WELCOME NEW MEMBERS!

- Blue Green Aqua
- Chesapeake Bank
- Courtyard by Marriott Newport News Airport
- Hilton Garden Inn Hampton – LTD Hospitality Group
- Holiday Inn Virginia Beach – Norfolk Hotel & Conference Center
- Just What I Kneaded Massage Studio
- Mannino’s Italian Bistro
- Navigon Financial Group Inc
- Sani e Felici
- Simply Women Designed Kitchens and Baths
- Stoneybrook Subway Station
- Sunrise Pizzeria Family Restaurant
- Taste of Europe
- Virginia Peninsula Photography
- Wild Birds Unlimited
- WSKY – SKY4TV

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THE CORNER POST

My Notes From The National Retail Federation Big Show
by Ray Mattes, President/CEO, Retail Alliance

I had the opportunity to travel to the NRF Big Show in New York City a couple of weeks ago. What an interesting and thought-provoking experience!

After reviewing my notes I would like to share some of my takeaways:

• Online sales versus brick and mortar retailers. Online sales is here to stay and will continue to grow (20 percent during 2013), brick and mortar retailers need to create a hospitable environment in order to attract and retain customers.

Online purchasing is considered an e-commerce relationship type interaction whereas physical retail creates a more emotional and community attachment.

People are social, therefore there is a primitive need for social interaction.

Brick and mortar has the capability to create a relaxing, community-orientated experience where consumers can enjoy the monetary benefit by shopping with their hard-earned-dollars; reaping their rewards, so to speak, as a way to enjoy their success.

Bottom line is that ever since the caveman, humans have used the campfire to connect with fellow friends and family; build a fire and make your customers feel warm and welcomed.

• Showrooming was a hot topic. As most of you know, showrooming is when consumers come into your store, look or try on your product, then scan the item in order to price shop with an online retailer.

The big discussion was that showrooming should be viewed as an opportunity versus a detriment.

Surveys have revealed that 30 percent of shoppers now use their smart phone for research. This will continue to grow as shoppers become savvier with the new technologies offered through smart phones.

Back to the campfire: keep your website up to date; consider offering loyalty rewards; engage in social media campaigns; offer flash sales; engage in online sales; allow shoppers fast and easy access; train your staff; create an easy return policy; maintain a robust Customer Relationship Management system (CRM); create a clean yet entertaining environment.

• Employees in retail today should not be viewed as entry or minimum wage employees.

Staff can make you or break you. Retail has become sophisticated and therefore recruitment of staff needs to conform to this changing environment.

90 percent of the population has a smart phone: 50% Android, 50% iPhone.

Retailers need intelligent and savvy employees to communicate properly with a new generation of sophisticated shoppers.

Our youth is not only the future of our country but the future of retail success. They grasp the intricacies of the Internet, mobile apps and social media. Use this knowledge and employ their ideas in your marketing and advertising campaigns.

• Customer Relationship Management should be employed to retain repeat shoppers. Proper data mining is going to be crucial in distinguishing brick and mortar from online retail.

Know your customers, understand their needs, and cater to their wants and desires. Targeted marketing can save you money while lifting your sales.

Couple of other tidbits

• 77 percent of retail stores have fewer than 10 employees

• Retail is the nation’s largest sector employer

• Retail supports one in five jobs

• More than 42 million jobs are supported by retail

• Nearly half of retail employees are 16-24 years of age.

I’d be happy to discuss any of this further with you if you’re interested. Hope you fared ok through the weather systems and I look forward to seeing you at one of our upcoming events.

Ray
Ebony Arts & Gifts is a unique store catering to our diverse community. We asked its owner, Marie M. Villamil, to answer a few questions about her experiences over the nine years since launch.

1. When was your business established?

Our company was established in 2005.

2. How many locations do you operate?

We have one store in Chesapeake Square Mall.

3. Describe your business and the services you provide?

We are an exquisite retail experience catering to our diverse community. We have a large collection of framed art, statues, masks, jewelry and other fine gifts, primarily from Africa and the Caribbean. We also have on hand a considerable variety of health and beauty products including oils, lotions, soaps, creams and other skin care products.

4. What made you decide to start your own business?

I was working for a friend who had a similar business in Virginia Beach and decided to start my own business in Chesapeake’s Western Branch.

5. What was your biggest challenge when starting your business?

There were many! Some of more significance included establishing the business relationships with my wholesalers and office suppliers, hiring reliable employees who I could count on, paying myself less than I was previously making to ensure enough profit went back to grow my business and, finally, the amount of my personal time required to make my business a success.

6. What do you wish you knew then that you know now?

Nothing really. All that my business and I have become, is due to the lessons I learned while growing my business these past nine years.
If I truly understood the difficulties prior to undertaking them, I may have been discouraged and discontinued my business or not even have started it.

7. What are your current challenges and how do you overcome these challenges?

One of my current challenges is my inability to compete with large chain businesses that are willing to sign multiple year leases.

I have moved my business five times since I started it. There really is no satisfactory method to overcome this; I just try to remain calm and patient as I shut down my store, pack it up and move.

8. What has been your greatest success?

Taking care of my customers while being responsive to their ever-changing needs. This has been the source of my greatest joy as an independent business owner.

9. What are your future goals for the business?

To look for and obtain those products that will interest my old customers and bring in new ones.

To continue to grow my business by 10-15 percent yearly, which will allow me to eventually manage my business without working as many hours, hiring more employees and then opening up another store.

10. What is the best part about owning your own business?

The satisfaction of knowing my business is a product of the time and effort I put into it.

11. What advice would you give others who are interested in starting their own business?

Find what you love to do and seek to make that into a business. Be patient and understand that success will not happen overnight.

Visit Marie in her store at:

Ebony Arts & Gifts
Chesapeake Square Mall
4200 Portsmouth Blvd
Chesapeake, VA 23321
www.facebook.com/EbonyArtsGifts
(757) 405-3465
LEGISLATIVE UPDATE
Update from the General Assembly as of February 20, 2014

By Kate Baker, Director of Government Affairs, Retail Alliance
Mary Huffard Kegley, Director of Government Relations, Retail Merchants Association

Tuesday, February 11th marked the 35th day of the 2014 Virginia General Assembly Session in Richmond, Virginia. It also marked the “Crossover” deadline. Each house must complete work on its own legislation by that day.

At the time of publication, Virginia Retail Federation was monitoring 162 pieces of legislation which could potentially impact your retail business.

Many of these have been taken care of through the process to date. Many others will be handled in the second half of the Session and updates can be received through our email newsletters and Virginia Retail Federation Facebook page.

Increase of the Felony Threshold for Larceny
Bills were introduced in the House and Senate to increase the threshold for felony larceny from $200 to $500.
The House bill was defeated in sub-committee by a voice vote.
The Senate bill was carried over for the year so it will be an issue for the 2015 General Assembly Session.

Patent Reform
House Bill 375 and Senate Bill 150 address the assertions made in bad faith by patent companies who allege that businesses are using their patented programs, such as ATM machines and scanning/faxing documents, without paying fees.
Both bills have passed their houses and will be transferred to the opposite house for consideration.

Consumer Tax on Plastic and Paper Bags
Two bills were introduced to enact a five percent consumer tax on all plastic and paper bags.
The House bill was defeated in sub-committee by a voice vote.
The Senate bill was defeated in full committee.
The VRF team is actively representing retailers to oppose these bills. In addition to the regulatory and administrative burden this tax would place upon the retailers, the VRF supports and encourages recycling opportunities.

Workers Compensation Regulation
HB 946 was introduced at the request of the business community to develop a fee schedule for medical care services under the Workers Compensation Act.
Many businesses report exorbitant fees, which increase the business premiums.
The committee carried this over for the year so it will be an issue for the 2015 General Assembly Session.
School Calendar Bills
Several school calendar bills were introduced in the house with regard to this issue.
Most requested for localities to have the option to begin school prior to the Labor Day Weekend.
Three bills have been referred to the floor of the House.
All three have the same common goal, giving localities control of school setting the school start date, however, they have different ways of reaching this goal.
A study was conducted by the University of Minnesota and has been a valuable tool in our efforts to fight this legislation. The study shows the negative economic impact, to the tourism and retail industries, of opening schools prior to Labor Day.
The VRF continues to maintain its opposition to these bills because of their impact on our members.

Minimum Wage Increase
Two bills were introduced in the House and one was introduced in the Senate.
Both SB590 and HB536 increased the minimum wage from $7.25 to $8.25 in July 2014 and $9.25 in July 2015.
HB32 increased the minimum wage from $7.25 to $8.50 in July 2014.
All three of these bills were defeated in the House.

Sales Tax Holiday
HB960 addresses the August Sales Tax Holiday.
The final form of the bill reduces the allowance for both clothing and shoes from $100 to $65 in order to add computers at $500 or less.
The VRF opposed HB960 because we felt it eroded the original intent of the Sales Tax Holiday for consumers and retailers. The bill was defeated in the Senate Finance Committee.

“Safe Days” Legislation
Legislation was introduced which would require private employers to allow an employee safe days, with pay, if the employee is a victim of domestic violence or sexual assault.
The VRF opposed this legislation because it mandated paid time off which could have a negative impact on our members.
This bill was defeated in House sub-committee.

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This bill was defeated in House sub-committee.

If you have any questions regarding any pieces of legislation mentioned above or any other questions regarding advocacy efforts, please contact our VRF team members:
Kate Baker
kbaker@virginiaretailfederation.com
(757) 406-9424
Mary-Huffard Kegley
mhkegley@virginiaretailfederation.com
(804) 662-5505
ARE YOU GETTING RIPPED OFF WITH COUNTERFEIT BILLS?

We kicked off our first Loss Prevention Task Force meeting for 2014 on January 28th.

Our speaker, Katie Dougherty, with the US Department of Justice, spoke to the group about counterfeit currency.

First off, did you know that counterfeiting is one of the oldest crimes in the USA? In 1790, Congress passed the Federal Counterfeiting law into place in order to help maintain the value of US currency.

Uttery, defined as; “to use or pass off fake bills”, must be similar to the real deal that has the potential to fool someone into thinking that it is real. Typically the counterfeiter spends the fake bills at a retail store, the store then sends all of the cash to the bank who then scans the bills in order to verify their authenticity.

If the bank determines that it’s counterfeit they then contact the Secret Service. Unfortunately at this point the retailer is out of luck of getting their money back. Katie reviewed with the Task Force a couple of best practices to help offset counterfeit losses:

• Know your money; watermarks, threads, numbers, presidents, etc. Just recently (May 2013) the government made pretty dramatic changes to the US currency.
• Contact the Secret Service for training your staff on how to detect counterfeit bills.
• Check out the Secret Service website, you will find a wealth of information on counterfeiting.

If you receive counterfeit currency, don’t give it back; get the description of the individual, license plates, type of car, etc. Make a note in the borders of the bill the initials of the individual who collected the currency, date and time then limit the handling of bill and seal it in a plastic sleeve.

• Only surrender the currency to an official police officer or secret service agent.
• Detection pens work on a limited basis, the Validator is more effective when scanning real or fake bills (Retail Alliance has validators available to members).
• Educate your staff!

The Loss Prevention Task Force meets every 4th Tuesday of the month at noon from January to October. Attendance is free to Retail Alliance members, lunch is included. Exposure to speakers with various loss prevention expertise while networking with law enforcement and other retailers is a good way to find out LP trends and happenings!

Contact Beth Parsons at (757) 455-9393 or eparsons@retailalliance.com for more information. 
UPCOMING EVENTS
To register for all events visit retailalliance.com/events

Save the Date! Retailer of the Year is on May 22

Retail 2 Retail Networking Mixers

Tuesday, March 11, 2014
6:00 PM - 8:00 PM
Hi-Ho Silver (moved to new location!)
The Settlers Market, 4640 Casey Blvd, Unit 130, Williamsburg, VA 23188

Tuesday, April 8, 2014
6:00 PM - 8:00 PM
The Creative Wedge & Artisan Market
630 Hilltop West Shopping Ctr
Virginia Beach, VA 23451

New Member Munchies

Held quarterly for new and existing members to get the most out of their Retail Alliance membership.

Wednesday, April 2, 2014
11:30 AM - 1:00 PM
Retail Alliance
838 Granby St
Norfolk, VA 23510

Loss Prevention Task Force

Occurs every Fourth Tuesday
11:45 AM - 1:00 PM including lunch

March 25, 2014
April 22, 2014

We host a different speaker each month on topics such as counterfeiting, disaster preparedness, security, gang awareness, vendor theft, store layout, and so on.

Retail Alliance
838 Granby St
Norfolk, VA 23510

The Retail Breakfast Club

Thursday, March 27, 2014
7:30 AM - 9:30 AM
Holiday Inn Virginia Beach - Norfolk
5655 Greenwich Rd
Virginia Beach, VA 23462

Thursday, April 24, 2014
7:30 AM - 9:30 AM
Courtyard Marriott
530 St Johns Rd
Newport News, VA 23602

Save the Date! Retailer of the Year is on May 22
MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

Now celebrating their fourth year in business, Bead Retreat provides custom handmade jewelry from their Newport News store, as well as materials and tools for customers to design their own.

They offer repair services, beading parties, and classes. We asked owner Larisa Jachmann a few questions about herself and her business...

1. Why did you decide to start your own business?
   It was the right opportunity and the right time!

2. What was your biggest challenge when starting the business?
   Trying to predict trends and market demands.

3. What do you wish you knew then that you know now?
   How unpredictable the sales market can be.

4. What are your current challenges and how do you overcome these challenges?
   Balancing the inventory budget with customer needs.

5. What do you think sets you apart from retailers that offer a similar product/service?
   We offer classes and parties which have been very popular. Our first class was on Saturday January 18th and Sunday January 19th. Because of the great response, we had to open a second section of the class.

   The class is a Peyote Stitch Seed Bead class and participants will be using seed beads to stitch a design around a Sea Glass Pendant or Earring Set.

   We are planning to offer classes periodically throughout the year, eventually working towards one class every month. We would like to offer classes on a variety of skills and designs to always bring something new and interesting to our customers.

   Bead Retreat Boutique also offers Private Parties for any occasion! We have already held several birthday parties, which have been a great success! A beading party is a great option for birthday parties, Girls Night Out, Showers, etc.

   We hosted our first “My re-TREAT Day” on January 26! This is a kind of play on words with our boutique and taking the time to TREAT yourself, as we all should!
We opened from 1:00PM—5:00PM on that Sunday (we aren’t normally open on Sundays), and partnered with MICHE Handbags, VA’s Finest Chocolate, Beverly’s Scarves and Such, and It Works! Body Wraps.

We had a wonderful day of socializing with our great customers! In fact, each of our guest vendors are valued customers of Bead Retreat Boutique!

6. Are you involved with the community? What initiatives or organizations do you get involved with or support?

Bead Retreat Boutique is proud to support “Gowns for Hounds” as the Official Drop off Location for the Peninsula.

Gowns for Hounds is a charity organization that collects and sells donated evening gowns at affordable prices. All proceeds go back to the community to make sure that every pet receives proper care, regardless of the owner’s ability to pay. We have also been honored to provide the jewelry for the Fashion Shows put on by the organization.

Another organization close to our hearts is The Multiple Aneurysm Awareness Foundation (T.M.A.A.F).

Recently founded by our friend Kristen, who suffers from multiple aneurysms, T.M.A.A.F. strives to provide support and education to individuals affected by aneurysms of any kind.

We have donated “Hope Ribbon Charms” to her organization to be used in the charm that she presents to Donators. We are currently holding a raffle in support of her upcoming February event, “Give a BOOT to Aneurysms” at Toby Keith’s I Love This Bar.

Year-round, we are pleased to donate five percent of all Pink Readymade Jewelry Sales to Susan G. Komen Fund for the Cure!

7. What are your future goals for the business?

To increase our customer base and ready-made jewelry sales.

8. What is the best part about owning your own business?

Getting to know all the wonderful and talented people I come into contact with!

9. What advice would you give to others who are interested in starting their own business?

However much money you think you need, double it!

Visit their store located in the shoppes at Port Warwick:

Bead Retreat
1105 William Styron Sq Newport News, VA 23606
(757) 597-2323
http://www.beadretreatboutique.com
2014 SURVEY SHOWS HUGE BENEFIT FROM "BUY LOCAL" EFFORTS

Author: Stacy Mitchell, senior researcher, Institute for Local Self-Reliance. Published with permission from ILSR

A national survey of independent business owners conducted by the Institute for Local Self-Reliance in partnership with the Advocates for Independent Business coalition has found that Local First initiatives are boosting customer traffic and improving the outlook on Main Street, but policymakers need to do more to create a level playing field and ensure that small local businesses have an equal opportunity to compete.

2,602 independent businesses from all 50 U.S. states participated in this year’s survey. Among the key findings:

Sales Growth — Independent businesses reported revenue growth of 5.3 percent on average in 2013. The retailers surveyed experienced a 1.4 percent increase in same-store holiday sales, comparable to many competing chains.

Buy Local — Over 75 percent of businesses located in cities with active Local First campaigns reported increased customer traffic or other benefits from these initiatives. They also reported sales growth of 7.0 percent on average in 2013, compared to 2.3 percent for independent businesses in places without such an initiative.

Challenges — Competition from large Internet companies was rated as the biggest challenge facing independent businesses, followed by supplier pricing that favors their big competitors, high costs for health insurance, and escalating commercial rents.

Policy Priorities — Among independent retailers, the top policy priorities are extending the requirement to collect sales tax to large online retailers, eliminating public subsidies and tax breaks for big companies, and regulating the swipe fees that Visa and Mastercard charge.

Internet Sales Tax — More than three-quarters of independent retailers said that the fact that many online companies are not required to collect sales tax had negatively impacted their sales, with 41 percent describing the level of impact on their sales as “significant.”

Access to Credit — Of those businesses that applied for a bank loan in the last two years, 42 percent either failed to obtain a loan or received a loan for less than the amount they needed.

“This comprehensive survey makes clear the unparalleled role that local businesses play in the health and vitality of communities,” said

Do Buy Independent / Buy Local Campaigns Make a Difference?

Year-to-year sales increases among independent businesses

- Communities with campaigns run by Independent Business Alliance® / Local First Networks
- No Independent Business Alliance / Local First Network

Data: Institute for Local Self-Reliance
Graph source file: amba.net/buy-local-campaigns

Do buy local initiatives work?

What people are retail top priorities
Oren Teicher, CEO of the American Booksellers Association and Co-Chair of Advocates for Independent Business. “And it highlights, too, the challenges that these businesses are facing regarding equitable governmental policy and a level competitive playing field. However, the widespread acceptance of the localism movement — which shows the potential of small business advocacy — is a clear sign for optimism.”

“American consumers are realizing more and more every day that supporting locally owned businesses is good for local economies and local communities,” said Bill Brunelle, co-founder of Independent We Stand.

“This data confirms what we experience assisting communities with ‘buy local and independent’ campaigns — they are raising consciousness and driving more business to local independents,” said Jeff Milchen, co-director of the American Independent Business Alliance. “The data is inspiring and suggests the future will be bright for America’s entrepreneurs once we change policies that handicap independent businesses.”

“Our dealers are continuing to see evidence of the buy local message influencing attitudes, new customer acquisition and most importantly buying habits,” commented Michael Morris, Vice President of Marketing for TriMega, an association of office supply resellers.

“This study shows us that once again, businesses located in communities that have Localist campaigns are doing better than those in communities without. But it also makes it clear that we need policies that level the playing field if we are to have the kind of success that results in more good jobs and more real prosperity for more people,” said Michelle Long, Executive Director of the Business Alliance for Local Living Economies.

Advocates for Independent Business (AIB) is a coalition of organizations that represent independent businesses. AIB’s members and partners in distributing this survey include the American Booksellers Association, American Independent Business Alliance, American Specialty Toy Retailing Association, Business Alliance for Local Living Economies, The Fabric Shop Network Inc., Independent Running Retailers Association, Independent We Stand, National Bicycle Dealers Association, Professional Association of Innkeepers International, Record Store Day, Soccer Dealer Association, TriMega, and dozens of local business groups. ILSR helped found AIB.
1. When was your business established?

January 21, 2013.

2. Describe your business and the products/services you provide.

The Point is a Farm to Table Gastro Pub. All of the food at The Point is made from scratch using food from local Farmers and Seafood suppliers. The Menu at The Point changes seasonally so as to maintain our FRESH concept. A drink menu also following our fresh concept is delicious and served by Professional Bartenders.....Great Food, Service and amazing atmosphere is what sets us apart.

3. How many locations do you have? Where are you located?

Currently we have one location located at 30 E. Mellen Street in Phoebus, a historic district of Hampton.

4. Have you always worked in the Retail Industry? If not, what did you previously do?

Josh and I have had an array of business experiences through our lives. One of the avenues has been the hospitality business which we have been in for many years. The Point is our first venture on our own.

5. Why did you decide to start your own business? How long of a process was it?

Josh and I were tired of making other restaurant/bar owners successful so we decided to venture out on our own!!! We immediately knew who we wanted to join us in our quest and began calling in our group of incredible staff members.....we started doing renovations on our building in January 2013 and opened August 10, 2013. All of the renovations on The Point were completed by myself, Josh and our staff family!!!!

6. What was your biggest challenge when starting the business? Why?

Our biggest challenge in starting our business was funding. Because we came from the restaurant business we had a bit of an issue with financial institutions believing in us. Our family and friends stepped in and invested in The Point, and we are grateful for that. We knew our concept of Fresh Farm to Table would be a success and our demograhic of a 30 and up crowd would support that, and they have.
7. **What do you wish you knew then, that you know now?**

We wish we knew the amount of cash outlay it takes monthly to get a successful restaurant off the ground and running for the first 2 years.

8. **What has been your greatest success as a retailer? What do you attribute that to?**

Our greatest success is our consistent fresh made from scratch food preparation. We will not compromise that in any way. Many people say it is cheaper to use frozen, however, The Point will never deviate from our Fresh philosophy.

9. **What is the best part about owning your own business? What changes has it brought to your life?**

The best part of owning our own business is being able to help build our community and make adjustments to our business whenever we want. The changes to our lives is that we are busy every day with restaurant business but we would not have it any other way.....this will get even busier when we open the next venture. This is a very good thing.

10. **As a retailer, what are some of the challenges that you have faced? Which were the easiest to overcome, which are you still working on?**

The main challenge we faced was mainly funding, a restaurant is hard to convince banks you will be successful, everything else was pretty easy. We are still working on getting a walk in cooler, at that time we can buy our produce etc in bulk from the farmers and then open for brunch!

11. **What should others know about starting a retail business? What advice can you give?**

Have your funding together to support you for one year before you open the doors. ♦

**Check out their restaurant at:**

30 E. Mellen Street Hampton VA 23663
thepointatphoebus.com
(757) 224-9299
thepointatphoebus@yahoo.com
We held our inaugural Retail Breakfast Club at the Holiday Inn Virginia Beach-Norfolk on a day most people would remember, the morning after the first snow storm hit Hampton Roads, January 23!

Attendance was higher than we expected as many people braved the snow and icy roads to enjoy the full breakfast and great speaker.

The Glen Boswick Orchestra musicians greeted everyone with their wonderful live sounds and entertained while attendees drank their Mimosa or Bloody Mary and talked to exhibitors. Feedback from the exhibitors was very positive. One comment was, “I was very pleased with display space and the availability to talk to members.”

In lieu of charging attendees, we asked people to bring a canned good or small donation to support the Foodbank of Southeastern Virginia and the Eastern Shore. Corporate Outreach Manager, Debbie Mergi, was there to collect donations and talk about their upcoming events.

A full buffet breakfast was provided for all attendees and while they munched on bacon and eggs, french toast, and fresh fruit or cereal, our speaker, Harold Lloyd, spoke with great enthusiasm and charisma on the topic, “Am I The Leader I Need To Be?”.

The presentation was engaging, practical and educational. Feedback was amazing for both Harold and the overall event.

We have some great speakers lined up for the rest of the year and hope you can join us.

This is what attendees of the January function had to say...

“I had a wonderful time at the event and look forward to future ones.”

“Great start for the Breakfast Club, that really filled me up this morning!”

“Great concept and very well executed!”

“I LOVE the fresh approach to Retail Alliance events this year. This event alone gave us the value of our membership dues for the year and the rest of the year is a bonus!”

“What a great way to kick off the Breakfast Club meetings. I am so glad I was able to attend this morning, it was time well spent. Good job!”

“Overall, the combination of good company, good food and a great presentation made for an amazing experience. I’m looking forward to the next event.”

“Well planned, well executed, loved it and learned a great deal.”

“Well worth the time & the meal is very good as well.”

Harold has kindly donated a box of his books to us to sell for $15. All proceeds go directly to the Foodbank of Southeastern Virginia and the Eastern Shore. Contact Kylie Ross Sibert at (757) 455-9323 or email ksbibert@retailalliance.com
Danielle Elizabeth Aaronson is a Leadership Development Partner at Luck Companies, an organization committed to igniting human potential through Values Based Leadership.

VBL is a philosophy and model that encourages employees to live, work, and lead in alignment with their personal core values, principles, beliefs, and purpose to in turn, ignite the extraordinary potential of those around them.

Aaronson graduated from the University of Pittsburgh in 2009 with a Leadership and Psychology degree. She began teaching leadership at a boarding school directly after college and two years later moved to Richmond, VA to provide outreach and engagement opportunities to young professionals in the city through a National Non-Profit.

Her passion for developing people and representing positive change drove her to seek a career at a company that cares deeply about their people and challenges them to exceed expectations in creative and healthy ways. Aaronson joined the Luck Companies team in 2012.

Aaronson currently blogs at valuesbasedleader.com and can be followed on twitter at @DEAaronson.

James is senior editor of RetailCustomerExperience.com. He has written about business technology for nearly 20 years, in publications ranging from USA Today to regional newspapers and magazines.

RetailCustomerExperience.com is a Web portal devoted to helping retailers differentiate on experience, rather than on price.

It is founded on the understanding that retail today is fundamentally different than any other time in its history, and staying competitive requires a new, holistic understanding of customers and how they want to shop.
PHOTOS FROM THE JANUARY RETAIL BREAKFAST CLUB
Since 2008, Retail Alliance has conducted the Retailer of the Year event for area retailers. Potential winners are nominated by consumers and fellow retailers (they can even nominate themselves). Being nominated is the first step in the award process.

The next step is for the nominated retailer to complete a very short questionnaire regarding their qualifications for the selection process. This information is reviewed by an impartial panel consisting of the Retail Alliance Board Membership Committee serving as this year’s Retailer of the Year selection committee.

The purpose of the information is to determine that they are a healthy, viable operation and must be a business from which others can learn. The owners should have a passion for their community and a penchant for customer service.

Every nominee who completes this process will be honored at the Retail Alliance Retailer of the Year event, themed “Raise Your Glass”, to be held at the historic Wells Theatre in Norfolk on Thursday evening, May 22nd.

The evening is an enjoyable mix of delicious food, entertainment, music, and networking. Members can enjoy dressing to the nines for this gala celebration in a theater that has been painstakingly restored to its original splendor in the tradition of the great theaters of the day. Its beauty is the perfect showcase to gather and celebrate the retail community.

This event could not be held without the generosity of sponsors. Sponsorship enables us to keep entries free of charge to all nominees. Sponsorship also covers the cost of the whole event from venue hire, videography and audio/visual, to decorations, winners trophies and food. Moreover, sponsorship contributes to the overall prize package, along with other contributions from area media companies and retailers.

Contact Kristin Lindsey if you are interested. Ph: (757) 455-9324 or email klindsey@retailallliance.com.
SPONSORSHIP LEVELS

THE CRISTAL SPONSORSHIP $5,000 (EXCLUSIVE)

- Company name or logo on the marquee outside the venue
- Company logo on "Raise Your Glass" posters outside the venue
- Company logo and link as the Cristal Sponsor on Retail Alliance website homepage/event page
- Company logo and link mentioned four times on the Retail Alliance Facebook page
- Company logo as Cristal Sponsor on marketing materials including event invitation, articles, and weekly e-newsletters with distribution to over 2,000 permission-based emails
- Company mentioned as Cristal Sponsor in event press release
- Full page advertisement on the back cover of the event program
- Ten (10) tickets to Retailer of the Year with reserved seats
- Introduction as the Cristal Sponsor with a speaking role by a company representative
- Company logo as the Cristal Sponsor on event signage
- Two (2) quarter page advertisements in future Retail Angles print newsletters
- Company logo as the Cristal Sponsor in Retail Alliance event ads in outside media, Retail Angles acknowledgements and articles and the Special Edition: ROTY issue post event
- Company mentioned as the Cristal Sponsor post-event press release

THE DOM PERIGNON SPONSOR $2,000 (TWO AVAILABLE)

- Company logo on the Retail Alliance website event page
- Company mentioned twice on the Retail Alliance Facebook Page
- Company logo in Retail Angles, weekly e-newsletters with distribution to over 2,000 permission-based emails
- Half page advertisement in the event program
- Eight (8) tickets to the Retailer of the Year 2014 and reserved seats
- Company logo on event signage
- One (1) quarter page advertisement in future Retail Angles
- Company logo on post event marketing

THE POMMERY SPONSOR $1,000 (FOUR AVAILABLE)

- Company logo on the Retail Alliance website event page
- Company mentioned one time on the Retail Alliance Facebook Page
- Company mentioned in Retail Angles, weekly e-newsletters with distribution to over 2,000 permission-based emails
- Half page advertisement in the event program
- Six (6) tickets to the Retailer of the Year 2014 and reserved seats
- Company logo on event signage
- One (1) quarter page advertisement in future Retail Angles

THE VEUVE CLICQUOT SPONSOR $500 (MULTIPLE)

- Company logo on the Retail Alliance website event page
- Company mentioned in Retail Angles, weekly e-newsletters with distribution to over 2,000 permission-based emails
- Quarter page advertisement in the event program
- Four (4) tickets to Retailer of the Year 2014
- Company logo on event signage

THE MOET SPONSOR $300 (MULTIPLE)

- Company logo on the Retail Alliance website event page
- Company mentioned in Retail Angles, weekly e-newsletters with distribution to over 2,000 permission-based emails
- Company logo in the event program
- Four (4) tickets to Retailer of the Year 2014
- Company logo on event signage

LEADERSHIP CIRCLE SPONSORSHIP $100 (MULTIPLE)

- Individual’s name printed in the program
Buying an existing business and inheriting its practices, both good and bad, has its challenges. We discuss these, and other things, with Groomingdale’s owner, Chrystal Ward.

1. When was your business established?
   Groomingdale’s was established in the Ghent area over 20 years ago.

2. Describe your business and the products/services you provide.
   Groomingdale’s is a full service salon that specializes in all breed bathing and styling. We also cater to pets who are rescued from questionable environments, young, anxious and fearful, older, have special needs or any other pet that may require special attention.

3. How many locations do you have? Where are you located?
   We have one location on W. 21st Street in Ghent, Norfolk.

4. How did you get into the pet service industry?
   I began working under the original owner of Groomingdale’s when we were located on Debree Avenue. My mother purchased the salon and I worked with her for 12 years. When she attained her master’s degree and decided to sell the salon, I purchased it from her. I have owned Groomingdale’s for four years.

5. Why did you decide to start your own business? How long of a process was it?
   When I purchased Groomingdale’s, the most difficult part was bringing an older, more traditional salon, into the new millennium. Groomingdale’s still operated with an index card filing system, where index cards containing the clients contact information and grooming history could easily be misfiled. We now utilize a computer based filing system. We also had a problem attracting new clientele. Groomingdale’s still advertised in the phonebook and by passing out flyers. We have updated our methods of advertising to more relevant methods such as the newspaper, local magazines, and social media sites. We also had some very old grooming practices, such as, all clientele must arrive early in the morning. This is not practical anymore and we now have appointments until 1:00pm.

6. Share with us one the biggests challenges you face. How are you dealing with it?
   My current challenge is to ensure the quality of our work remains consistent. During the busier times of year we hire seasonal staff and they come with all levels of experience. We try to train everyone to be attentive groomers but not everyone will be great in this field of work. It takes a great deal of patience and knowledge of animal behavior.
7. What do you wish you knew then, that you know now?

One of the things I wish I knew then, that I know now, is don’t be gullible. I bought into so many advertisers, new products, charities, etc until I was left with nothing and none of those reps were available to tell me why the campaigns, and products, etc did not promote my salon. Instead of trusting in a rep who comes into or calls the salon, I tell them to email me the proposition and I ask around to other business owner or research online. This way I am making a more informed decision.

Another thing I learned, do not be afraid to let the staff know what you need them to do. I was too shy at first and had a problem letting people know the tasks that needed to be completed and by when for the salon to be successful. Most of the time, staff looks to an owner or a manager to help them and to guide them in what needs to be completed. If a staff does not know your expectations, they will not fulfill them. Strong communication is key.

8. What has been your greatest success as a retailer? What do you attribute that to?

Our greatest success as a retailer is to offer the lower cost leashes and collars over the more expensive or “posh” items. Specialty items are always popular at first, but the majority of pet owners quickly become aware that most pets do not value their items the same way and will destroy them pretty quickly. The lower cost leashes or leashes with a replacement guarantee are more successful sales for the average, playful pet.

9. What are your future goals for the business?

Our future goals for the salon are to save enough to replace all of our equipment. With an older salon, we have maintained a great deal of older items. There is now equipment that makes grooming so much easier when used in a commercial setting. But these things are extremely expensive. We also would like to add more retail to our salon. We currently work with one wholesaler and would love to branch out and offer more.

10. What is the best part about owning your own business?

The best part about owning my own business is the scheduling flexibility. I have a one year old son and if he needs me, I am grateful that I can be there for him.

11. What should others know about starting a retail business? What advice can you give?

The advice that I would offer to anyone starting up their own retail business, or any other business, is to expect to put in your own hours. When establishing a new business, you may endure slow periods and you will spend the majority of your business earnings on payroll, withholding taxes and unemployment tax. I work more 10 hour days than I have days of leisure. And this is to ensure a profit in a shifting economy.

Check out their space at:
Groomingdale’s
222 W. 21st St, Ste G
Norfolk, VA 23517
(757) 627-1162
groomingdalesghent.com
Our Mission
To be a trusted resource for the success of local retailers.