
- Huntsville LLC
HUNTSVILLE

BT2 Communications
Group LLC
BIRMINGHAM

C Rosinsky Inc., dba
Lavish
TUSCALOOSA

CF Burgers Inc.
MADISON

Cheharma LLC
HUNTSVILLE

Chi Truong LLC
DAPHNE

Cross-Eyed Owl
Brewing Co. Inc.
DECATUR

Cullman Auto Body &
Frame LLC
HANCEVILLE

D & G Ventures Inc.
MONTGOMERY

Diamond Hope LLC
ANDALUSIA

Don Bigotes
Mexican Grill LLC
ATTALLA

Dothan Employment
Solutions LLC
DOTHAN

DT Birmingham LLC
BIRMINGHAM

EB Homes Inc.
BIRMINGHAM

FG Saraland LLC
SARALAND

FG West Mobile LLC
MOBILE

Fillinger Foot Clinic LLC
CULLMAN

Frankie's Crab Shack Inc.
HUNTSVILLE

Frederickson LLC
SHEFFIELD

French Joint LLC
MONTGOMERY

Guthrie's at Legends LLC
PRATTVILLE

Heavy Holdings LLC
MOBILE

Hebner Enterprises LLC.
MOBILE

HG Furnishings Inc.
BIRMINGHAM

HRC HWD LLC
HOMEWOOD

Income Trustees
of the Kate Kinloch
Middleton Fund
MOBILE

Jay & Vivek AL LLC
FOLEY

JMSJA LLC
OPP

Johnny Macs Liquor
Shack LLC
ROGERSVILLE



K B 51
Management Inc.
AUBURN

LBR Enterprises LLC
ORANGE BEACH

Little Mexico Grill 2 LLC
KILLEN

LIV B&B LLC, dba Bitty
& Beau's Coffee
BIRMINGHAM

Lost Management
Group LLC
ANDALUSIA

NLB Two LLC
PELHAM

Parkway Pharmacy
South LLC
ARAB

Radiant Hotels Inc.
HUNTSVILLE

RBSN Enterprises LLC
ENTERPRISE

Rix Audio, Video &
Appliance LLC
OPELIKA

SAI Midland LLC
MIDLAND CITY

Saina Inc.
PRATTVILLE

SH Enterprises
LLC, dba Dickey's
Barbecue Pit
DALEVILLE

Soham Group III LLC
BESSEMER

Southern Oak
Outdoors LLC
DEMOPOLIS

Spices
Smokehouse LLC
ALBERTVILLE

Tamburro's Italian
Home LLC
BIRMINGHAM

The Cajun
Leprechaun LLC
MONTGOMERY

The Tuscaloosa
Children's Theatre Inc.
NORTHPORT

The Vine Church
TROY

Toucan Enterprises LLC,
dba Tuscan Tiki Bar
BIRMINGHAM

Vaishali Corp.
COTTONDALE

Walter Scott LLC
BIRMINGHAM

Widespreadpizza LLC
PIKE ROAD

FEATURED NEW MEMBER

**SQUARE 1
BOUTIQUE LLC
BRENT**

Founded 2020

OWNERS

**Marena Stephens,
Katie Crumpler,
Kimberlee Moody
(pictured)**

LOCATION

**10450 Alabama
Highway 5,
Brent, AL 35034**

NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES

7

MEMBER SINCE

Nov. 30, 2023



Socially Speaking

THE POSTS YOU MAY HAVE MISSED

"Entrepreneurship has always been my thing."

- TUC WILSON, SAW'S INC.



If you are tired of eating turkey after the long holiday weekend, Tuc Wilson recommends the ribs from Saw's BBQ Inc. in Homewood. Tuc, a college sophomore, and his sister, Reese, a high school senior, own the place. Learn more about the Wilson family at <https://alretail.org/40LiisG> #MemberMonday #SawsBBQ #AlabamaBBQ #DineAlabama" Nov. 27 four-photo reel and link



Black Friday, Small Business

Saturday or Cyber Monday – Whatever day and however you plan to shop – in-store or online – make sure your local stores and restaurants are in your rotation. When you shop local, you support innovation, opportunity, families, the economy and giving back! Nov. 22 graphic



Get social with us! Talk to us about the photos, resources, retail updates and member news we share.

/Alabama Retail

@ShopAlabama

/Alabama Retail Association

@AlabamaRetail

Stay informed at alabamaretail.org



For 71 years, the Pacey family has been making pralines, divinity, fruitcakes and other confections at Punta Clara Kitchen, a family business on Scenic Highway 98 in Point Clear. Learn more about the Paceys and their business at alretail.org/3tQfM8e#Fruitcake #ESeats #ShopAlabamaForTheHolidays Oct. 30 13-photo video with link

For four generations, the Dalton name has been associated with the pharmacy industry in Alabama. During an all-day open house, the Alabama Retail Association presented Dalton Pharmacy in Slocomb with an Alabama Centennial Retailer award marking its 120th year of operation. Learn more at alretail.org/4946nu0 Oct. 20 Four-photo post with a link



Alabama Retail Association

honored Planters Hardware & Building Inc. for its more than 107 years in business. The Runyan family has owned and operated the store since about 1916. Third-generation owner Walt Runyan continues to sell "everything in hardware" as well as building supplies. bit.ly/49tPM2J Nov. 9 video with 12 photos and a link



@ALABAMARETAIL POST, REPOSTED BY @AGSTEVE MARSHALL

Other states are looking to Alabama as a model for its "attack on retail property theft" in the Retail Theft Crime Prevention Act, @AGSteveMarshall said at today's ARA annual meeting. New law gives tools to prosecute, aggregate thefts and file charges remotely. #alpolitics Nov. 8 photo





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BETTER TOGETHER

Together We Are the Leading Voice and Resource for Retailers in Our State

Retail in Alabama is better when we join together.

Whether voicing the retail view when public policy is made, negotiating rates for benefits and services or communicating the retail story, the 4,300 members of the Alabama Retail Association are better together.

Take advantage of all your association has to offer.

Legislative Clout

Your membership gives us the power to stop laws that interfere with your business and help shape laws that let your business succeed.

Cost-Effective Workers' Compensation Coverage

The greatest benefit of ARA membership is the workers' compensation coverage available through Alabama Retail Comp. You get great rates, expert claims handling and exceptional service. Excess income comes back to you in the form of an annual retro return.

"It's great to belong to an organization that has a voice loud enough for policymakers to hear. We get other benefits with membership too. Alabama Retail's workers' comp program is second to none."

- MICHAEL GEE, PANTS STORE

In-Depth Communication

Whether posts or issue briefs on alabamaretail.org, timely email communications, real-time social media posts or stories in our magazine Alabama Retailer, ARA keeps you informed on the latest regulatory, legal, legislative and business issues affecting your business.

Industry Recognition

Through its Alabama Retailer of the Year and Centennial Retailer awards program, telling the retail story and media interaction on consumer spending and shopping trends, ARA spotlights outstanding retailers in our state and the contributions they make to our communities and economy.