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THE OFFICIAL
PUBLICATION OF THE
ALABAMA RETAIL
ASSOCIATION

*THE VOICE
of Retailing in Alabama*



ALABAMA GROUP PLANS LIVING WAGE REPORT

Alison Wingate, Director of Governmental and Public Affairs

A new group has been formed in Alabama to study the need for a *living wage* in the state. The Alabama Appleseed Center for Law and Justice was founded several years ago and has a very prominent Board of Directors including former Governor Albert Brewer and C. C. Torbert, Jr., former Chief Justice of the Alabama Supreme Court. Many Appleseed board members are attorneys with the state's largest and most conservative law firms.

Alabama Appleseed plans to release a report this month on the need for a *living wage* in the state. A *living wage* law or ordinance requires employers to pay wages that are above federal or state minimum wage levels. When the *living wage* idea first surfaced, only workers employed by businesses that have a contract with a city or county government or those who receive economic development subsidies from a locality were covered. The rationale behind the ordinances was that city and county governments should not contract with or subsidize employers who pay poverty-level wages. Since then, several local ordinances have been proposed to require that a living wage be paid to all employees by all employers.

The *living wage* level is usually the wage a full-time worker would need to earn to support a family above federal poverty line, ranging from 100% to 130% of the poverty measurement. The wage rates specified by *living wage* ordinances range from a low of \$6.25 in Milwaukee to a high of \$12 in Santa Cruz. In addition to setting wage levels, many ordinances also have provisions regarding benefits (such as health

insurance and paid vacation), labor relations, and hiring practices.

Living wages actually impose more costly than necessary employment arrangements, thereby reducing the amount of public service that can be provided. *Living wage* ordinances discriminate by giving certain employees economic privileges that are not provided to other workers. Artificially high labor rates mandated by living wage ordinances are paid for by the very workers against whom such ordinances discriminate, through higher taxes and lower levels of service.

Many economists believe that both minimum wage laws and *living wage* ordinances are flawed economic and social tools. But *living wage* ordinances are by far the most inappropriate. Despite the jobs and opportunities that minimum wage laws destroy, at

Living wage ordinances discriminate by giving certain employees economic privileges that are not provided to other workers.

least minimum wage laws do not single out a particular class of workers for higher compensation than others. The principle of a minimum wage is that all employees shall be paid no less than a statutorily established amount. The principle of a *living wage* ordinance is that some

employees shall be paid no less than a statutory amount, which is more than that mandated for other employees. *Living wage* ordinances discriminate against the vast majority of workers to provide benefits to a privileged few.

Alabama Appleseed is also interested in non-partisan elections for statewide judicial seats and bringing payday loan companies under the State Banking Department's Alabama Small Loan Act. With the people and firms represented in this group, ARA will keep a close eye on Appleseed's activities.

THE VOICE

THE VOICE OF
RETAILING IN ALABAMA
VOLUME 3, NUMBER 1
FIRST QUARTER

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THE VOICE is the official publication of the Alabama Retail Association, 7265 Halcyon Summit Drive, Montgomery, Alabama 36117. Telephone (334) 263-5757; FAX (334) 262-3991.

THE VOICE is published four times a year, quarterly. Views and conclusions expressed in articles herein are those of the authors, not necessarily those of the editors or officers of the Alabama Retail Association. Opinions expressed in this magazine do not necessarily reflect the policies of the Alabama Retail Association.

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Postmaster: Send address changes to *THE VOICE*, P. O. Box 240669, Montgomery, Alabama 36124.

FROM THE PRESIDENT

CHARLES MCDONALD

The Legislature and Governor were given a challenge by ARA Chairman Bud Kitchin at our recent Board of Directors' meeting. He quoted Mark Burnett, founder of the Eco-Challenge:

The temptation when the path to success gets too bumpy is to leap back into the comfort zone. Don't. Keep pushing forward, always forward. The comfort zone is the land of dreams and wishes. Success is the land of results, where all those dreams come true.

The new Legislature convenes on March 4. They will be faced with a financial crisis, the likes of which not seen in modern times. The ones who will earn their place in history are those willing to leave their comfort zone, to place their political futures aside and

move to the land of results for the betterment of our state. We need trailblazing leadership to step forward and say "Band-aids no more – let's fix Alabama!"

The Legislature needs to join Governor Riley in the pledge he made during his inaugural address:

I will always endeavor to do what I believe is in the best interest of Alabama, without regard to the political or personal consequences. I am here to serve you, not me.

If only we could find more willing to also make this promise, Alabama could be fundamentally changed forever.



STALLWORTH JOINS ALABAMA RETAIL ASSOCIATION AS LEGISLATIVE LIAISON

MONTGOMERY, AL – The Alabama Retail Association is pleased to announce that Melinda Stallworth has joined the staff as



Melinda Stallworth

Legislative Liaison for the upcoming legislative session. Her duties will include working with the Alabama State Legislature and regulatory agencies on issues impacting retailing.

Stallworth comes to the ARA from the Siegelman administration where she served as Legislative Liaison. She formerly served as an Alabama Law Institute Intern with the Lieutenant Governor's and the Attorney General's offices. She is a member of the National Political Science Honor Society, National Honor Society for Public Affairs and Administration, American Society for Public Administration and Alabama Political Science Association. Stallworth received her Bachelor's degree in Political Science from Alabama State University and will complete her Master's degree in Public Administration from Auburn University – Montgomery in May, 2003.

25 WAYS TO DO IT... RETAILERS, SHOW YOUR CUSTOMERS JUST HOW MUCH YOU VALUE THEM

By Ed Rigsbee, CSP

It was October 6, 1727 that Alexander Pope wrote in a letter to John Gray, "Blessed is he who expects nothing, for he shall never be disappointed." Does this resonate for you, with truth and reality, as to the expectations of today's consumers? Unfortunately, it does. But today, consumers have more choice than ever before in the history of civilization as to where and how they will acquire what they want. Big boxes, walk-in specialty stores, drive-up stores and in-home purchasing—television shopping networks, mail order and internet-based electronic ordering.

For today's specialty brick and mortar retailer, one that desires to compete with the national big boxes, the most important activity is delivering value to their customers. One of the important ways to do this is by subscribing to the philosophy: Our customer's have earned the right to our respect simply by walking through our door!

This simple rule can mean the difference between mere existence and a success enterprise. If you personally have an emotional ownership in this simple belief, and show it in word and deed, your staff will have it too. Then, you can watch your sales increase year after year. Sure, there is more to running a successful business than that. But, with all things being equal, the merchant that follows this rule will do exceedingly better than the one that does not.

The following is an example of how not to deliver value—one that you have most likely experienced yourself. You go out for a nice meal and your expectation is that of service and elegance. Do you want some smart-ass server delivering poor service, or even worse, trying to make you look bad in front of your dining partner? Of course you wouldn't. So why in the world would you allow the same kind of situation to occur in your store, or any business for that matter?

When your customers feel really good about visiting your store they will come back repeatedly and urge that their friends do the same. This is because they believe

they received the value they expected when they shopped your store. Does this sound like dollars in the register? It sure does.

In order to deliver on a greater number of your customers' expectations consider incorporating as many of the below listed ideas into your daily offering as possible. Then, watch good things happen.

1. Greet each customer within 30 seconds from the time they enter your store. No matter how busy or short-handed you are.
2. Show respect by using your customer's name. If appropriate, use their first

name. If this is not appropriate or possible, then refer to them formally (Mr., Mrs., Ms., etc.). While it may sound simple, watch their facial expressions when you do this.

3. Keep your store bright and well lighted. This gives a better feeling.
4. Keep your store clean and orderly—make it easy for them to find reasons to give you their money.
5. Have a water dispenser and disposable glasses.

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Retailers, Show Your Customers Just How Much You Value Them – 25 Ways To Do It

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6. Keep freshly brewed coffee and hot water for tea available for your customers during business hours.
7. Have donuts or cookies available in the morning for your customers. My drycleaner always has donut holes and coffee for me (and everyone else) in the morning; it's a nice touch.
8. Music, not acid rock or elevator music, but something in the middle, or jazz will

soothe your customers' tensions. Relaxed people buy more.

9. Have a "new arrival" section so your customers will know what is new and it will also create interest in the new stuff.
10. Smile, but please do not offer the slick "used car salesman" smiles, but rather the warm, sincere and friendly kind.
11. Do things free, like the idea behind the baker's dozen. Offer an "off the wall" service your customers value but would not generally expect your kind of store.
12. Say, "Thank You" as often as you can.
13. Regularly give your customers the

opportunity to complete customer satisfaction surveys. Also, consider product mix/offer satisfaction surveys. (Share this information with your suppliers and ask them to consider new offerings.)

14. Do weekly customer drawings for free stuff your manufacturers and their salespeople give you. Do you really need another coffee mug, hat or T-shirt?
15. Offer valet parking, hire a high school age person to be your valet, they could use the job and your customers will feel very special.
16. Hire people to work in your store that exhibit a "can do" attitude.
17. Select and train your help well. Generally, attractive, neat and friendly workers that have good product knowledge make customers feel special.
18. The Value Equation: Good quality stuff, at fair prices and offered with exceptional service.
19. Be in stock. Most people hate it when you do not have what they want—and tend to go elsewhere—giving your competition the opportunity to edge you out as the merchant of choice in the mind of that customer. Have what they need, when they need it and they'll love you for it. (Surveys also help.)
20. Efficiency is important. Be sure your systems are not counter-productive to allowing your customers to make their purchases in a timely manner. Customers get angered very quickly when they have to needlessly stand in line. This is especially true when there is a long check out line and "other" employees are just standing around and doing things other than serving customers.
21. A logical store layout that allows your customers to more easily find things always makes them feel better about your store.
22. Make your store "user friendly" in every possible sense. Consider store operating hours, layout, policies, etc.
23. Entertainment is always a winner. Frequently, sporting goods retailers will have sports videos showing on a large screen monitor. Even many of the



Continued on page 5

United States Postal Service offices have gotten into the act with television monitors visible while customers are waiting in line. Some of their programming is even interesting. What can you offer your customers in the way of entertainment?

24. The smell of a fresh bakery is always inviting, just ask Mrs. Fields. Bake chocolate chip cookies, or something else that smells wonderful, in the store. Perhaps try using a small portable convection oven as they work quite well for this purpose.
25. Reward customer loyalty. Introductory offers stink. They indicate to loyal customers that they do not matter to you any more. Do good things for loyal customers. Remember, you do not own them. Any time they want, they can shop somewhere else.

If you can, stretch your brain muscles daily by asking yourself, "What else can I do to make my customers feel really good about frequenting your store?" Also ask, "What else can I do to set apart my store from the Nationals?" Put your answers into action and watch your business prosper.

Ed Rigsbee, CSP is the author of three business relationship books: *PartnerShift—How To Profit From the Partnering Trend*, *Developing Strategic Alliances* and *The Art of Partnering*. He has over 600 published articles to his credit and is a regular keynote presenter at corporate and trade association conferences across North America. Rigsbee can be reached at 800-839-1520 or EdRigsbee@aol.com. For additional related information, visit his Partnering University Web Site at www.rigsbee.com <<http://www.rigsbee.com/>>.

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STC Network Services, Inc.	Mobile	The Sport Center, Inc.	Cullman	Waid McNamara Parrish	
Steak-n-Biscuit Too	Hartselle	The Turtle Shell, Inc.	Prattville	Architecture, Inc.	Dothan
Stone Automotive, Inc.	Foley	The White House Restaurant.	Valley	Wall Street Deli & The Market.	Auburn
Stone, Patton, Kierce & Freeman	Bessemer	TLC Exhaust & Auto Care Center	Satsuma	Wayside Animal Hospital.	Alexander City
Sunbelt Industrial Sales, Inc.	Mobile	Tommy's Folly, Inc.	Birmingham	Weight Loss USA, Inc.	Anniston
Sunset Enterprises, Inc.	Mobile	Tortugas, Inc.	Hoover	Wendy's	Alexander City
Swift Drug Company, Inc.	Selma	Total Pet Care, LLC.	Birmingham	Westglenn Software, Inc.	Birmingham
T.G.S., Inc.	Birmingham	Tourway Pancake House	Florence	Wholesale Optical Supply, Inc.	Robertsdale
Taylor Mortgage, Inc.	Guntersville	Town & Country Acceptance		William E. Palmer, DMD, P.C.	Oneonta
TC Computer Service	Anniston	Corporation	Birmingham	William G. Hand, DMD	Dothan
TCBY Auburn	Auburn	Trademarc's Family Sports Grill	Mobile	William L. Howell, P.A.	Mobile
Techni-Core Engineering, Inc.	Huntsville	Transmission Supply Company, Inc. .	Birmingham	William S. Poole, Jr.	Demopolis
Techni-Core Professionals, Inc	Huntsville	Travelodge Of Pelham	Pelham	Wiregrass Community Pharmacy, Inc.	Ashford
Terri Pines Country Club	Cullman	Trent & Christian, Attorneys At Law	Athens	Yesterday's Marketplace.	Chickasaw
The Barking Kudu, Inc.	Birmingham	Tri-State Wholesale, Inc.	Mobile	Zaxby's of Cullman	Cullman
The Briary.	Homewood	Truitt, Tingle & Paramore, LLC	Birmingham	Zaxby's of Florence.	Florence
The Cline Carmack Co., Inc.	Notasulga	U.S. Graphics, Inc.	Montgomery	Zenko Hrynkiw, MD, P.C.	Birmingham



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