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MUNICIPAL LIQUOR STORE

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On the Cover

After decades of service to the Minnesota municipal beverage industry, Bob Leslie is retiring.

Over the years Bob served as liquor manager for the cities of Brandon and Pelican Rapids, was an MMBA board member and officer and a respected alcohol awareness class trainer.

Pictured on the cover is Bob and wife Mona Marie.

See page 5 for more Bob tidbits.

Thank you for all of your service!!!!

(PS: Gary Buysse will take over as MMBA Trainer. He can be reached at: garybuysse1@gmail.com)



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MMBA PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

**By Chris Arnold,
Bagley**

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is a hot topic in the business world.

You may be asking what the future holds for AI use in bars and liquor stores.

Well, I decided to ask AI about AI.

Here is what came up in ChatGPT when I asked, "In a casual style how can AI help bars and liquor stores succeed":

AI can be a game-changer for bars and liquor stores, helping them boost business in ways that feel both innovative and practical. Here's how:

1. Personalized Recommendations: *Imagine AI-powered systems that get to know customers' preferences over time. For a liquor store, this could mean suggesting new wines or spirits based on what someone has previously purchased. For bars, it could help bartenders suggest cocktails or drinks that align with a patron's tastes, making the experience more personal and engaging.*

2. Inventory Management: *AI can take the headache out of keeping track of stock. It can predict which products are likely to sell out based on trends, seasonal demand, or even local events, ensuring that popular items are always in stock while reducing overstock of less popular items.*

3. Targeted Marketing: *By analyzing customer data, AI can help bars and liquor stores create more effective marketing campaigns. Whether it's sending personalized promotions to regular customers or targeting ads to people who haven't visited in a while, AI ensures that marketing efforts are spot-on.*

4. Dynamic Pricing: *AI can optimize pricing based on various factors like time of day, demand, or even competitor pricing. For bars, this might mean offering happy hour deals at the perfect time to draw in more crowds, or adjusting prices on the fly for special events.*

5. Enhanced Customer Experience: *AI-powered chatbots can handle reservations, answer questions, or even suggest drink pairings, making the customer experience smoother and more enjoyable. It's like having a personal assistant that's always available.*

6. Trend Analysis: *AI can analyze broader market trends, helping bar and liquor store owners stay ahead of the curve by stocking the latest popular drinks or creating trendy cocktails that attract customers.*

In short, AI helps bars and liquor stores by making operations more efficient, enhancing customer experiences, and driving more sales — all while allowing owners to focus on what they do best: creating a great atmosphere and offering top-notch service.

Future success means thinking about the future ... NOW!

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BOB LESLIE TIDBITS



- Brandon Liquor manager
- Pelican Rapids Liquor manager
- MMBA board member and officer
- Highly respected alcohol awareness trainer
- At one point Bob was executive director Paul Kaspszak's boss and Paul was Bob's boss at the same time.
- Bob started his career, and taught Paul and others, using a perpetual inventory "book."
- When they were little kids, Bob and his brother used to run around the Columbia Heights newspaper office of former MMBA executive director Ed Kaspszak.
- Bob and Paul once took a 1,000 mile road trip visiting MMBA members.
- Bob introduced Paul to fried gizzards on the trip.
- Continues to be a professional golf tour marshal.
- Was very active in the West Central Food & Beverage Association
- Responds to people shouting Bob LAY-LEE!!!!!!
- Loves the Kansas City Chiefs and the Kansas Jayhawks

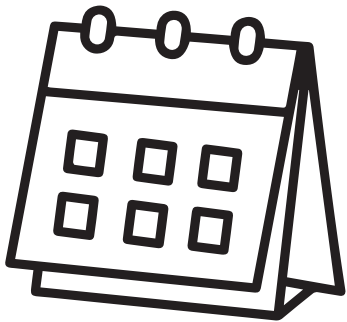
SAVE THE DATES!

2025 Legislative Day

February 10, 2025

2025 MMBA Annual Conference

April 26 – 29, 2025



WHY BAGLEY LIQUOR IS A TOP 100 RETAILER



By Krystina Skibo
Beverage Dynamics

Nestled into Bagley, MN, with a population of only 1,300 people, Bagley Liquor has managed to stand out in the small town. It also helps they moved to a new area in 2014. Chosen for its location on U.S. Hwy 2, the fresh space brings in a great deal more customers

"We went from eight parking spaces to over 30 parking spaces, along with two larger spots for pickups, trailers, campers and boat trailers," says liquor operations manager Christopher Arnold. "We also have a large LED display board on the front side of our lot, which gets roughly 3,000 to 5,000 views a day."

Arnold notes one of the more unique attributes of the new location is its multipurpose room. "It can be easily turned into our tasting room/classroom for educating our customers and staff," he says.

INTRODUCING THC-INFUSED BEVERAGES

Bagley Liquor's new store location boasts a large selection of wine, spirits, beer, mixers, cordials, liqueurs, tobacco and wine accessories. Recently, they added THC-infused beverages to their shelves, which has proven to be a profitable revenue stream. "It seems like every month the sales continue to increase," notes Arnold.

"We also just added edibles to our product selection, as well. In my opinion, it's almost like wine, where customers want to read about the different varieties and products."

Due to this category's popularity, Arnold says Bagley Liquor will continue to offer THC products. "Our margins are very good and it's bringing in a whole new customer base. We have shoppers coming in who aren't liquor drinkers, but they'll try the edibles and THC beverages," he explains.

Along with the store's prominent THC selection, Bagley Liquor is also known to have one of the "neatest bourbon selections north of the Mississippi," according to Arnold.

"Bourbon is a huge category in our store," he says. "We've seen some trends lately with people changing their buying habits due to the economy, but bourbon sales are not changing. We may not have the largest selection, but we have some of the nicest bourbons you can find."

STORE IMPROVEMENTS

One major improvement Arnold has done in the store is reset the cream liqueur section. "I went from a block layout to a ribbon layout, which seems to be improving sales," he says. "I feel customers who normally shop the beer coolers are used to looking at everything ribbon style, or vertical brand, as I call it."

To make it easier for the customer, Arnold decided to lay the liquor shelves out the same way and place the brands in a vertical sequence. He cites it has improved sales in the departments in which he tested the new layout and plans on converting the rest of the liquor and wine departments over to this ribbon style over the next few months.

"I also plan on expanding my summer tasting schedules," Arnold states. "We do very well with our wine classes and I'm going to expand it. I'm looking at doing high-end bourbon classes and possibly high-end tequila classes to improve these departments."

Arnold started these classes in the backroom at the old store. But now that the new Bagley Liquor location has a big multi-purpose room, there's additional space for more people.

"We're also looking at possibly doing some THC classes and teaching consumers about the different products out there," he says.

"Since Covid, we installed a TV for brand representatives to play slideshow presentations, but we have also done some Zoom meetings with winemakers."



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For more information, contact
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BEVERAGE DYNAMICS ANNOUNCES ITS 2024 TOP 100 RETAILERS

Beverage Dynamics is pleased to announce Bagley Liquor, Firehall Liquors (Barnesville), Brooklyn Center Liquor, Lakeville Liquor, Tall Grass Liquor (Marshall), Olivia Liquor, Rogers Wines & Spirits, and Boxcar Liquor (Tracy) are among the winners of its sixth-annual Top 100 Retailers Awards. These awards recognize off-premise retailers from throughout the U.S. who demonstrate innovation, excellent customer service and superior beverage alcohol industry knowledge.

Retailers may nominate themselves or be nominated by an industry member like a distributor, supplier or industry association. The nominees are judged by the *Beverage Dynamics* editorial team, and winners are chosen to represent a diverse cross-section of the off-premise industry. They are business operators who take pride in their store, care about their customers and employees and stay involved in the community and the industry at large.

All winners are featured in a special Top 100 issue of *Beverage Dynamics* magazine in July.

“We’re proud to name these successful retailers as winners of our prestigious award,” says *Beverage Dynamics* Vice President Jeremy Nedelka. “They join some of the best and brightest of the industry and deserve the recognition they’ve received.”

The awards were presented to winners at the seventh-annual Beverage Alcohol Retailers Conference, held on June 19 in Chicago. For historical information about Top 100 Retailers’ predecessor, the Retailers of the Year Awards, visit BeverageDynamics.com/top100.

About *Beverage Dynamics*

Beverage Dynamics is the largest and most respected national magazine dedicated to the needs of the off-premise beverage alcohol retailer, whether it’s the owner of a single liquor store, the general manager of a warehouse store or the buyer for a large supermarket or drug chain.



Chris Arnold
Bagley



Randi Trowbridge
Barnesville



Tom Agnes
Brooklyn Center



Tana Wold
Lakeville

BEVERAGE DYNAMICS ANNOUNCES ITS 2024 TOP 100 RETAILERS



Eric Luther
Marshall



Nanette Serbus
Olivia



Tom Agnes
Rogers



Tammara
Stimpert Schons
Tracy

MMBA MEMBERS SPEAK AT NATIONAL BEVERAGE ALCOHOL RETAILERS CONFERENCE



Tana Wold spoke about social media best practices




Tom Agnes spoke about store security



“NO FLAVORS. JUST
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-Tito



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TAKE A BREAK!

Work on this puzzle and learn/remind yourself on what MMBA is all about!

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H R X V T E N Y L U S A T M S
F M M R P A R R K Y L L E E R
Q K K H A S T E E X I S S R R
W L O H V G L L N A A I C C D
W N O S S R J A U C M G L E D
E N I Z A G A M N S E E J B M
S U R V E Y S V H O N L R P U
Z V X D I S C U S S I O N S Z
N O I T A M R O F N I G C F P
R E T T E L S W E N U M E U M
M E E T I N G S A J S P U R I

Conference	Consultations	Discussions
ECommerce	Emails	Family
Information	Legislation	Magazine
Meetings	Newsletter	Regionals
Surveys	Telephone	Twitter
Updates		

This puzzle is a word search puzzle that has a hidden message in it.

First find all the words in the list.

Words can go in any direction and share letters as well as cross over each other.

Once you find all the words. Copy the unused letters starting in the top left corner into the blanks to reveal the hidden message.



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CITY HALL WORKS TOGETHER WITH THE LIQUOR OPERATION



By Ross Olson
Sauk Rapids City Administrator

I've been with the City of Sauk Rapids since 2000. I started as the city's Community Development Director and one of seven department heads. One department though functioned much like an independent service.

Our Liquor Operations Department really didn't participate in our weekly department head meetings nor did the City Administrator or the City Council pay much attention to the day-to-day running of the store. I think the mentality was as long as the store makes money, everyone is happy.

I became the City Administrator in 2002 and made the decision to treat and interact with the Liquor Operations Department the same as I would the Police Department or the Public Works Department.

All of our departments provide a necessary service to the community and all deserve the respect and attention to make the service the best we can.

This new direction and attention brought with it a site visit and evaluation by the MMBA on how we could become more competitive in our market and how to best engage our leadership and staff at the store.

Sometimes change can be difficult for employees who have become very secure in their usual day-to-day operations.

Change brought about by the observation, expertise and recommendations from the MMBA can take an adequate or under producing service to a position that can offer a better service and more profit to the city.

This is what happened in my community. Today, even with harsh competition, the store is as profitable as it has ever been and the leadership, staff and elected officials work together on a regular basis.

To the City Clerks, Administrators and Elected Officials who see their Liquor Operations as a service that is different than services traditionally provided, change your attitude. Become more involved in the daily operations of your business. All of the community's services need to work together.

Sauk Rapids doesn't just provide Public Works, Police or Building Inspection services. We work together to provide efficient and successful community service.

Municipal Liquor Operations in Sauk Rapids is one "City" service we are proud to offer and strive to provide the same level of administrative support to our store and dedicated employees as we do for any other department.

If you want a successful store that will attract and retain quality and dedicated employees, you should do the same.

A graphic featuring a map of Minnesota with several ice manufacturer locations marked. The text "We've got you covered." is at the top. Below the map, the MIIMA logo is displayed, followed by the text "minnesota independent ice manufacturers association" and the website "m i m a - i c e . o r g".

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Ace Ice Minneapolis
Home City Ice Waterville
American Ice Eau Claire, WI

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a s s o c i a t i o n
m i m a - i c e . o r g



By Jason Berghorst
Rock County Star Herald

That was the message City Finance Director Tyler Reisch delivered to members of the Luverne City Council during their regular meeting July 9.

He told the council the Blue Mound Liquor store is on track to have a net income of around \$197,000 through the end of 2024.

"We're making better margins and have less expense," Reisch said.

According to data provided at the meeting, the liquor store had a yearly net operating loss of \$106.03 in 2021 and a loss of \$22,733.89 in 2022.

Reisch said money from the liquor store enterprise fund covered those losses and provided the budgeted \$45,000 transfers to the city's general operating fund each of those years.

"No property tax money was used to offset those losses, and the transfers were still made," he said.

A change in the management of the store occurred in 2023, with Dan Serie being hired as the new store manager.

In 2023 the store ended with a profit of \$36,781 for the year.

Reisch began his work as finance director in January 2024 and has been working with Serie on continuing improvements to store operations.

Policy changes summarized by Reisch include ending the delivery service and removing unnecessary discounts.

The city also paid a consulting firm \$10,570 to observe liquor store operations overall and offer advice on how to improve operations.

"One of the big things we wanted to do right away was bring in a consulting firm with a lot of retail experience, especially in the liquor store realm," Reisch said.

"They could point us in the right direction to make sure that the money we spend and the changes that are made get the liquor store turned around as quickly as possible."

Changes suggested by the consultants and adopted by store management include:

- overhauled the ordering and inventory process.
- analyzed selections and price points.
- developed a better store layout.
- revamped employee schedules.

According to Reisch, the purchase and installation of a new point of sale system has been one of the biggest improvements at the store.

"The old POS (point of sale) system was out of date and not meant for liquor store operations," Reisch told the council.

"The new one is for retail liquor stores and can better track our sales and margins."

The new system also made inventory easier and more accurate, streamlining the use of employee time and product management.

In addition to the new POS system, store management invested in deferred maintenance and other building improvements in 2024.

Those improvements include:

- a new rear garage door.
- a new camera and alarm system.
- a new office door.
- service and repair of walk-in cooler and compressor.

Reisch reported these projects have totaled \$38,655.57 so far this year.

"So far in 2024, our revenue is down 1.25 percent, but our purchasing of merchandise for resale is down 17.5 percent," Reisch said.

"We've spent much less money on the merchandise with the new ordering and stocking processes."

He said other expenses are up slightly, around \$8,000, which includes just under \$40,000 of the deferred maintenance.

"If you take those out, our expenses would have gone way down, too," Reisch said.

Overall, he said liquor store profits have increased 210 percent from June of 2023 to June 2024.

"At this point last year, we were in the hole \$52,754. This year we are making a profit of over \$58,000," Reisch said.

"Normally we make 47 percent of our revenues by the end of June, so you can extrapolate that out with where we are currently at this year to the entire year, and we are on track to have a net income of \$197,000 through the end of 2024," he said.

"All in all, all the changes we are doing at the liquor store in a short matter of time have really turned that place around.

We're really excited and hope we can continue moving forward with it."



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KASSON LIQUOR CONTINUES TO CHURN PROFIT FROM THC SALES



By Alex Malm
Dodge County Independent

One of the goals of having a municipal owned liquor store is to help drive revenue for the community, and thus, help to lower taxes, or help pay for projects that would otherwise go to the wayside.

Now, aside from just selling alcohol, some communities including Kasson, have opted to include the sale of THC products.

THC is the psychoactive ingredient contained in cannabis.

In December, Liquor Manager Cathy Pletta made the decision to begin selling both hemp-derived THC edibles and drinks, after seeing the success other municipal liquor operations were having.

The products became legal in 2022, following the passage of the state's Farm Bill, and then in 2023, legislators clarified the rules making it so the products would be limited to five milligrams of THC per serving and 50 milligrams per package.

To be in compliance with federal law, the products also need to contain 0.3% THC or less.

End of Prohibition

Pletta chalks up the new products sold in the store, as a new opportunity to increase revenue, by selling a product recently made legal.

"It's just like a new prohibition ended," Pletta said.

The success has been noticeable.

Pletta said since the store began selling the products, the store has seen a month over month increase on its profits with an average increase of 46% per month.

Pletta declined to provide specifics on how much of a profit has been made through THC sales.

Pletta said while not every municipal liquor store across Minnesota is selling THC products, she said the number is increasing.

"If they weren't initially they are gradually getting closer to it," Pletta said.

"There are some communities who have elected not to sell it. But... this is just like the end of prohibition all over again."

She said when prohibition ended there were likely communities who were "afraid" to go into alcohol sales.

She said the reality is, the money raised through the municipal sales helps to generate revenue without taxes.

"It's a nice new revenue stream," Pletta said.

"It's got a good margin on it and we're controlling the sale of the substance just like we control the sale of other substances."

Questions about how the funds have been used in recent years, were referred to City Administrator Tim Ibisch.

"Over the past couple of years profits from the Liquor Store have gone to resurfacing the tennis courts at Veteran's Park, the skate park in Lions Park, the City Welcome signs on Hwy 14, downtown beautification, supporting economic development efforts, and sponsorships of various parts of events like Festival in the Park," Ibisch wrote.

"As you can see, mostly it has gone to support the Parks system."

He said in the past decade, approximately \$350,000 has been allocated for various projects with \$250,000 kept in the fund balance for operations.

Pletta said currently the THC drinks sell better than edibles.

The best-selling product so far?

Blackberry Lemonade, made by the company Higher Vibes.

Meanwhile, not every city who is selling THC edibles and drinks at their stores, are seeing a lot of success.

According to West Concord City Administrator Paula Even Trendera, the store "sells drinks and gummies but hardly any."

Based on a conversation with the Liquor Store Manager, the city's Municipal Liquor Store sells maybe one to three a day, she said.

Not Only Business In Town

Unlike some other communities, Kasson has no local licensing mechanism in place for THC edibles, and instead, the only requirement is to register with the state's Office of Cannabis Management.

"The Kasson Store and Kasson Smoke Shop are licensed by the state and sell hemp-derived THC products.

Both Kwik Trip locations are licensed but are currently not selling products," Police Chief Josh Hanson wrote in an email.

Hanson thus far, said there haven't been any issues.

"We have done educational compliance checks and have not had any problems with the businesses selling THC products," Hanson said.

Beginning in 2025 businesses are expected to be granted cannabis dispensary licenses through the State.

Despite the success so far, from selling THC at the liquor store, the City Council wasn't in favor of expanding its operation, by selling joints.

"There are some cities I know who are looking into municipal dispensaries because [they] could be worth a lot of money," Pletta said.

"Our council chose not to pursue it and that's fine. It's their choice."

Municipal Pot Shop Off Table For Now

While hemp-derived THC edibles and drinks have seen high revenue numbers, the City Council, during a work session in March, opted against looking into a municipal dispensary, a concept other communities across the State are doing research on.

Some communities, similar to municipal liquor operations, are debating whether or not to apply for cannabis licenses when they become available in 2025.

Those licenses, unlike the current hemp-edible licenses, would allow businesses to sell flower, and other THC products.

"While State Statutes provide a possibility for Minnesota cities to open municipal cannabis sales facilities, more research is needed to determine the legal ramifications of such an operation," City Administrator Tim Ibisch wrote in an email.

"In addition, at this time, the Kasson City Council has chosen not pursue this option but rather it will take a measured approach to adopt ordinances with reasonable restrictions on the time, place, and manner of the operation of cannabis businesses."



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Dahlheimer Beverage

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