

Newsletter



Save the Date!



**VRGA
Scholarship Golf
Tournament
Williston Golf Club**

[Register here](#)

Senator Dick Mazza Resigns

Senator Dick Mazza, D-Colchester, after 42 years of service, and facing health issues since the fall of 2023, has tendered his resignation. Senator Mazza, owner of Dick Mazza’s General Store and member of VRGA, The Dean of the Senate, and one of the most steadfast in his love of Vermont and representing his constituents, Governor Phil Scott said “It would be difficult to find a Vermonter who has been more impactful, committed or dedicated to public service over the past four decades than Senator Dick Mazza.”

In the height of VGA conventions, Senator Mazza could be found visiting exhibitors, meeting with members and constituents, and judging the bagging contest. He was always welcoming VRGA staff into his office in the back of his store or answering the call for guidance when needed. Senator Mazza’s commitment, integrity, and leadership will be missed in the Senate and the VRGA. We send strength to the Senator and his family during this time.

Four Weeks Remaining in 2024 Session

With about a month left in the 2024 legislative session, Legislators are honing their focus on remaining must-pass bills; including the yield bill - which will set the residential and non-residential property tax rates for 2025, as well as remaining priorities.

H.121, the data privacy bill is expected to move out of the Senate Economic Development Committee within the next two weeks and meet a full Senate floor vote prior to needing a review from the House. Impending changes have interested stakeholders questioning the bill’s fate due to the myriad changes that are anticipated from the Senate. Senator Kesha Ram-Hinsdale reports that she is ...cont.

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Legislative and Regulatory

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...cont.

working to bring the bill closer to other state data privacy bills that have been enacted and are showing results. VRGA and other stakeholders have requested continuity within the Northeast region, and have pointed to the Connecticut law.

Meanwhile in Washington, DC, the House Energy & Commerce Committee is initiating the process of advancing comprehensive federal privacy legislation with a hearing on Wednesday, April 17. If a federal bill passes, it would supersede state law.

[H.534, the retail crime bill](#) has seen varying stops and starts throughout the legislative session, but has just cleared another major hurdle. As passed by the House the bill would have modified the criteria for differentiating between misdemeanor and felony theft, and aggregated multiple retail theft offenses within a 14-day period in one or more locations within a single county. The Senate committee changed the bill, eliminating the aggregation of offenses and rather instituting a multiple-offense, graded penalty system where the penalties increase for every conviction. The penalties being at \$500 for the first offense and increasing by \$500, as well as longer imprisonment periods for the second, third, and fourth offenses.

Early on in the session, the Senate failed to override the Governor's veto of [H.158, the bill that would expand the scope of the bottle bill](#) and create a Producer Responsibility Organization that would be responsible for streamlining the redemption system and increasing the rate of redemption in Vermont. It is expected that a proposal will be back next year.

The House and Senate both voted over the last two sessions to pass [S.18, legislation that would have banned the sale of flavored tobacco and flavored tobacco alternatives in the state](#), but votes in both chambers showed the Governor he had the power to veto the bill and garner enough support to uphold his decision. Therefore, flavored tobacco and flavored tobacco alternatives remain legal to sell to consumers 21 and older.

Labor-related bills have mostly remained at bay this session, except for [S.102, the captive audience bill](#), which would prohibit employers from requiring employees participate in certain mandatory meetings. Vermont Solicitor General warned the House General Committee that the same law is currently being litigated in Connecticut and the result will set a precedent for the Vermont bill. The committee continues to consider the bill regardless of the warning.

The 2024 legislative session is expected to conclude in early May. Both chambers still need to finalize the state budget and set the property tax rates for 2025. At the time of this report, residential property taxes (homestead) are set to increase 15%, while commercial and second home property taxes (non-homestead) are set to rise more than 18%.

2024 Legislative Update Calls

Calls are held every other Tuesday.

@ 11 am

April 30 and May 17

[Register in advance for this meeting](#)

Association News

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Call For Board Members

VRGA is accepting nominations for new board members until April 19. If you're passionate about shaping the future of Vermont's retail and grocery industry, submit nominations to info@vtrga.org, including the nominee's name and a brief bio.

Scholarship Deadline Pushed to May. Share the VRGA 2024 Scholarship Program with Employees

33rd Annual Scholarship Golf Tournament



June 5, 2024

Williston Golf Club

Registration for our 33rd Annual Scholarship Golf Tournament is open!

10 Team Spots Remaining!

Click [here](#) to view registration form and sponsorship opportunities.

The deadline to apply for VRGA's \$1500 scholarship has been delayed by one month due to the FAFSA approval deadline. Applications are now due by Friday, May 24th. Annually, VRGA grants scholarships of \$1500 to 10 students attending a two or four-year college or university. VRGA members are encouraged to promote this opportunity among their employees. A [poster for display in stores can be accessed by clicking here](#). For detailed application requirements and the application form, please visit the provided link. The deadline for applications is April 26, 2024. For additional information, contact info@vtrga.org.

Recover Your Portion of Swipe Fees from the VISA/Mastercard Settlement

VRGA has partnered with DCAP Claims to help time-crunched members recover swipe fees from the \$5.54 billion VISA/Mastercard settlement. If you haven't filed and would like assistance, DCAP can help. VRGA hosted a 20 minute webinar to provide information to members about the service. Watch it [here](#). Contact DCAP [here](#).

2024 Invoices Go Out May 1

VRGA will invoice members on May 1 of this year. Please ensure your profile with us is up to date to ensure your dues amount is correct.

[Click Here to Update Your Profile](#)

Funding & Education

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2024 National Small Business Week Winner

BUILDING ON AMERICA'S
SMALL BUSINESS BOOM



SBA U.S. Small Business Administration

sba.gov/nsbw

This 2-day event is free to attend, but registration is required to access all the value the virtual event has to offer:

- Expert business advice to help you navigate your business journey.
- Downloadable business resources to collect for future use.

[Learn more and Register here](#)

[Accelerate Business Growth with AI](#)

Webinar: April 30, 11am

Learn from a roundtable of experts how business owners can harness the power of AI to help not only protect against payment fraud but also help find new funding opportunities.

[Building a Foundation for Online Marketing Success: Review, Plan, and Execute](#)

Webinar: April 30, 2:40pm

The key to business growth lies in continuously attracting, engaging, and nurturing your customer base. However, the rapid evolution of the online landscape can seem daunting and ambiguous. Discover a simple and adaptable framework that will become your strategic compass for digital growth.

[Small Business Accelerator](#)

On-Demand videos to expand your knowledge and business. Get a refresh on branding your business, creating an exceptional customer experience, effective pricing strategies, and more.

[Bookkeeping for Small Business Success Year Round](#)

June 25, 1:30-3

Gain essential knowledge and tools to navigate bookkeeping with ease, ensuring your financial processes are so efficient and effective, that your accountant will give you a gold star come tax season. Learn the basics of where to start and how to keep up with everything, the questions you should ask a CPA, what needs to be done to prepare for tax season, and more.

[Online Workshop: Preparing Financial Projections](#)

April 24, 6pm

Using spreadsheet examples, this session will create monthly profit & loss projections for Year 1 based on estimates for sales activity, variable cost of sales, and monthly operating expenses. You'll expand on this to include funding requirements and cash flow for Year 1 and extend it all annually for Years 2 & 3, and then address the financial projections statements typically required by banks and outside lenders.

[Goldman Sachs 10,000 Small Businesses Program](#)

May 7, 10am

Goldman Sachs 10,000 Small Business offering is a totally free 10 to 12 week program in which participants will gain practical skills in topics such as negotiation, marketing, identifying new opportunities, leadership and employee management that can immediately be put into action in their business. VRGA and VSFA members have participated in this program and have come away with positive experiences. Learn more about this FREE program

State and Regulatory

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Childcare Payroll Tax Begins July 1

The [Child Care Contribution](#) (CCC) is set to go into effect July 1, 2024. The contribution, passed on 2023 will be used to offset the costs of childcare costs for Vermont families. Employers will be mandated to pay the 0.44% tax on all employee wages, with an option to withhold a maximum of 25% from employee wages. Employees have no filing requirement for the CCC and will see withheld amounts on their W-2 forms. Self-employed individuals face a 0.11% income tax on net self-employment income, payable with their Vermont Personal Income Tax filings. [Additional details](#), including FAQs, are available for employers and self-employed individuals regarding payment methods, reporting requirements, and tax implications.

The Department of Taxes will host a webinar for employers on May 21st at 1pm. [Learn more and register here.](#)

Do you Sell Propane or Kerosene?

Pursuant to [Act 18 of 2023](#), the bill that established the Clean Heat Standard, retailers that sell propane or kerosene are now required to register with the Public Utility Commission. One deadline has already passed with about a 30% compliance rate. Beginning March 1, 2024, the Attorney General will begin enforcing the law. Those that have not registered, may face fines or penalties. [Find Frequently Asked Questions and the registration form here.](#) If you haven't registered your business yet, please take a few minutes to do so to avoid penalties.

Department of Taxes Guidance Docs

The Department of Taxes [hosts several guidance documents](#) that make it easier for retailers to identify what products are taxable or not, how to determine sales that are tax exempt, guidance on the Use Tax, and more.

802 Liquor Stores- LICENSE RENEWAL DUE BY April 30th

You may be one of the 1,700 licensees with a license set to expire at the end of April. To start a renewal, or determine if your license will expires this month, log on to DLL's online licensing portal at dllportal.vermont.gov. For direct assistance with renewals, you can contact DLL.LiquorLicensing@vermont.gov, or by phone at (802) 828-2345.

Licenses can be renewed up to 150 days prior to their expiration. While the Department averages a processing time of 13 days for renewals, some licenses require local control, which means additional processing time is needed to ensure timely approval from local control administrators. See more info [here](#).

Scanner Inspection Guidance

The Weights and Measures Section of the Vermont Agency of Agriculture Food and Markets oversees the accuracy of pricing and scanner systems in retail stores. Ensuring accurate pricing is crucial for consumer satisfaction and retailer credibility. Retailers are advised to [designate a pricing coordinator, adopt written pricing policies, provide staff training, conduct systematic price checks, utilize technology such as hand-held scanners and portable label printers, and address common errors like failing to update sale signs or end cap item prices.](#) Inspectors conduct price verification inspections, and resources are available for guidance and support from the Weights & Measures office. Compliance with these best practices helps maintain consumer confidence and regulatory compliance. Read more details [here](#).



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Associated Grocers of New England is a full service Cooperative Grocery Wholesaler supplying Supermarkets and Convenience Stores from Maine to New York.

Consumers Trading Down to less Expensive Meat: Survey

Consumers are being more selective about their meat purchases as inflation continues to weigh on their wallets, with 37% of those surveyed saying they are purchasing cheaper cuts of meat, according to a March report from data analysis group 84.51. While consumers continue to prioritize proteins, 43% of respondents said they are cooking dishes which use less meat, such as casseroles and tacos. Only 12% said they are not stretching their budget purchasing meat. [Read more from Food Dive here.](#)

Resilient Food Systems Infrastructure Program Grants Available

Over \$3.2 million in grants will be available to Vermont businesses to strengthen local and regional food systems. The USDA Resilient Food Systems Infrastructure program grants can be used to

- expand capacity and infrastructure for aggregation, processing, manufacturing, storing, transporting, wholesaling, or distribution of locally and regionally produced food products, or
- simplified application solely for equipment needed.

[To learn more or apply, click here.](#) Applications open May 1 and close June 5

Reeling in Seafood Sales: Opportunities and Strategies for Grocers

Consumer perceptions of seafood are improving, focusing on health benefits and sustainability. Though fresh and frozen seafood sales have dropped, overall consumption is rising. Top sellers include shrimp, salmon, tuna, and crab, with crab sales growing notably. Seafood prices remain higher than other proteins. Grocers can differentiate by offering standalone fish markets and promoting sustainable practices. These strategies capitalize on changing consumer preferences and drive seafood sales.

Monthly U.S. Online Grocery Sales: March 2020-2024



The latest Brick Meets Click/Mercatus Grocery Shopper Survey

reports that the U.S. online grocery market hit \$8 billion in monthly sales by March, holding steady from last year. This marks a 23 percent increase from March 2020, the onset of the pandemic. David Bishop of Brick Meets Click highlights the unexpected long-term impact of the pandemic on eGrocery, shaping future profitability strategies for retailers and businesses.

Data Shows Retail Sales Grew in March Amid Early Easter, Bigger Tax Refunds and More Jobs

The Retail Monitor calculation of core retail sales – excluding restaurants in addition to automobiles and gasoline – was up 0.23% month over month and up 2.92% year over year in March. That compared with increases of 0.27% month over month and 2.99% year over year in February, based on the first 28 days in February.

March 2024 Retail Monitor

CNBC/NRF March Retail Monitor, powered by Affinity Solutions



Source: Affinity Solutions, Consumer Purchase Insights

NRF Center
for Retail & Consumer Insights

affinity
solutions



Village Trust Initiative Launched: Expertise and Funding Available to Support Community Revitalization

The Initiative's first year will support up to seven communities. Selected communities will receive support with community engagement, pre-development technical assistance and consulting/contracted services, and substantial implementation funding. Projects could be the revitalization of a general store, the creation of a community center, improvements to the accessibility of an old town hall, renovation of a large historic home into housing, and more.

[Learn more here](#), and [join an informational webinar April 30 at 10am](#).

The power of post-purchase engagement: Strategies for lasting customer loyalty

In today's retail world, the post-purchase experience is vital for building loyalty. Research shows loyal customers drive most revenue, emphasizing the need for positive post-purchase engagement. With a robust strategy and technology, retailers can boost satisfaction, drive repeat purchases, and cultivate brand advocates for long-term growth. [To read the full article, click here.](#)

FREE Downloadable Retail Tools

Recent volatility in the retail landscape has upended business strategies for many retailers. This suite of free retail tools was designed to help you stay laser-focused on the metrics that matter, and plan for a faster recovery. Management One, an inventory management solution, provides some free resources to help you gain clarity on your metrics to grow your business. [Find these FREE resources here.](#)

10 Things Indie Retailers Can Do To Maximize Sales This Spring

With consumers eager to refresh their wardrobes and embrace the spirit of renewal, now is the perfect time for indie retailers to capitalize on this opportunity.

To ensure you make the most of the spring season, here are ten (10) essential strategies to maximize your sales:

- Invest in Open to Buy Planning
- Analyze Past Spring Sales Data
- Spruce Up Your Retail Merchandising
- Focus on Seasonal Trends
- Enhance Online Presence

[Click here to read on.](#)

Member News

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Looking for something from a previous newsletter?

[CLICK HERE](#)



Congratulations to Samantha Kingsley for receiving the Department of Liquor and Lotteries' inaugural Top In-House Trainer Award. Samantha trained 52 people for [Stewart's Shops Corp](#) in 2023. Samantha, pictured on the right next to Education Manager Jennifer Fisher, uses Stewart's dedicated training space at their West Rutland location to conduct job fairs, new hire training, and certification renewals and completions for Vermont and New York State employees.

Hannaford Partners with Dig Deep Vermont to Aid Flood-Affected Family Farms

[Hannaford](#) is contributing \$25,000 to Dig Deep Vermont to aid family farms affected by recent floods and extreme weather. Throughout April and May, all Hannaford stores in Vermont will host donation kiosks for customers to contribute digitally or with cash. The donations will support impacted farms across the state. This initiative complements Hannaford's ongoing efforts to support local farms.

Celebrating its 50th anniversary, [Keeler's Bay Variety Store](#) stands as a testament to dedication and community spirit. Founded in 1974 by Mark and Gail Horne, this family-owned business has been a cornerstone of South Hero, Vermont, providing essential goods and a warm welcome to locals and visitors alike. As South Hero grew from a small town of 1000 to over 1700 residents, KBV evolved alongside, offering fresh, local produce and maintaining a steadfast commitment to exceptional customer service. Now, with their daughter Wendy Horne at the helm as co-owner and store manager, the legacy continues. Having grown up within its walls, Wendy brings a passion for community and a dedication to maintaining KBV's reputation for excellence. With plans to assume full ownership in the future, the Horne family ensures that Keeler's Bay Variety Store will remain a cherished institution for many years to come.

Association Staff is here to help!

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