

# NEWS RELEASE



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## **Grocers Recognize 2021 Award Winners, Hall of Fame Inductees**

St. Paul, MN – August 5, 2021 – 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 that 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 by MGA Board Chair, Doug Winsor, and MGA President, Jamie Pfuhl on August 1, 2021, at the association's annual conference in Brainerd, MN. This is the state's premier event showcasing the pride and tremendous accomplishments of those in the Minnesota food industry.

The 2021 Outstanding Grocer award was presented to Mike Stigers, CEO of Cub Foods. He began his nearly 50-year grocery career as a part-time courtesy clerk at the age of 16. He took on managerial positions of increasing responsibility up to CEO and COO of various retailers and vendors throughout the United States. Stigers joined SUPERVALU in 2011 as President of Shaw's/Star Market in New England. After it was purchased by UNFI in 2018, Stigers was named Executive Vice President of the company's Fresh Division in addition to being named CEO at Cub Foods – the position he holds today. Since 1968, Cub Foods has been a steady community partner, providing more than groceries to the communities they serve. The Stillwater, MN based company has a retail network of 71 supermarkets throughout Minnesota.

Stigers is an active member of the MGA and has served on its Board of Directors. His commitment to serving his team and the greater community is epitomized through his collaborative approach for the greater good. Stigers' leadership and passion exemplify what it means to be an outstanding grocer.

Dan Kueppers, General Manager of Great Lakes Coca-Cola in Eagan, MN, was honored by the MGA with its 2021 Outstanding Vendor award. This award is given to those who show innovation in customer support, excellence in customer service, as well as involvement in the MGA. Just like so many in this industry, Kueppers started his career at the age of 15 working at a beverage bottling plant in Burnsville on the grounds crew. He continued his advancement in the industry and has held his current position since 2017. Great Lakes Coca-Cola is a Business Unit of Reyes Holdings, one of the largest privately held companies in the country.

Kueppers' approach has always been to be steady, loyal, and strategic while putting his customer's needs in the forefront. He believes we all are partners and strives to set a path that ensures positive growth for all. He is a leader and mentor within the Great Lakes Coca-Cola team. Kueppers serves as the Chairman of the MGA Vendor Leadership Committee. This committee was formed in 1998 to advance the interests of the association's vendor partners through engagement and partnership opportunities. This demonstrates why he was honored with the 2021 Outstanding Vendor Award.

Jim and Mary Anne Kowalski, owners of Kowalski's Companies, Inc., were inducted into the Minnesota Grocers Association's Hall of Fame in recognition of their outstanding service and exemplary contributions to Minnesota's food industry. Jim and Mary Anne Kowalski purchased the Red Owl grocery store on St. Paul's Grand Avenue in 1983. Since the first market opened, the Kowalski's have been driven to give their customers a place where they truly love to shop. Today, there are eleven Kowalski's locations in the Twin Cities.

Kowalski's is committed to the common good of their business, its stakeholders, and the neighborhoods they serve with community-oriented and charitable partnerships. The company gives to causes important to those who shop the markets through their Groceries for Good Causes program. Both Jim and Mary Anne have served on the MGA Board of Directors and Executive Committee. They were named MGA Grocer of the Year in 1990.

As an institution, the Kowalski's realized they had a larger obligation to the greater world than merely being a good business partner and employer. The company's civic governing standards are something much bigger and broader than selling groceries. It puts more of a transcendent purpose to people's daily work, which translates to great service not only to themselves, but to their customers and the community. The Kowalski's outstanding leadership, industry service, and vision made this induction to the MGA Hall of Fame a well-deserved acknowledgement.

Additionally, this year's award presentation celebrated our industry heroes, showcasing the outstanding essential workers who were responsible for ensuring there was food on our tables during the COVID-19 pandemic. This celebration was concluded by remarks of appreciation from Governor Tim Walz.

*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 120 years of advancing industry. We have over 300 retail, manufacture, 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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