

Michigan Grocers Association (MGA) is joining forces with the Michigan Retailers Association (MRA). Michigan Grocers Association will become a division of the Michigan Retailers Association on January 1, 2018.

119 Years of Service

MGA was formed in 1898 as the Michigan Business Men's Association. At that time, like-minded business people joined together as members of an industry affected by government policies, regulations, and changing business practices. Coming together as an association was critical to maintaining a strong, collective voice. That is still true today.

Over the past 119 years, the association has gone through many permutations. The name has changed from the Michigan Business Men's Association to the Retail Grocers & Meat Dealers Association of Michigan to the Michigan Food Dealers Association, and finally, to the Michigan Grocers Association.

Through it all, no matter what it was called, the Association worked on behalf of its members to advance the success of the food industry. "We accomplish this by providing leadership and industry-specific programs and services, and by delivering a unified voice when advocating for policies and legislation. Everything we do is with our members' best interest in mind," says MGA President Linda M. Gobler. "Today, in our ever-changing environment, organizations must continually evolve to stay relevant. That includes MGA as we move forward always looking for the best way to maintain our unwavering member focus."

Deliberate Approach to Change

Approximately two years ago, MGA began to formally consider how the Association could remain sustainable and best prepare for the future. The MGA Board of Directors formed a Sustainability Committee in 2016. At the February 2017 board meeting, the committee recommended that MGA explore the possibility of joining operations with a like-minded association — one where MGA could retain its identity. At the May 2017 board meeting, the board approved that the Association join forces with the Michigan Retailers Association.

"We decided to join forces with a highly compatible association that shares our vision, values, and commitment to advancing the success of the retail industry," says Gobler. "We are pleased to have found all of these attributes and more in the Michigan Retailers Association."

Get to Know the MRA

Founded in 1940 and headquartered a few blocks from the Capitol in Lansing, the Michigan Retailers Association is a trusted resource for all types of retailers. President and CEO Jim Hallan has been with the association since 1985.



*Putting More Muscle
in Your Membership*

"We are excited to have MGA members on board and can't wait to get to know you and your businesses better," says Hallan. "We are also eager for you to get to know us. As a member, you join more than 5,000 other businesses who share your enthusiasm and commitment to Michigan's retail industry. MRA members include small family-owned independents, multi-store operators, and everything in between."

MRA's Board of Directors is comprised of a variety of successful retailers including Chairman Orin Mazzoni, Jr. who is president of a family-owned business with stores in Garden City and Northville. As a division of MRA, Michigan Grocers will have its own volunteer advisory board as well as grocer-members on the Michigan Retailers' board and important committees.

MRA members are thriving. At the end of MRA's June 30 fiscal year, the association attained record sales in merchant processing and a net gain in membership, experienced tremendous growth in its Michigan-based Retailers Insurance Company, invested heavily in cutting edge technology, and scored significant legislative victories, including several in concert with MGA such as prohibiting local governmental units from taxing or banning the use of plastic bags.

"MGA and MRA have a long history of fighting on the same side of legislative issues," Gobler says. "In fact, over the years we've aligned on every major issue. We've successfully worked together to eliminate item pricing requirements, organize a retail crime statute, and ensure a level playing field between remote sellers and Michigan businesses — to name a few joint accomplishments on our members' behalf."

The now formal MGA/MRA alliance means MGA members will have even more muscle in the Legislature. MRA's four registered lobbyists will continue to fight on behalf of the food industry. Hot issues include proposed tax chang-

es, alcohol reforms, and legislation that MRA has been working on to keep food and beverages tax-free at the local level.

"MRA is no stranger to joining forces with other associations," Hallan adds. "Previously, we have successfully joined operations with the Michigan Retail Hardware Association, Michigan Shoe Association, Michigan Jewelers Association, and Michigan Tire and Vehicle Association. Collectively, we are all stronger."

What Does This Mean for MGA Members?

"We are excited for you to see firsthand where the power of the MGA/MRA partnership can take us," Gobler shares. Moving forward, as an MGA member you will continue to receive the same unbeatable resources you get now: The *Michigan Food News* will continue to be published on the same schedule. The annual conference, dues schedule, and Michigan Grocers Fund will continue.

And now MGA members will get even more: With a staff of 40 and a reputation for financial strength, MRA will put impressive resources at members' disposal. MGA members will be able to participate in Michigan Retailers \$1.4 billion merchant processing program; have access to MRA's Blue Cross Blue Shield health insurance program and Delta Dental of Michigan insurance plan; receive mandatory state and federal posters for Michigan employers free of charge; and benefit directly from MRA's popular Buy Nearby campaign, which educates consumers about why it's so important to shop at Michigan stores.

Gobler explains, "Apart from the obvious business similarities, what appealed most to us about the Michigan Retailers Association is that we hold similar philosophies on doing business, striving to best serve members, all while holding honesty and integrity in high regard. We are your trusted partner; so it was paramount that we be able to trust a new business partner."

Another benefit: MRA's updated, expansive, and mobile-friendly website provides key information including results of a monthly survey, in cooperation with the Federal Reserve, to gauge retail sales in Michigan and communicate those results through the Michigan Retail Index; a frequently updated, detailed overview of all legislation and issues affecting retail and business, including food and beverages; and regulatory alerts. You can learn more at www.retailers.com.

"The food industry is no stranger to businesses combining forces, so I know many MGA members have experience with this," says Gobler. "We hope MGA members join us in celebrating this alliance. We look forward to bringing you enhanced expertise, support, and service unmatched by any other industry association."