

NEWS RELEASE



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Minnesota Grocers Association Recognize 2026 Award Winners and Hall of Fame Inductee

St. Paul, MN – July 28, 2026 - The Minnesota Grocers Association (MGA) has a long-standing tradition of honoring the best of the best by annually presenting awards to those in the industry who demonstrate excellence, have made significant contributions, and are highly respected by their peers. This year's award winners are a testament to the vitality of the grocery industry in Minnesota. The awards were presented on July 26, 2026, at the association's annual conference in Brainerd, MN. This is the state's premier event showcasing the accomplishments of those in the Minnesota food industry.

2026 Outstanding Grocer Award: Mike Oase, Kowalski's Companies, Inc.

2026 Outstanding Vendor Award: Pat Miller, Russ Davis Wholesale

2026 Hall of Fame Inductee: Mike Miller, Miller's Market

The MGA is proud to name Mike Oase, Chief Operating Officer of Kowalski's Markets, as the recipient of the 2026 Outstanding Grocer Award, recognizing his 40 years of leadership, service, and dedication to Minnesota's grocery industry. Oase joined Kowalski's in 1993 and has served in a variety of leadership roles before becoming Chief Operating Officer in 2017. During his tenure, he has helped guide the company's growth while fostering a culture focused on employees, customers, and community.

In addition to his leadership at Kowalski's, Oase has been an active supporter of the Minnesota Grocers Association and numerous community and industry organizations. He has championed initiatives that support local nonprofits, food shelves, workforce development, and civic engagement, reflecting his belief that businesses have a responsibility to strengthen the communities they serve.

Respected for his humility and people-first leadership, Oase credits his success to the mentors, colleagues, and team members who have supported him throughout his career. The Outstanding Grocer Award recognizes his lasting contributions to the grocery industry and his positive impact across Minnesota.

The MGA is proud to name Pat Miller of Russ Davis Wholesale as the recipient of the 2026 Vendor of the Year Award, recognizing his more than two decades of outstanding service, industry leadership, and commitment to building strong retail partnerships. After beginning his career in family-owned grocery stores and spending more than 10 years as a produce manager, Miller joined Russ Davis Wholesale in 2003, where he has become a trusted partner to retailers across the Midwest.

Known for his integrity, customer-first approach, and deep understanding of the grocery business, Miller has helped strengthen relationships between retailers and suppliers while contributing to the continued success of Russ Davis Wholesale. He has also dedicated his time to numerous community organizations and charitable initiatives, reflecting his commitment to serving others both inside and outside the industry.

Respected by customers, colleagues, and peers alike, Miller is recognized for his humility, professionalism, and unwavering support of those around him. The Minnesota Grocers Association's Vendor of the Year Award honors his lasting contributions to the grocery industry and the positive impact he has made on retailers, communities, and the people he serves.

The MGA is honored to induct Mike Miller into its Hall of Fame in recognition of his lifetime of leadership, service, and dedication to Minnesota's grocery industry. Miller began his grocery career as a teenager at Lanning's Red Owl in Plainview before purchasing his first grocery store in St. Charles at age 23. Over the next 40 years, he built a respected independent grocery business known for its commitment to its customers and the St. Charles, MN area, mentoring hundreds of young people who got their start in the workforce through his store.

Beyond his success as a grocer, Miller was a longtime leader within the Minnesota Grocers Association, serving 18 years on its Board of Directors after being named Grocer of the Year in 2005. He also devoted decades to civic service in St. Charles, supporting numerous community organizations, local development projects, and charitable initiatives. His leadership has been guided by a simple philosophy: to leave his community better than he found it.

Known for his humility, integrity, and dedication to serving others, Miller considers his greatest accomplishments to be his family, the employees he mentored, and the positive impact he made in his hometown. Today, his legacy continues through the family business, now operated by his son, Jon. The Minnesota Grocers Association Hall of Fame Award recognizes Miller's lasting contributions to the grocery industry, his unwavering commitment to community service, and the countless lives he has influenced throughout his career.

This year's award recipients exemplify the vital role local grocers and the broader food industry play in strengthening their communities. Their stories reflect a deep, multi-generational commitment to serving consumers, building meaningful careers, and supporting the neighborhoods they call home.

The Minnesota Grocers Association (MGA) is the only state trade association that represents the food industry of Minnesota from farm to fork. We are one of the oldest trade associations in the state, celebrating over 125 years of advancing industry. We have over 300 retail, manufacturing, and wholesale members supporting nearly 1,300 locations statewide. Our member companies employ over 150,000 union and non-union Minnesotans. We actively advance the common interest of all those engaged in any aspect of the retail food industry as a leader and advocate in government affairs.

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