

WFIA Celebrates Grocery Industry Excellence

Independent grocers, suppliers recognized for industry contributions, civic and charitable efforts

OLYMPIA — The Washington Food Industry Association (WFIA) recently took time to honor independent supermarket grocers, suppliers and convenience store owners for their outstanding philanthropic and community efforts. The awards were presented May 24 at the association's Industry Awards dinner at the Washington State Convention Center.

Jan Gee, WFIA president and CEO, said the awards highlight the excellent work members of the independent grocery and neighborhood industry are doing in communities all across Washington state.

"Washington's independent grocers are among the most connected to their customers. They live alongside one another in big and small communities and are frequently leading efforts to help others and to give back," said Gee. "This year's award winners are outstanding representatives of our industry who work every day to make life in their communities better for so many people. Mark and Lori Loften, Larry Baker and Don Rhoads exemplify the best of what our association seeks to represent."

This year's WFIA honorees include:

- **COMMUNITY SERVICE AWARD: Ki-Be Market owners Mark and Lori Loften of Benton City** received WFIA's 2017-18 Community Service Award, which honors individuals in the grocery industry who exemplify the highest standards of service in both business and community to positively influence and enhance the lives of others. Through various initiatives, the Loftens have made their store a catalyst for civic engagement and community pride. For the past 10 years, the Loftens have worked closely with city officials on a beautification project, pulling weeds on Main Street and working with area businesses to spruce up the downtown and restore a sense of pride among its residents. The couple has hosted numerous community events in support of local youth sports teams, sponsoring weekly promotions highlighting high school football players (complete with lifesize cutouts of the players displayed in their store). The Loftens even built a sand volleyball pit and soccer training field at their home for the high school to use, and supplied trainers and coaches to help the teams sharpen their skills.
- **VENDOR OF THE YEAR: Larry Baker of Bunzl Distributing in Summer** is the recipient of WFIA's 2017-18 Vendor of the Year award. Baker, general manager of Bunzl, also serves on the WFIA board of directors and has been a long-time supporter of the association's [educational foundation](#). In recent years, Baker has co-chaired one of the foundation's more visible events, the statewide Best Bagger grocery bagging championship. Baker has also led various charitable initiatives at Bunzl, ranging from employee fundraisers for local food banks to an adopt-a-family program for families in need at Christmas. Baker and his team at Bunzl are also quick to organize in support of

disaster relief. In recent years, they have raised money and provided support for victims and first responders in the Oso landslide and seasonal wildfire crews.

- **RETAILER OF THE YEAR: Vancouver Minit Mart owner Don Rhoads** received the WFIA Retailer of the Year award, which recognizes a retailer's lifetime of commitment to the industry and exemplification of business leadership. The award also honors WFIA members for their commitment to the prosperity, ethics, and image of the independent food industry and association. Well-known for his generosity in the community, Rhoads joins forces annually with local distributors to host a food drive, placing barrels in stores and encouraging others to participate. In 2017, the drive generated 10,000 pounds of food for the local community.

Additional information about each award winner can be found on the [WFIA website](#).

PHOTO CAPTIONS:

COMMUNITY SERVICE

Ki-Be Market owners Mark and Lori Loften celebrate their WFIA Community Service Award with Troy Tanner, a WFIA member and retail operations counselor with Family Foods. Tanner nominated the Loftens for the award. (Photo © 2018 CJ Photo NW)

VENDOR OF THE YEAR

Larry Baker of Bunzl Distributing received the WFIA's 2017-18 Vendor of the Year award at the association's Industry Awards dinner May 24 in Seattle. (Photo © 2018 CJ Photo NW)

Larry Baker, center, celebrates his Vendor of the Year award with fellow Bunzl employees (L to R) Rick Sorenson, Shannon Parker, Bob Hensen, Mike Barhart, Trina Valdez, and Lisa McNeeley. (Photo © 2018 CJ Photo NW)

RETAILER OF THE YEAR

Vancouver Minit Mart owner Don Rhoads and his wife, Jennifer, were honored May 24 as the WFIA Retailer of the Year. (Photo © 2018 CJ Photo NW)

About the Washington Food Industry Association

The Washington Food Industry Association (WFIA) is dedicated to promoting and protecting the independent, community-focused grocery industry and its suppliers. Founded in 1899, the WFIA represents the state's independent grocers. Membership includes all levels of the food and beverage distribution industry who collaborate to promote the principles of free enterprise to ensure a vigorous, competitive, economically healthy food industry. The grocery industry provides about 50,000 Washington jobs. For more information, visit www.wa-food-ind.org.