

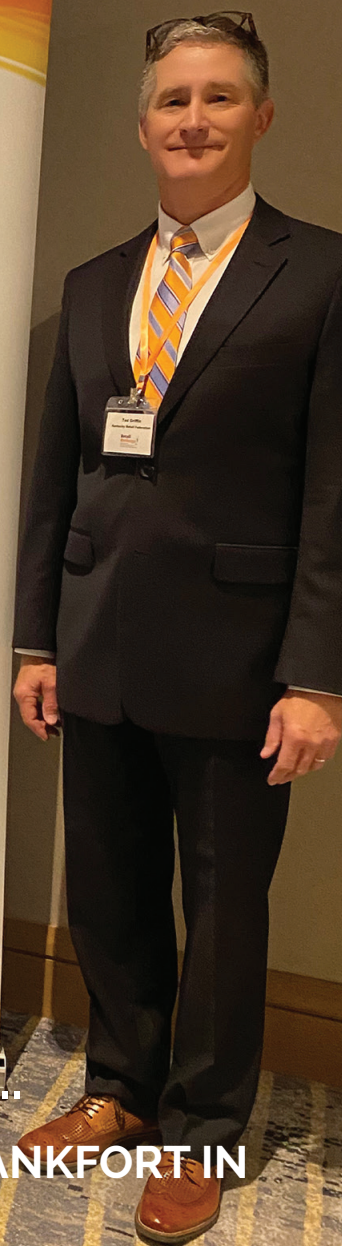


# THE KENTUCKY RETAILER

June 2023 • Volume 17 • Issue 1 • [www.kyretail.com](http://www.kyretail.com)

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# THE KENTUCKY RETAILER

June 2023, Volume 17, Issue 1

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The Kentucky Retail Federation is the "Voice of Retailing" throughout the Commonwealth, representing retailers of all types and sizes since 1939. From Main Street to the mall, retailers enhance Kentucky's communities and provide a better quality of life for Kentuckians everywhere. Kentucky's retail industry employs over 400 thousand Kentuckians and pays more than \$11.7 billion in wages annually. Retailers collect over \$2.8 billion in state sales tax and pay millions in other taxes to state and local governments.

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On the cover: Retail Minded's Nicole Leinbach (left) will once again be leading the 2023 Retail Recharge Conference in September. KRF's Cassie Grigsby and Tod Griffin look forward to seeing Kentucky's retailers once again in Lexington.

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# Kentucky Retail Federation continues to deliver for state's retailers



*Tod Griffin*  
KRF PRESIDENT

**I**t has already been a busy 2023 for the Kentucky Retail Federation, and the rest of the year will be more of the same.

Like most years, the early months were dominated by the state legislative session. Advocating for the state's retailers is one of the Federation's main activities, and this year was no different. The environment in Frankfort is ever evolving from session to session, and especially

day to day. With the constant influx of new legislators, the Federation's government affairs team has to educate them each year on the importance of retail to the state's economy.

This session, a great deal of time was spent working on data privacy legislation that would have become a burden for retailers to implement. This bill has been filed in previous sessions, and despite repeated meetings with the sponsor, the version that went to committee did not include concessions the retail industry had sought. But thanks to a coalition of like-minded businesses, of which the Federation played a big role in putting together, the legislation was eventually defeated.

Looking ahead, staff is busy preparing for its second Retail Recharge conference in September and putting together an exciting

lineup. One of the things staff has heard from members is they want the opportunity to gather and learn from each other on issues we are all facing, and Retail Recharge is the perfect opportunity to do just that.

One of those issues we are all facing is building a quality workforce now and in the future. With that in mind, the Kentucky Retail Institute has been establishing relationships and opportunities to showcase what careers retail can offer. This has been a long time coming and is very much needed for the retail community.

The Shop Our Town series is returning this year. The video vignettes featuring independent retailers in Kentucky's towns will be making stops in LaGrange, Harrodsburg, Prestonsburg and Pikeville this year. This is a favorite of staff and members alike as those local businesses that are the backbone of their communities get the chance to be in the spotlight and tell their story.

The Federation continues to offer a robust member service program that creates value for membership. Many members participate in KRF's group health insurance, workers' comp, shipping, or merchant processing program and see the cost savings that result for their businesses. Check it out for yourself and see how you might benefit.

All of this is just part of what the Federation does every day for its members. Working together, we can keep retail vibrant and strong today and beyond in the Commonwealth. ■

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## Stay connected to the Kentucky Retail Federation

Kentucky Retail Federation members will vouch for the valuable information that comes from staff to keep their businesses up-to-date with changes from Frankfort and other benefits that help them run successful businesses. If you are not getting emails from the Federation, please contact Steve McClain at [smcclain@kyretail.com](mailto:smcclain@kyretail.com) to make sure your email is on file.

502-875-1444  
[WWW.KYRETAIL.COM](http://WWW.KYRETAIL.COM)



# 'R' is for Retail, also for resilient

**G**reetings for 2023! It is hard to believe, but we are already speeding into the warmer days of summer. As we know in the retail business, we are always looking to our past to prepare for the future.

Retailers have always been known for their resiliency throughout history. No matter the circumstances, they have come out stronger and putting into practice the lessons they have learned from their past.

Our resilience has been sorely tested the last three years or so. It feels like there has been just an endless cycle of one thing after another that has had an impact on retail businesses – each one presenting its own set of challenges that has tested our resolve.

We can begin with the COVID-19 pandemic that started in March of 2020 that forced many of us to close our doors, then adjust to how we did business and interacted with our customers. We opened drive-thrus, offered curbside pickup, made deliveries, upped our social media and website game to reach customers and did what we had to do to survive.

Throughout the pandemic and after, supply chain issues often put the brakes on how fast retailers have been able to get back to normal. Those issues helped fuel rising inflation that has remained stubbornly above acceptable levels. That has led to consumers making adjustments on what they are purchasing and retailers have had to do the same to meet their customers where they are.

For the last few years when the Kentucky Retail Federation board has gathered and we open the discussion to what issues we are facing, there are usually two common themes. The top one is finding enough workers. It is not just getting enough workers that is the trouble. It is even getting people to show up for interviews. And even though many of us are often short-staffed,



**Alicia Dawson**  
McDowell Professional  
Pharmacy  
KRF Board Chair

we know we have to offer a level of service our customers have come to expect. We are all looking for solutions to this issue.

The second issue that is often discussed? Shoplifting and organized retail crime. People often think of shoplifting as a victimless crime, but we have all seen the videos of criminals looting businesses across the country. We know these are often organized efforts to steal items and resell them on the

internet. National efforts have been made to crackdown on these criminals, and in the meantime retailers have taken what steps they can to protect staff and merchandise. The Retail Federation is working with legislators and law enforcement to address this growing problem.

Then there has been the weather. Kentucky is no stranger to natural disasters from ice storms to blizzards to tornadoes and flooding. But the magnitude that has struck the state from west to east has been daunting. Tornadoes in western Kentucky. Flooding in eastern Kentucky. Hurricane force winds that damage buildings. The devastation has left our neighbors struggling and wondering how they are going to survive. Yet in Kentucky fashion, we all become neighbors lending a helping hand to one another, and retailers are leading the way in their local committees.

It has been a long three years. We have seen challenges not seen by retailers in many years; yet we have been resilient in finding new ways to overcome and provide our customers the products they need. As retailers have done throughout history, we have learned what works and what does not to be successful. And I know that we will continue to find new ways to persevere and leave lessons for those that come after us. ■

# MARK YOUR CALENDARS FOR 2023 Retail Recharge on September 19

**Retail  
Recharge**   
A Conference for  
Kentucky Retailers Presented  
by the Kentucky Retail Federation

By Steve McClain  
Kentucky Retail Federation

**W**e can all use a chance to recharge, personally and professionally.

The Kentucky Retail Federation will offer its members and retailers across Kentucky the chance to do just that when it hosts the 2023 Retail Recharge conference on Sept. 19 in Lexington. It will begin at 9 a.m. at the Marriott Lexington City Center.

“As soon as last year’s Retail Recharge ended, we had people asking if we were going to have it again,” said Tod Griffin, KRF president. “Retailers enjoyed being able to gather together, network and hear about different trends that affect how they operate their businesses.”

Once again, Nicole Leinbach with Retail Minded will lead the conference. She is a globally recognized retail thought leader and has been named one of Women’s Wear Daily’s 25 Most Inspiring Women in Retail.

“Bringing community leaders, retail operators and decision makers within the retail space together proved very valuable in the debut year of Retail Recharge, and we’re excited to deliver this experience again,” Nicole said. “With retail constantly evolving and challenges always present in the competitive space of retail, taking the time to join Retail Recharge is truly a win for any business - small or large.”

The agenda will include panel discussions, including one on understanding the behavior of different aged consumers, such as Teen, Gen Z, Millennials, Gen X and Baby Boomers. Nicole will lead a session on extending commerce beyond the store’s walls, and Alison Davis with the Community Economic and Development Initiative of Kentucky will give an update on the economics of Kentucky. (Editor’s note: Agenda is subject to change)

“From generational preferences in buying decisions to in-store operational opportunities to leveraging digital marketing to strengthen in-store sales, we have a fantastic agenda for attendees of Retail Recharge. Plus, the connectivity among like-minded peers is one that simply can’t be mimicked without being a part of this experience in person,” Nicole said.

Registration information is still being put together at press time, but members and retailers alike should not pass up this chance to Recharge. There will also be a fund-raising event the evening of September 18, with more details to come.

“We know it is difficult for retailers to get out of their stores for any length of time to attend meetings,” said Cassie Grigsby, Senior Vice President of Operations and Development. “We intentionally plan Retail Recharge to make it as convenient as possible for retailers to attend. Retail is an evolving business, and we all need the opportunity to think and plan for the future.” ■



Nicole Leinbach will be back again to lead the 2023 Retail Recharge Conference in September.



## Don't miss Retail Recharge!

Join retailers from across the state for a day of conversation, collaboration and learning about attracting new customers, managing your workforce, and positioning your retail business for success in today's changing economy.

The 2023 Retail Recharge Conference is the perfect chance to network with fellow retailers and share ideas and success stories, hear from national leaders on various issues to help your retail business continue to succeed and take the next step.

The event would not be possible without the generous support of the conference sponsors, who you can meet with throughout the day. Thanks to Anthem and Traditional Bank, the conference's Featured Sponsors. There are more sponsorship opportunities available. Go to [www.retailrecharge.com](http://www.retailrecharge.com) for information or contact [cgrigsby.kyretail.com](mailto:cgrigsby.kyretail.com).



**Retail Recharge** ⚡



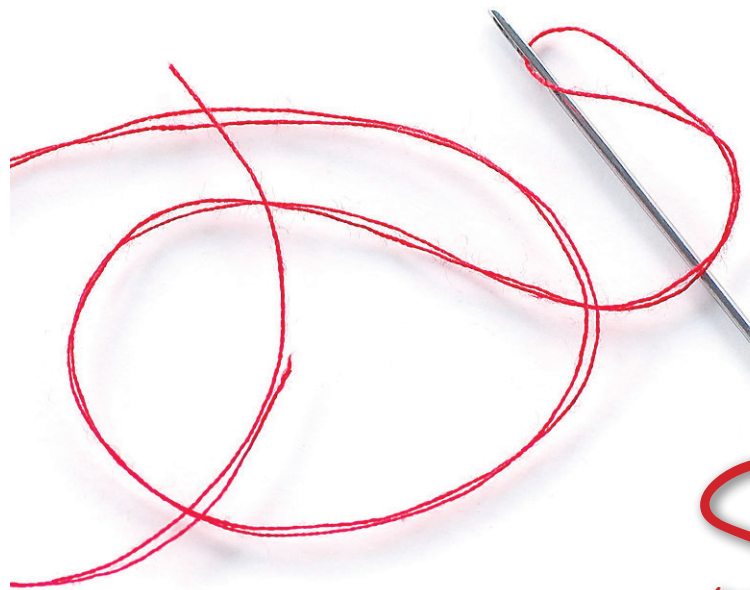
KENTUCKY  
RETAIL  
FEDERATION

**WHAT:**  
2023 Retail Recharge

**WHEN:**  
September 19, 2023

**WHERE:**  
Marriott Lexington City Center, 121 W. Vine St.,  
Lexington, KY

**REGISTRATION:**  
Information will be available soon.  
Check [www.retailrecharge.com](http://www.retailrecharge.com) for details  
and the agenda once finalized.



# New owner still keeping Frankfort area in STITCHES

By Steve McClain  
Kentucky Retail Federation

**F**or 23 years, Creative Stitches in Frankfort has been outfitting area residents in logowear. When Rebekah Hankins bought the business from Janine Combess last September after working there for 16 years, she wanted to keep the trust the business had earned from its customers. That is when Creative Stitches became Creative Stitches of Frankfort.

“I felt like I had helped Janine bring our profits up and our turnaround time was easier,” she said. “And I had bonded with the customers here. They trust me with their business and products.”

Rebekah brought quite a bit of experience in the embroidery business when she was hired by Combess. She had worked at the local Fruit of the Loom plant after she had her son, Alex. She learned how to sew elastic on underwear and then the company took a turn into screen printing and embroidery.

“I started out in the screen printing area taking ink and shirts to the machines to be printed. Then they put in embroidery machines, where I worked 12-hour shifts,” as she said, “that’s when I fell in love with embroidery work.”

“Basically, I had knowledge of the embroidery world. I had experience with 12 and 24 head machines, which means you could run 12 or 24 shirts at a time. This job at Creative Stitches was on a smaller scale, running three single head machines.”

When the Fruit of the Loom plant closed, she worked in a greenhouse as the head grower, and after taking some time off and the birth of her daughter, she saw an ad in the paper that Creative Stitches, a member of the

Kentucky Retail Federation, was looking for help.

“We do heat press, and we can send products out to a printer for screen printing,” she added. “We are an onsite sewing embroidery facility. We also do the design work for the customer, and I will take a personal hand in the stitching process. Shelby Greenwood is my right hand and helps a lot with fulfilling orders, and is the main person that is doing the stitching for me now. We take your order, process it, and have the items embroidered and have it ready to pick up.”

They design the artwork, put it on a usb thumb drive – which is a far cry from the floppy discs they used to save the designs on when Rebekah first started. The thumb drive is then used to set up the embroidery sewing machine to stitch the artwork onto the item, using the thread that is chosen from the many spools on the wall.

Rebekah said they do a lot of logowear for schools, businesses and a lot of monogramming. A store in Shelbyville works with Creative Stitches of Frankfort and brings items for logos to be stitched on, such as hats, shirts, blankets, sweatshirts and letterman jackets. And it’s not just Franklin County and Frankfort schools. They have the logos for schools in Owen, Anderson and Shelby counties. They even do logowear for a Southern States store in Somerset and businesses in Indiana.

And it’s not just school logos. They monogram purses, retirement, baby and wedding gifts. They have put stitching on dog collars, horse blankets and even shower

curtains. Rebekah said she has customers from Louisville who own property in Florida who bring in items for monograms and decorate their homes there.

“I enjoy the crafting of it...making someone’s vision come to life,” she said, with pride. “Taking their image and turning it into something they enjoy and giving it as specialized gifts.”

You can also hear the pride in her voice when she talks about the future. The plan is for her 17-year-old daughter, Raine, to take over the business someday. Raine is graduating from Franklin County High this year and will be going to Eastern Kentucky University as part of its honors program majoring in business administration and minoring in accounting.

“She already has a love of embroidery and crafting,” Rebekah said. “But I’m not handing her the business. She has to earn it and put in the time. She will work here during the summer and I’m going to show her every aspect of the business.”

Rebekah said she has no regrets at all about taking the leap into becoming a business owner. She and Comboss actually started discussing the transaction before the COVID-pandemic, which put the brakes on the sale.

“We knew we would move ahead, and I knew we would be OK. But it was nerve wracking,” Rebekah said. “We still had orders coming in. The jackets the governor’s office wears with emergency management and their names on them? I stitched them!”

One thing that helps make the learning curve a bit easier is the credit card processing program the Retail Federation offers.

“I was familiar with it as far as typing in the amount and getting the receipt,” she said. “But getting things set up, the ease with the way deposits go in at night is helpful. There were a couple of little things, but they got them resolved right away.

“I am thankful for the Kentucky Retail Federation being here to support small businesses.”

Rebekah said she has no regrets, and is proud to be part of the local community.

“Reputation means everything in the community. I love my community and my customers. It makes me proud to see our items out or at ballgames,” she said. “Local business is important to the community. We all try to support each other’s business.” ■

Rebekah Hankins is the new owner of Creative Stitches of Frankfort, and they continue to build on their reputation of quality work turned around quickly for customers not just in Frankfort, but across the state and beyond. (KRF photo/Steve McClain)



# MLS Powersports revving up for a bright future

By Cassie Grigsby  
Kentucky Retail Federation

If you can envision small-town America, a small business based on faith, honesty, transparency, and treating people the way they want to be treated; MLS Powersports is the epitome of this vision.

Almost two decades ago, Mark and Trish Smith began their journey as small business owners in Georgetown, Ky. Mark worked full-time in the corporate world and Trish was a stay-at-home mom with their three children.

“Mark had a great stable job but found over time he became unhappy with his position,” said Trish. He wasn’t sure this is what he wanted to do long-term.

Mark had a friend in the military getting ready to deploy and approached him about buying his four-wheeler. He knew Mark loved four-wheelers and if he could sell it, he would not have to worry about it while he was deployed.

Mark purchased the four-wheeler, made a few repairs on it, and sold it on eBay. That’s when he knew what he wanted to do.

Thus began the MLS Powersports journey. Mark and Trish had three children at the time and that is where the name MLS comes from. It is the first initials of each of their names: Maddie, Luke, and Sam.

Mark and Trish started MLS in their garage. They were able to make a connection with an auction house where they would purchase the inventory, make any needed repairs, and sell them on eBay.

Mark was still working his corporate job during the day and worked until late at night making repairs so they could sell the 4-wheelers. Trish would take care of the delivery during the day.

The customers would come to Mark and Trish’s home to pick up their purchases. “Looking back now, that probably wasn’t the safest decision,” Trish chuckled.

Mark was working so many hours between his corporate job and their start-up business that when Trish was expecting their fourth child, she knew they couldn’t continue their current pace.

When their fourth child was born in 2007, they took a break from the business. Mark was still working at his corporate job. “I thought the business was over,” said Trish, but six months later, Mark began dabbling with the business again.

Even after a six-month break, business hadn’t slowed down. MLS continued to grow to the point they knew there needed to be a change. They just weren’t sure what was next for them or the business.

Trish and Mark Smith have built a thriving business in Georgetown. MLS Powersports has come a long way from Mark working out of his garage repairing four-wheelers. (KRF Photo/Cassie Grigsby)

During this time, Mark was a youth leader at their church. They were preparing for the annual youth trip. While on the trip, they continued to pray about the direction they needed to go. Pretty soon, they got their answer.

When they returned from the trip, they were at church that Sunday morning. A dear friend came up to Mark and told him she had a dream about him. She said he was going to build something that would keep his family safe. Mark put in his two-week notice.

2010 was the last year they worked out of their garage. They sold over a million dollars that year and in 2011 they opened their first brick-and-mortar store.

They never intended to open the store to the public. They were going to continue their current structure of buying, repairing, and selling on eBay. However, people would not stop coming to the door, so they decided to open up to the public.

Owning your own business does not come without trials and tribulations. Several years ago, MLS suffered a devastating blow. Although Trish could not disclose any details, she said “this situation should have destroyed our business, but God walked us through it and made us

Continued on Page 21





# Federation scores legislative win on stopping data privacy bill

By Shannon Stiglitz and Steve McClain  
Kentucky Retail Federation

The 2023 General Assembly wrapped up its 30-day session in April. And while lawmakers insisted they did not want to tackle any big issues in the short session, the session was anything but quiet. While there were several high-profile bills that dominated the airwaves and print, the Kentucky Retail Federation stayed busy on legislation that would impact members.

One of the biggest issues was a data privacy bill that would have drastically changed how retailers use and track consumer data.

Senator Whitney Westerfield (R-Crofton), who recently announced that he will not seek reelection in 2024, has for three years pushed legislation to make sweeping changes to data privacy and security laws.

After the close of the 2022 legislative session, the KRF government affairs team gathered a coalition of businesses and business organizations to work on all the data privacy and security legislation moving through the Kentucky General Assembly and proactively seek solutions to data privacy and security legislation that would protect consumers and ensure that retailers were not harmed in the process. KRF met with Westerfield to try and reach a conclusion, but he refused to make any changes to the legislation.

Senate Bill 15 was a uniquely restrictive bill that applied to retailers with 25,000 or more customers who controls or processes consumer data to comply with the customer rights provided in the legislation. It included a consumers' right to request whether or not data is being tracked, delete personal data, obtain a copy of what is being tracked, opt-out of targeted advertising, and opt-out of the sell of personal information. The legislation contains all these requirements for a consumer to opt-into tracking and targeted advertising and the definitions included were difficult for retailers to understand the difference between targeted advertising. Essentially, the legislation as originally drafted, would have put a digital fence around Kentucky that would stifle business

innovation and frustrate consumers.

The bill was assigned to the Senate Economic Development Committee where a committee substitute was introduced that would remove the private right of action. While members of the committee raised concerns about retailers' opposition, the bill came out of committee. The bill waited for floor action and in the meantime, Senate Majority Floor Leader Damon Thayer (R-Georgetown) filed a floor amendment that would remove the provisions of SB 15 and replace it with the Virginia model legislation that is recognized nationally as a compromise bill.

As the bill continued to wait for further action, Westerfield filed a floor amendment that would change all the opt-in requirements to opt-out requirements. The bill came to a vote and Westerfield argued that he had addressed all the concerns of the Federation and that Thayer's amendment gutted the legislation. Thayer moved to withdraw his floor amendment and spoke against SB 15 arguing that it would increase business operating costs, which would lead to increased consumer costs.

The bill next moved to the House, but it never received a committee hearing. The House indicated that their preference for legislation more closely aligned with the Virginia model. The House argued that there was a data privacy solution that could protect consumers while not restricting business's ability to innovate.

House Small Business, Tourism and Technology Committee Phillip Pratt (R-Georgetown) proposed HB 301 that did not contain a private right of action, did not require consumers to opt-into tracking and selling of consumer data. The bill never received a committee hearing, as it was meant to send a message to the Senate that the House supported data privacy legislation that mirrored Virginia.

While SB 15 didn't pass in 2023, retailers need to prepare for this legislation to return in the 2024 legislative session. ■

# RETAIL NEXT-GEN: A Student Leadership Conference

One of the biggest concerns retailers say they are facing is finding enough workers, and what that means for the future. The Kentucky Retail Institute (KRI) is launching a leadership conference to address that need and showcase what careers retail offers.

KRI, in partnership with the Kentucky Department of Education's Office of Career and Technical Education is hosting the first student leadership conference in Elizabethtown, Ky., Nov. 2, 2023.

The Retail Next-Gen conference is a one-day event giving students exposure to retail topics such as supply chain and distribution, retail economics, entrepreneurship, and career opportunities.

"The Retail Next-Gen Conference is the perfect opportunity to showcase the careers available in the retail industry. There are so many avenues in retail when you think beyond the cash



register," said KRI President Cassie Grigsby. "We look forward to seeing students and helping them explore career options."

There are many different paths a student can take in the retail industry, and they can choose their path to success. Whether they choose to start their retail career right out of high school, earn a two- or four-year degree, or participate in the Retail Leaders Apprenticeship Program,

the decision is theirs.

There are sponsorship opportunities available for retail businesses. The sponsorship includes a vendor table for students to visit, your company logo on the back of the T-shirts given to the students, your company logo on all marketing materials, and an opportunity to speak on the day of the event.

If you would like to be a sponsor, be involved, or if you would like to see a Retail Next-Gen event in your area, please contact Cassie Grigsby at [cgrigsby@kyretail.com](mailto:cgrigsby@kyretail.com). ■



## Kentucky Retail Institute launches Retail Leaders Apprenticeship Program to address workforce challenges

With retail employers across the country challenged to find and retain reliable, qualified workers, the Kentucky Retail Institute (KRI) is offering a new solution to help businesses and employees alike. The Retail Leaders Apprenticeship Program delivers on-the-job education and training for students and working adults wanting to expand their skillsets and advance their careers.

Apprentices will work as paid employees, learning the entire scope of retail operations, including customer service, loss prevention, logistics, merchandising, accounting and more. The KRI partnered with the MBA Research & Curriculum Center to develop a robust and comprehensive curriculum for a Retail Operations Specialist that has been approved by the U.S. Department of Labor.

"The retail industry is the country's largest private-sector employer, supporting one in four jobs nationwide," said Cassie Grigsby, president of the Kentucky Retail Institute. "Retailers have an important role to play in setting up young people for success and helping them acquire the skills they need to advance their careers."

The KRI is working with employers as well as employees, job candidates and

students who want to participate in the Retail Leaders program and become certified as Retail Operations Specialists. In particular, the KRI is encouraging retailers who want to take on a high-school aged apprentice to reach out and participate.

The apprenticeship includes 2,000 hours of on-the-job training, which equates to approximately one year for an employee working a 40-hour week. Part-time employees can also participate at the employer's discretion.

According to the National Retail Federation, retailers have employed at least 55 percent of the country's working teenagers, more than any other industry, since 2008. Despite a recent drop in youth employment, this first job is still an essential part of many high school-aged students' learning experiences. A 2017 study done by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics found that a third of American teenagers are working, 30 percent of high school graduates begin their careers immediately upon graduation and 77 percent of part-time college students are also punching the clock.

Employers, educators, students and working adults interested in learning more and participating in the program should visit [RetailLeadersProgram.com](http://RetailLeadersProgram.com). ■



# RETAIL

NEXT-GEN

Student Leadership Conference

**11/02/23**

Elizabethtown, KY



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# Business is **BLOOMING**

History draws people to Harrodsburg, retail keeps them around for awhile

*The Kentucky Retail Federation is back out in 2023 for Shop Our Town, the video series spotlighting independent retailers in Kentucky's towns. The first stops this year were Harrodsburg and LaGrange.*

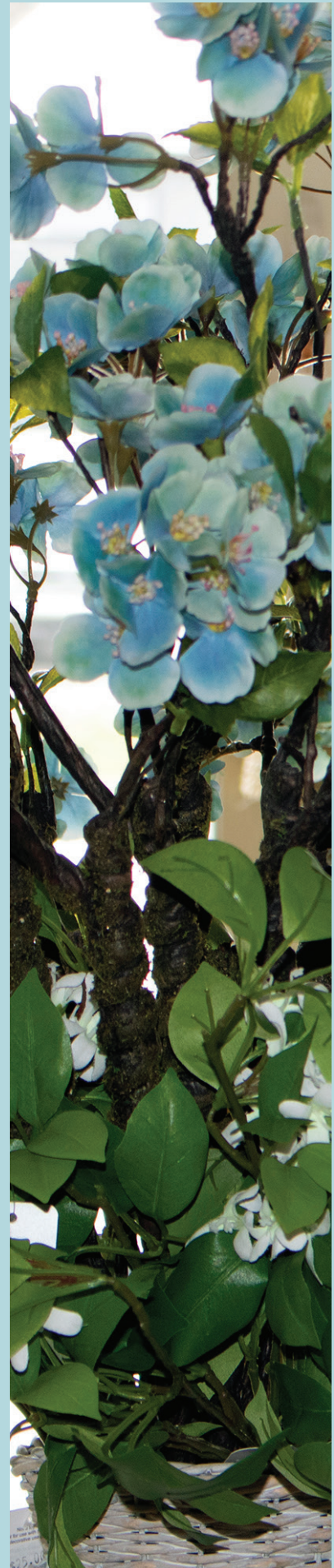
If people are asked what they know about Harrodsburg and Mercer County, they likely will say Fort Harrod and Shaker Village in Pleasant Hill. After all, Harrodsburg is the oldest settlement west of the Allegheny Mountains.

Jill Cutler, the executive director of the Mercer County Chamber of Commerce, would like to add a busy and enticing retail scene keeps people in the area a little longer.

"If people come for the history, they aren't going to stay that long," Jill said. "But if there is thriving retail, they want to eat and shop and walk the streets. That represents the culture of the town."

And thanks to local entrepreneurs, a thriving retail scene is just what people see.

"We have so many entrepreneurs, even entrepreneurial families," she said. "When big box stores came in, this became



Articles and Photos by Steve McClain  
Kentucky Retail Federation

a desert downtown. We have seen a resurgence. It is people wanting control over their own lives, and people finding the big box store doesn't have everything you need. It is the personal touch they get. It's great to order online from around the world, but if I can walk into a store and see a neighbor, it makes it unique."

Jill said retailers are the "bread and butter" of the local chamber, estimating 80 percent of the membership is mom-and-pop small shops and retailers. To help promote retail, the Chamber sponsors events throughout the year to attract visitors such as Shop Local events, jazz festivals, historical celebrations and others.

She credits the Kentucky Retail Federation with driving interest in retail statewide.

"When I first came on, one of the first organizations I became aware of is the Kentucky Retail Federation. They are our main advocate at the state level. A little chamber like ours can't have a state impact. But KRF is the driver of the retail business," Jill said.

### **Giggles and Grace a family affair**

Megan Sallee has always loved children's clothes, so when the opportunity came up to own such a store in Harrodsburg where she grew up, she wasted little time getting with her mom to purchase it.

"We have gifts for mom or birthday parties, and outfits that are timeless that could be worn now and when your child's child puts them on. These options are not worn for one season," Megan said. "And I think the store will always fill a need. The next closest place that has items like we do is in the next town over."

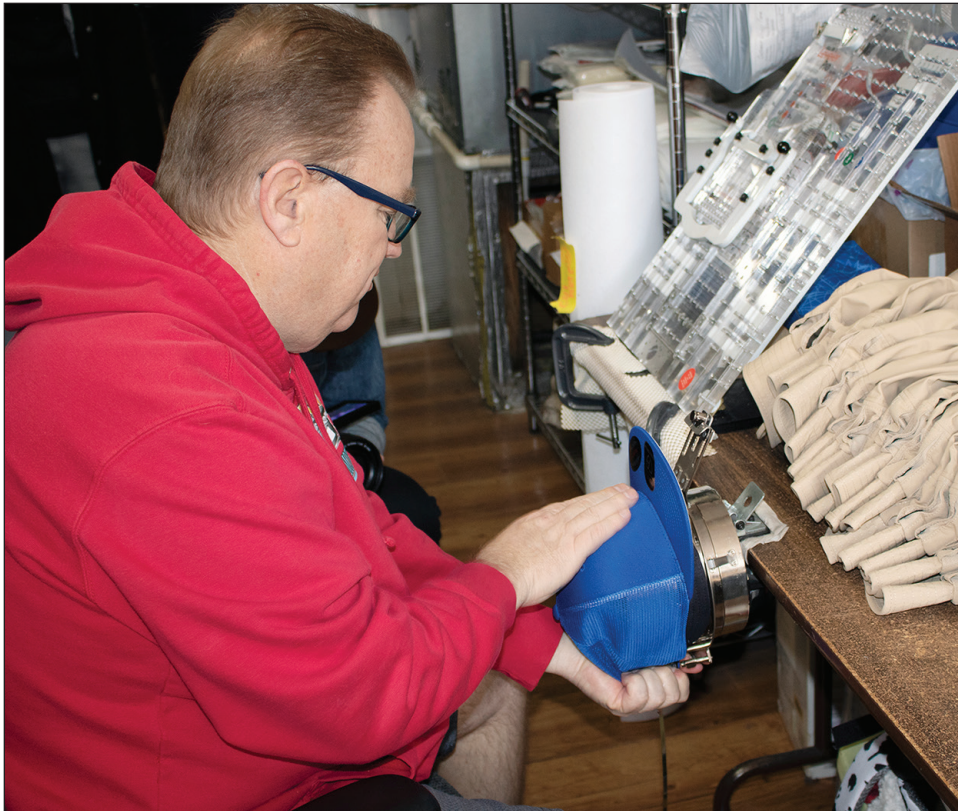
Her mom and co-owner, Amy Shewmaker, is beyond proud to be part of a business with her daughter and offer quality children's clothes to the community.

"These little boutiques are what

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Megan Sallee (left) and her mom Amy Shewmaker have made Giggles and Grace in Harrodsburg a true family business offering a wide variety of children's clothing, toys and home décor.





make your hometown and brings everyone together. That's what I want this generation to know," she said. "Being able to shop local like this means you don't have to run to Lexington and spend the whole day. You can spend time with your family."

### **Custom Promotional Products outfits residents in favorite logowear**

If you go to a ballgame, a local festival, buy a top at a local boutique or go to a family reunion in the area, chances are you will see or even wear something that Custom Promotional Products printed.

"If someone is looking for something specific with a logo or own design on it, we can do it," said Larry Betterly, owner of the local business. "We do shirts for local schools from preschool to Campbellsville College. If you need something really quick, we can usually make something that day depending on the request."

Larry takes pride in providing quality items and turning the order around

quickly. He said no two days are alike, and has made some great friends since moving to Harrodsburg from California.

"It's neat seeing your stuff out and people wearing them to ballgames and seeing things on shelves," Larry said. "Having somebody come in and order something that is personal to them and they are excited about excites us. It means we are making something special that is one of a kind and can't get anywhere else."

### **Owner juggles Mercer Outfitters, electrician business**

Eric Keller has been an electrician by trade, but he had an epiphany in 2019 he wanted to provide something for the community. His aunt and uncle had owned Mercer Outfitters since the early 2000s, and he was able to purchase the business. It has since grown and he is planning to open a new storefront early next year.

"I thought I had a sense of what people needed since I worked in construction. My uncle ran a great business," Eric said. "I felt I could come in and expand with more brands and provide our community – whether it was local or surrounding areas – with quality footwear and workwear."

And that is just what he has done. They see regular and new customers come in daily to get workboots, outerwear or even casual shirts.

"It's awesome seeing people wearing things they bought



(Top photo) Larry Betterly with Custom Promotional Products prepares a hat to be stitched for a customer.

(Bottom photo) Ariat and other brands of jeans, outerwear and boots can be found at Mercer Outfitters.

here. There's a sense of pride that people want to come in and buy your product," Eric said.

That pride in the community he grew up in sparks him to also give back.

"Shopping local keeps dollars local. Once someone comes in, makes a purchase here, I feel it is my duty to give back, whether it is sponsoring events at local schools, the local FFA, or local fire department. I'll try to donate and help where I can."

### **Lemon and Bloom offers unique gifts**

When Season Prewitt was considering what to name her new business, she did what she normally did. She texted her mom, telling her what images she had in her mind – a lemon because the color yellow makes people feel happy and cheerful. Her mom sent a list back, and Lemon and Bloom was on there. And she had a unique name for a unique store.

Shoppers can pick up small gifts from hand soap, candles, lotion to home décor and accessories and clothing. Seasonal items are always popular, as is garden décor. For example, she has several Realtors who come in and pick up a housewarming gift for clients.

"There is nothing like it in surrounding towns and counties. I wanted to create spaces that are warm and welcoming. You can come in and see how things are displayed and see how they fit in the home," Season said. "We have everyday gifts, and wanted to have a place for people to come in here and find something without going to Lexington."

Lemon and Bloom has been open about 2 ½ years, and Season said successful unique stores is important to seeing Harrodsburg grow.

"Having shops and owners that support each other is important. If we want the community to grow, we have to do that for each other and give back to our community so the next generation sees they can be successful too," she said. ■

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"Shopping local keeps dollars local. Once someone comes in, makes a purchase here, I feel it is my duty to give back, whether it is sponsoring events at local schools, the local FFA, or local fire department."

— Eric Keller, Mercer Outfitters

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Season Prewitt adjusts a floral display at Lemon and Bloom, where customers can find anything for their home, garden or outdoor living areas.



## Unique shops have people making tracks to LaGrange

Oldham County and its county seat LaGrange have been one of the rapidly growing areas in Kentucky for several years as people sought a place to live that is close to Louisville with some rural features.

“LaGrange is just a quaint, small community,” said Mayor John Black, who is in his second stint in the elected position. “The thing that makes us unique is the CSX freight train that runs through the middle of town. That’s a fascination for a lot of folks who don’t believe that the town is 10-15 feet from a major rail line, L&N in the old days.”

People may come for the train, but end up staying for the unique shops that line the tracks and found throughout the area.

“We get a lot of tourists who are fascinated by trains and then stay and visit with us,” Black said. “We are fortunate. There are a lot of towns that suffered through the pandemic, but we improved our situation. We have had some of the highest retail days in our history.”

A native of LaGrange, Black has seen the retail landscape evolve over time.

“Back in the days, we had a downtown meat market, small grocery store, hardware store and all those neat things,” he said. “It has changed to shops with gifts, clothes, music shops and more of an artsy downtown than when I grew up.”

With the proximity to Louisville, Black doesn’t see things changing.

“We’ll see folks continuing to come. We are building a variety of different housing opportunities. I think that is important to hold the next generation here,” he said. “We have to keep standards high. We have a lot of energy and lots of younger folks investing hundreds of thousands of dollars in these properties.”

### Couple finds their creative outlet

Mike Prather has worked as a graphic designer and illustrator, but continued to paint. His wife Karen thought they needed a place to showcase his work.

“When I first started, I was working out of the house. Karen said, ‘Mike, no one will see your work hanging on the living room wall,’” he said. “So, she found a place on Main Street and we paint and hang things on the wall for people to see. We had 18 paintings on the wall at home and now we have none.”

And that is how Mainly Creative started. At first, it was a painting studio, but Karen had always had a dream.

“I wanted to have a retail space to showcase local artists,” she said. So, she added retail space, working with local artisans to feature their wares made of wood, ceramics and glass. “It is not uncommon to come in for a gift and then see us in the back painting,” Mike added.



Their ties are in Oldham County, and it just made sense when they were looking for retail space that they settled on LaGrange.

“We worked in Louisville, but when we wanted to open the business, we felt LaGrange was our place. It has a friendly hometown feel, and we liked the creative energy on Main Street,” Mike said. “You can instantaneously buy (online) a painting of a horse, or you can come here and see a tangible object and purchase it.”

It is hard not to come back to horses when talking artwork with them. Many of the items in the shop reflect Kentucky’s love affair with horses, and Mike has built a reputation for his horse paintings. Paintings of past Kentucky Derby winners hang in the studio, and since 1999, he has painted each year’s Derby winner at the Kentucky Derby museum.

Painting the Derby winner provides a thrill, but Mike and Karen say they wouldn’t trade their roots in LaGrange. Mike even plays in a band that has built quite the local following. It is that personal connection they love to see.

“When someone comes in and likes something you’ve done and they want to buy it or commission us to do a portrait and they burst into tears,” Mike said. “When you move somebody emotionally like that, it’s fantastic.”

### Taking the farm-to-table leap

Jeffrey Baker and his wife had started to think about their retirement years. So, what better plan than starting a Black Angus farm and then opening the Coffeehouse & Café?

“We thought we would like a place to have a coffee, sit and relax and something to eat. We worship next door and thought it would be a built-in audience,” he said. “This is our retirement.”

Jeffery has a diverse background in the grocery, retail and deli business. He put that background to work in planning the Coffeehouse and Café. He also wanted a place to market their beef, so they use it in all of their beef dishes from a ribeye steak sandwich to their chili.

He also has a flea market in town, so they added some of those items to their restaurant for people to purchase, such as candles, t-shirts and home décor. But the sheer size of the coffeehouse catches

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Mike Prather works on a Derby painting at Mainly Creative in LaGrange. When someone comes in to purchase a piece of art in the front shop, they will likely see Mike painting or teaching a class.

Opposite page, coffee cups are a natural decoration at Coffeehouse and Café.

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“Everybody knows everybody and are like neighbors. You see the mayor or councilmen walking down the street and are very accessible. We can go to the city, but we have everything here we need.”

— Jeffrey Baker, Coffeehouse & Café in LaGrange

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people off guard. It is spacious with actual living room sets for people to sit on and enjoy their coffee while chatting with friends.

“We were thinking of the tv show ‘Friends.’ What did they sit on? A couch,” he said. “We wanted comfortable places to sit and hang out and have a conversation without wondering if someone could hear them.”

Devout Christians, Jeffrey and his wife wanted a faith-based business. There’s even a cross at the entrance where patrons can share prayer requests and he and his wife pray over them. That is just part of the friendly atmosphere.

“Everybody knows everybody and are like neighbors. You see the mayor or councilmen walking down the street and are very accessible. We can go to the city, but we have everything here we need,” Jeffrey said.

### Knitting a connection

If you walk down the street any day of the week and look in the window of Friends and Fiber, you will likely see a group of people chatting...and knitting.

“We want everyone who walks through the door to knit,” owner Vicki Kinser said. “It’s not just to sell yarn, but we know the benefits of knitting. It’s such a wonderful hobby and we know what it does for you personally and spiritually.”

Vicki started the shop almost 27 years ago with a group of friends. They ran it as a co-op and made all the products. Her focus was yarn and knitting, even spinning the yarn. Eventually it became more of a yarn shop. Today, you can find yarn in just about every color, patterns and tables where people come in regularly to knit and catch up with each other.

“There aren’t many yarn shops around anymore. A lot of brick-and-mortar shops have

Vicki Kinser can provide just about anything a knitter would need at Friends and Fiber, including yarn, needles and patterns.

closed, so we get a lot of people who come from Louisville and surrounding areas to get their supplies,” Vicki said.

The number of people who come in proves knitting is not a dying art.

“It is very popular. There’s a lot of young designers and knitters doing a lot of interesting patterns and keeping everything moving forward. It’s not a grandmother’s hobby. We get a lot of grandmothers who want to help their grandchildren get started,” she said.

Friends and Fiber is truly a passion for Vicki and those who gather to work on their projects. But it is a passion of love.

“I don’t know if I would have a business if it wasn’t knitting. I love knitting and helping knitters with their projects and picking projects. I appreciate I get to do this every day,” she said. “We are glad to have tables and places for people to come in. There’s lot of laughter. We have developed quite a knitting community.”

### Judith M puts the finishing touch on outfits

Judith M Millinery Supply House in LaGrange is one of three millinery supply houses in the country, and the only one that is open to the public to milliners making hats from scratch. So why LaGrange?



“Why not LaGrange?” said Bart Pfanenstiel, who owns the store with his wife Jenny. “We live here, and before we opened Judith M, we drove through here every day and came to the downtown and when we decided to open Judith M, we thought this would be the perfect place.”

Judith M was a real person (Judith Mishler) in, ironically, LaGrange, Ind. When she decided to sell her business, she reached out to Bart and Jenny, who leapt at the chance.

They had lived in Chicago and decided to relocate and open the store near the largest hat-wearing event of the year – the Kentucky Derby. So, they moved here in 2014 and started a hat box company to go along with the supply house with all the materials needed to make hats.

Jenny was one of the featured milliners of the Derby, so the first part of the year is like Christmas for them.

“It’s a big honor to be associated with Churchill Downs and the Derby,” Bart said. “We go to the Derby and see it in person. Most milliners have unique features and styles, so you can pick out different styles and who made them.”

They also make hats and supply materials for college theater departments and productions, such as Moulin Rouge on Broadway, various operas across the country and other national shows.

All of this out of LaGrange.

“It is a vibrant town. Everyone is cohesive and works well together,” Bart said. “It’s a great meeting place. You can walk up the streets, sit outside in the summer and listen to live music.

“I’m a true outsider knowing nobody and the friends we have made just being downtown with the retail store next door. It’s a welcoming place.” ■

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Bart Pfanenstiel shows off one of the hats that was created at Judith M. They offer classes to teach people how to decorate hats or even make one from scratch, including stretching the fabric to shape the type of hat they want.



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## MLS Motorsports

Continued from Page 10

better for it.”

They signed with their first vendor in 2012 and were expected to sell 15 units the first year. They sold around 100 units that year! Since then, they have been named Dealer of the Year a couple of times.

In 2019 they started selling Suzuki and in 2020 they brought in Kawasaki. It took about seven years and a 12-page letter written by Mark explaining why Kawasaki should be a vendor to get the brand in their store. During Covid, Kawasaki saw others closing close their doors, but MLS worked through the mandated guidelines and was able to keep operating. MLS credits the relationship with Kawasaki as one of the reasons they survived Covid.

Kawasaki predicted MLS would sell 40 units in the first year. MLS shattered that goal, reaching gold status the first year despite Covid!

“No employees were let go during Covid,” said Trish. “We had one employee that would take everyone’s lunch order and they would order from different local restaurants each day.” This was her job for five months;” Trish explained.

Looking to the future, MLS has purchased 40 acres and is building a new facility in Georgetown. They have already sold their current location to the Amen House.

Trish explains, “One of my favorite things about owning our own business is the freedom to help people however we want to. We have been blessed with so much and we get to give it back.”

When asked what she sees for MLS Powersports moving forward, Trish says, “We hope to continue to be an asset to the community, a good employer, an honest place for customers to shop, and a good partner to our vendors. With all this combined, we are hoping for continued growth.”

MLS Powersports has been a KRF member since 2013.

“KRF has been a good partner and we have a good relationship with them. The information KRF provides is very beneficial and has saved us a few times by keeping us informed on issues,” Trish said. “We recently joined the association health insurance program as well. The service KRF provided during the health insurance transition made it seamless. They were always prompt and responsive with any questions we had and were very helpful for our business and employees.” ■

## Billie Jean Lockard, Business Manager



The Kentucky Retail Federation's new Business Manager knows retail and she knows accounting. It's the perfect combination.

Billie Jean Lockard got her start in retail back in 2001 as the manager of the Georgetown Tobacco Discount Outlet. It wasn't long before her small

Georgetown store was outpacing profits of the far busier Lexington outlets. Billie enjoyed managing the Georgetown Tobacco Outlet but soon learned she enjoyed the accounting aspect of the business the most.

Nearly 20 years later, Billie has joined the Kentucky Retail Federation, bringing with her many years of experience to her role as Business Manager. After graduating with her associate's degree in accounting in 2003, Billie worked 10+ years in accounting, legal research & regulatory compliance roles before deciding to pursue a bachelor's in accounting. Since graduating from SNHU in 2018, she has gained additional experience in trade association & government accounting. Billie's two adult children work in the retail sector now, giving her added incentive to support the work of Kentucky Retail Federation's lobbying and advocacy efforts.

She is an avid gardener and a big baseball and softball fan, and a native of St. Louis. Naturally, she is a St. Louis Cardinal baseball fan. She also played softball in high school, and counts being on an all-star team that played against a squad that included some members of the Cardinal baseball team as one of her favorite memories.

Billie Jean is a welcomed addition to the Federation and has used her knowledge and experience to become an indispensable asset to the organization. ■



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For more information, please contact Cassie Grigsby at 502-875-1444 or [cgrigsby@kyretail.com](mailto:cgrigsby@kyretail.com)

# RETAIL SALES FORECAST TO GROW 4-6 PERCENT THIS YEAR

National Retail Federation

The National Retail Federation issued its annual forecast, anticipating that retail sales will grow between 4 percent and 6 percent in 2023. In total, NRF projects that retail sales will reach between \$5.13 trillion and \$5.23 trillion this year.

“In just the last three years, the retail industry has experienced growth that would normally take almost a decade by pre-pandemic standards,” NRF President and CEO Matthew Shay said. “While we expect growth to moderate in the year ahead, it will remain positive as retail sales stabilize to more historical levels. Retailers are prepared to serve consumers in the current economic environment by offering a range of products at affordable prices with great shopping experiences.”

NRF’s annual sales forecast was announced during the third annual State of Retail & the Consumer virtual conversation, where retail executives from major brands, prominent economists and consumer experts discussed the health of American consumers and the retail industry.

The 2023 figure compares with 7 percent annual growth to \$4.9 trillion in 2022. The 2023 forecast is above the pre-pandemic, average annual retail sales growth rate of 3.6 percent.

Non-store and online sales, which are included in the total figure, are expected to grow between 10 percent and 12 percent year over year to a range of \$1.41 trillion to \$1.43 trillion. While many consumers continue to utilize the conveniences offered by online shopping, much of that growth is driven by multichannel sales, where the physical store still plays an important component in the fulfillment process.

As the role of brick-and-mortar stores has evolved in recent years, they remain the primary point of purchase for consumers, accounting for approximately 70 percent of total retail sales.

NRF projects full-year GDP growth of around 1 percent, reflecting a slower economic pace and half of the 2.1 percent increase from 2022. Inflation is on the way down but will remain between 3 percent and 3.5 percent for all goods and services for the year.

Although the labor market has remained resilient, the trade organization anticipates job growth to decelerate in the coming months in lockstep with slower economic activity and the

prospect of restrictive credit conditions. The unemployment rate is likely to exceed 4 percent before next year.

NRF Chief Economist Jack Kleinhenz noted that aggregate economic activity has held up well, despite restrictive monetary policy that is working purposefully to curb inflation. He also acknowledged that recent developments in the financial markets and banking sector as well as some unresolved public policy issues complicate the outlook.

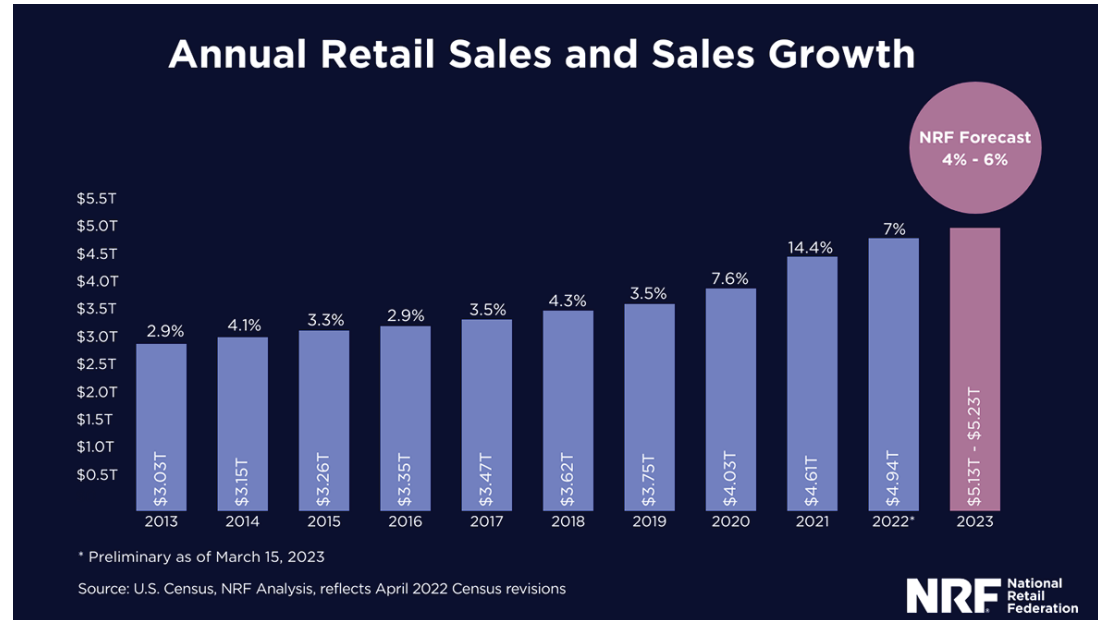
“While it is still too early to know the full effects of the banking industry turmoil, consumer spending is looking quite good for the first quarter of 2023,” Kleinhenz said. “While we expect consumers to maintain spending, a softer and likely uneven pace is projected for the balance of the year.”

As the leading authority and voice for the retail industry, NRF provides data on retail sales each month and also forecasts annual retail sales and spending for key periods such as the holiday season each year.

NRF’s calculation of retail sales excludes automobile dealers, gasoline stations and restaurants to focus on core retail.

## About NRF

The National Retail Federation, the world’s largest retail trade association, passionately advocates for the people, brands, policies and ideas that help retail succeed. From its headquarters in Washington, D.C., NRF empowers the industry that powers the economy. Retail is the nation’s largest private-sector employer, contributing \$3.9 trillion to annual GDP and supporting one in four U.S. jobs – 52 million working Americans. For over a century, NRF has been a voice for every retailer and every retail job, educating, inspiring and communicating the powerful impact retail has on local communities and global economies. ■





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