

March 1, 2024 | The Association for Merchandise Buyers of Zoos, Aquariums & Gardens | www.zaggift.com

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Interested in joining the board?

Elections are right around the corner!!

August 1st--Call for Candidates

September 1st--Voting begins

October 1st--Voting closes

Have questions about being a board member?

Please reach out and we would be more than happy to answer them!



A LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

BY DAVID WHITAKER
PRESIDENT, ZAG
DIRECTOR OF RETAIL OPERATIONS,
NORTH CAROLINA ZOO

GET READY it's here! A new and exciting 2024 season is upon us.

This year, I am pleased to introduce the new ZAG board officers who will be joining me: Sheila Wewers as Vice President, succeeding Tommy Brown; Rose Domas, who will continue in the role of Communications Officer; and Samantha Halligan, taking over as Secretary/Treasurer from Judy Rancour. A warm welcome is extended to Jadena Terrell from Zoo World and Jon Lawrence from Potter Park Zoo as new board members. In the image below, you can see board members Sheila Wewers, Samantha Halligan, Elie Johnson, Jadena Terrell, Jon Lawrence, Rose Domas, and April Terranella. Unfortunately, I was unable to attend the January Board Meeting at the Surf Show due to illness.

ZAG is made up of dedicated retail professionals – like you and me – who are happy to share ideas, contacts, success stories and sometimes failures with their peers. Since we do not directly compete with one another, we benefit from everyone performing well. ZAG is a resource for all to use, or not, depending on need. For new buyers, it's a ready-made group of people to ask questions – “how do I navigate a trade show” or “how do I plan a seasonal buy?”; but for more seasoned buyers it's also a great resource to quickly problem solve - “does anyone know where I can find “x” product?”. We are all more successful in the long run!

When we kick off the 2024 trade show season, ZAG will once again provide some travel scholarships for those interested and able to attend. Keep an eye out for email notifications ahead of the markets to discover the available offers. I eagerly anticipate meeting many of you in the upcoming year!

Please don't hesitate to reach out to any of the board members if you have any questions or ideas.

David: 336-953-4771

Sheila: 651-487-8215

Samantha: 218-730-4500, ext. 204

Rose: 718-741-8293

April: 816-595-1167

Elie: 813-935-8552, ext. 3243

Jadena Terrell: 850-230-1243

Jon Lawrence: 517-244-8021

MEET THE NEW BOARD MEMBERS



JADENA TERRELL
ZOO WORLD, ASSISTANT DIRECTOR



JON LAWRENCE
POTTER PARK ZOO,
CUSTOMER SERVICES MANAGER

WHY DID YOU WANT TO JOIN THE BOARD?

JT: One word passion! I have a passion to help others in this industry. It has been such a life changing experience to work with colleagues who share the same passion I have for the zoo industry and our gift shops. ZAG brings so much to the table for vendors and buyers, so I wanted to be a part of it.

JL: I decided to run for the board as I have always found service to industry is a key component of networking and staying ahead of trends. While it requires dedication to the boards work on behalf of the members of the organization, the ability to work closely with other professionals in the field, deepening relationships and empowering others to navigate challenges that our industry faces each day helps me to continue to learn, lead, and adapt.

FAVORITE ANIMAL?

JT: American Alligators!

JL: I have always liked owls in all their shapes and sizes but a recent addition to Potter Park Zoo is a new Okapi exhibit and currently the Okapi has captivated my interest!

CURRENT FAVORITE GIFT SHOP PRODUCT?

JT: My current favorite product is anything from African Bronze Honey Company. Not only is the product itself amazing but they work with 10,000 Beekeepers, a woman owned company, in Zambia.

JL: Like so many retailers, answering this question often brings us to the highest sales volume items, however I think my favorite product currently is a series of small clay figurines and note cards produced by a local artisan who grew up coming to our zoo. Alex, who is on the autism spectrum, has developed his love of animals into a business (Alex's Clay Creations). He provides small one-of-a-kind replicas of animals on exhibit and the combination of his artistic abilities and his story have guests engaging in his products and asking for more.

WHAT DO YOU LIKE MOST ABOUT WHAT YOU DO?

JT: I love the challenges that each day brings. No two days are the same! I have also met some amazing people during my career, many who have become dear friends, but all have had an impact on my life.

- JL: I really enjoy seeing the outcome of my teams hard work through positive guest actions, or visitor surveys and comments. While my job here at Potter Park Zoo encompasses development and execution of the retail opportunities, I also oversee the food service, admissions, parking, and public safety. At times all of this can be a handful but, more often than not, it puts me in a great position to observe the guest interactions and the value we bring to the overall experience & message of conservation our institution strives for. I appreciate working with others and collaborating to deliver the collective experiences we make available to schools, groups, and all of our guests.

UPCOMING TRADE SHOWS

TOY FEST: MARCH 3RD-5TH
ASD MARKET: MARCH 10TH-13TH
THE REUNION: A SOUVENIR, GIFT & RESORT SHOW: APRIL 4TH-6TH
ATLANTA MARKET: JULY 17TH-22ND
NEW YORK NOW: AUGUST 4TH-7TH
ASD MARKET: AUGUST 4TH-7TH
SURF EXPO: SEPTEMBER 5TH-7TH
LAS VEGAS SOUVENIR & RESORT GIFT SHOW: SEPTEMBER 17TH-20TH
THE GATHERING: OCTOBER 7TH-10TH
ICES SEVIERVILLE: NOVEMBER 5TH-7TH
ICES PIGEON FORGE: NOVEMBER 6TH-9TH
SMOKY MOUNTAIN GIFT SHOW: NOVEMBER 6TH-9TH
OCEAN CITY RESORT GIFT EXPO: NOVEMBER 13TH-15TH
GRAND STRAND GIFT & RESORT MERCH SHOW: DECEMBER 8TH-11TH

DON'T FORGET TO FIND OUR ZAG SPONSORS AT THE SHOWS! ZAG PLATES WILL BE DISPLAYED IN THEIR BOOTHS.



**THANK YOU,
SPONSORS!!**





MEMBER SPOTLIGHT
BY ROSE DOMAS
COMMUNICATIONS OFFICER, ZAG
BUYER, WILDLIFE CONSERVATION SOCIETY



**JAMIE GLOVER – RETAIL MANGER - NEW YORK AQUARIUM:
SHORE SHOP & OCEANIC**

What is your favorite product – Cuddlekins from Wild Republic! Their assortment is amazing. Wild Republic produces incredible life like plush, with the added feature of recycled stuffing. All our key animals at New York Aquarium are represented, which delights every guest, young and old as they come into our gift stores. These purchases represent the connection they have had with our exhibits.

Best Sellers - Hello Kitty Mermaid from Fiesta & Jumbo Red Pacific octopus from Petting Zoo – these are always selling out before we can refill the floor! I have two very distinct stores – Shore Shop is anchored by our newly renovated “Plaquarium” and “Spineless Wonders” exhibits. The product in this store is geared to octopus and Jellies – one of our top sellers is the Jumbo Pacific Red Octopus from Petting Zoo. My second store “Oceanic” is near our exit and our Sealion Show. Naturally Sealions are top sellers in all sizes – but fan favorites are the Sea Otters – these playful creatures lend themselves to cute and cuddly toys.



Advice for other Store Managers – Listen to your team, they are on the front line. Embrace their ideas – remember it is not a one person show and only a team can drive the business. Partner with your buying office – communicate regularly and don’t be shy to say that you don’t think some items are right for your customer – because it is all about driving sales which goes back to the mission of the park.

Busy Season – Spring break & the height of summer. We are right next door to the world-famous Coney Island amusement park and boardwalk. During the summer months there is so much excitement in our part of New York City.

What do I like most about my job – Interaction with guests – making sure they have a great experience every time they visit our aquarium. Great customer service goes a long way – we want to make sure that our guests are happy during each part of their visit.



BOTTOM LINE BOTOX BY SHEILA WEWERS

VICE PRESIDENT, ZAG
ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR OF RETAIL OPERATIONS,
GARDEN SAFARI GIFTS COMO PARK ZOO AND CONSERVATORY

Keeping your retail in-house isn't just about the numbers. As ZAG retailers, we sometimes focus on the needs of the present and forget about the needs of the future; we then get caught off guard when our institution contracts the retail out to a concessionaire. It's time to re-think how we provide for the sustainability of our institution's in-house retail locations by giving our stores a facelift.

Several years ago, our main store went through a modest store remodel and our satellite store went through a refresh. When I asked the President of Como Friends, Jackie Sticha, why she was willing to invest in a store remodel rather than outsource with a concessionaire, her response was:

"Garden Safari Gifts had seen strong sales numbers over the years. However, the main store at Como Zoo's entrance saw a lot of traffic and was needing updates to refresh it. The gift shop directors presented a well-thought-out plan for remodeling the store to improve flow and sales space. They had a successful track record of developing strong strategy and producing results. They are very attuned to the shopping interests of Como Zoo guests. A store remodel was needed to provide them a platform for keeping guests engaged and for taking sales to the next level. It has proven to be a good investment as sales have grown annually."



Before



After

After: fresh paint, better lighting, new fixtures

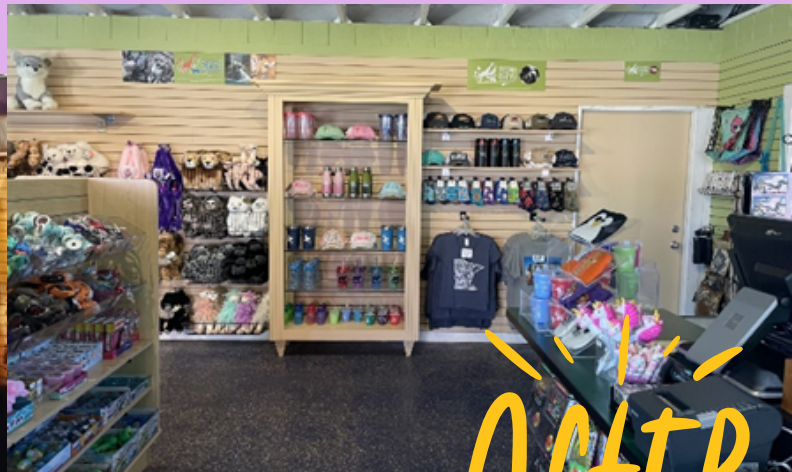
BOTTOM LINE BOTOX CONTINUED

How long has it been since you visually modernized your store or added new fixtures? If you're not sure, then it's been too long! A store refresh or remodel about every 10 years is a vital component to maintaining retail relevancy and will translate into higher sales. But it doesn't happen without planning...

Involve your Decision Makers. Including the top decision makers in conversations about a refresh or remodel is key to keeping your retail in-house. It lets them know you are invested in seeing growth and provides the decision makers with ownership (and bragging rights) for the success of your store. By encouraging ownership and financial investment from your decision makers, in even the smallest remodel, your decision makers will be far less tempted to outsource retail when the concessionaire dangles a remodel as part of their proposal.

Make your case. Few people live in their home without ever making updates to it. Why should your store be any different? If your store design is over 10 years old, it's important to show your decision makers how an update of your store fixtures, lighting, and layout can allow you to stay competitive in an ever-changing retail landscape. Don't forget to include how customer service can be positively impacted by a fresh new look with updated lighting, better traffic flow patterns, and modern displays that entice shoppers to engage and encourage staff ownership and job satisfaction. And how about the efficiency angle? A new POS system can lead to faster check-outs and more accurate inventories. All these updates will translate into stronger sales and ensure your shopping environment is the best it can be!

Before



After: new POS terminal,
neutral paint colors

AFTER

Ask for the funds to complete the remodel. This process does not happen overnight. Start the conversation NOW! Planning is key; sometimes it takes more than a year to get the budget approved, not to mention the time needed to create the store remodel plan. The process might include hiring a consultant to bring current design elements into your location. Re-think your store layout. Add color and lighting. It's ok if you don't get everything on your wish list the first time – that allows you to continue the conversation. Once the conversation door to refreshing your store has been opened, don't let it close! Keeping your retail space fresh and relevant is an ongoing process, and will ultimately lead to higher sales, better customer service and happier staff!



YEAR-END FINANCIALS BY APRIL TERRANELLA

BOARD MEMBER, ZAG
RETAIL OPERATIONS MANAGER,
KANSAS CITY ZOO & AQUARIUM



“How was your year?”

We should all be able not only to answer this question, but to know how to answer depending on who is asking the question. It may be our peers asking and looking for helpful information and ideas for their institution. It may be our higher-level management at our own institution. We can also use our prior year KPIs (Key Performance Indicators) to help us find areas of improvement for the next year.

What are we using to gauge our success? Overall, most institutions will be looking at revenue, per cap, average transactions, cost of goods, and labor expenses. Most institutions will also be very interested in the net profit margin. Knowing what KPIs are most important to your institution is the key.

The goals are to be over in revenue, higher per cap and average transactions, under in cost of goods, under in labor expenses, and above projected Net Profit Margin compared to budget and prior year. More importantly, knowing why you are over or under is what truly matters. If revenue, per cap and average transactions are down, why? Some factors that may affect these numbers are attendance, weather, closed exhibits or construction in your institution near your retail locations, etc. The importance of knowing is so that you can course correct at the time if possible or reevaluate for the next year to find strategies to increase those KPIs. If the cost of goods is coming in higher than anticipated, it may be time to look at item pricing and sale strategies. We all know it takes money to make money, but controlling labor expenses and using labor effectively is very important for most institutions.

We can be better buyers and business operators by knowing and evaluating our financials. This gives us the ability to plan and buy differently when needed. We should always know what our top selling items and categories every year are. It is also a good idea to break that down per location if you operate multiple locations. Your buying strategy may need to be different for some locations than others. Numbers and data always tell the real story. I love numbers as much as I love buying and merchandising. Always know what is expected of you and use the numbers to help you continue to grow your business and institution. Cheers to a wonderful and profitable 2024!

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ZAG AT

SURF EXPO



**THANK YOU SURF EXPO FOR
HOSTING OUR BOARD MEETING**

WELCOME NEW ZAG SPONSORS!

The Original Bag of Poo®

Greetings ZAG members. My name is Barry Sullivan and I am the Creator and Founder of "The Original Bag of Poo"® novelty cotton candy products. Some of you I have met before and others I am looking forward to meeting. I am returning to ZAG after missing out during the COVID period of time.

A quick refresher about my products. Each bag is designed for FUN for that 4-10 year old customer who loves Aquariums and Zoos. Most notably, they love the animals and cotton candy.

Of course, kids that age talk non-stop about poo jokes. So, what better way than to give some fake poo to eat. The original color is brown and it turns their mouth brown.

In addition, all kids love stickers. Inside each bag comes a high quality water proof, fade resistant sticker of the animal. Naturally, they want to collect all of them. Plus, on the back of each bag is an educational piece of information for those kids who can read.

This year, I have lowered the price to \$3 plus FREE shipping. This should help your margins and drive sales at a MRSP of \$6.99 and a cost of \$3. I have seen sales volume double with a multiple price option of 1 for \$7, 2 for \$12 and 3 for \$15. Online ordering available.

Please reach out directly anytime. Let's have fun and give some.



mélange

COLLECTION

Our mission is to offer the very best in handmade gifts by blending quality design with artisan craftsmanship. We specialize in knit and crochet toys, ornaments, stockings, and clothing for children.

For over 20 years, Mélange Collection has built meaningful relationships with the same artisan communities around the globe and developed long-term, committed partnerships contributing to sustainable income, environmental awareness, and greater economic equality.

We keep people and planet top of mind by setting high standards for the materials we choose and for an ethical production process. From sourcing to design to finished product, our team is diligent in each step to ensure quality and beautiful items. We believe in making toys and gifts that people are proud to have in their homes. We want customers to love the products and feel good knowing that their purchases were well-made and made a difference.



At Wild West Shirt Co. we don't sell shirts, we sell art! Our artwork captures the spirit of the incredible places we explore, while our winning design formats can be customized for the unique zoos, aquariums, and gardens they represent. From artwork through production, we have the ability to take our intricate, multicolor artwork and pair it with the garments and hard goods that suit your retail needs.



CAPSMITH, INC.

HEADWEAR DISTRIBUTION

Capsmith, Inc. is a headwear & baseball cap manufacturing and wholesale production company located in Sanford, Florida with over 37 years in headwear expertise. We currently provide wholesale headwear to zoos, aquariums, gift shops and souvenir stores. We are trusted by many major private label zoos and aquariums to deliver headwear that sells while maintaining a high set of quality standards. We are American owned and operated, with a domestic production facility of 120 embroidery heads and in-house art staff consisting of 4 graphic artist and digitizing staff.

We carry in stock and ready to ship various zoo and aquarium headwear styles perfect to boost your profits. Fun Action Critter Caps such as Whale, Gator, Turtle and more, feature movable parts that are super fun to wear! We also carry Big Eye Critter Caps, perfect for a fun zoo or aquarium themed critter lover. If you dream of creating your own custom headwear collection, we can help with that too as part of our Overseas Custom Program. Call and speak to one of our sales representatives at 1-800-228-3889 or email sales@capsmith.com

THANK YOU TO ALL OUR ZAG SPONSORS!