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ABL Hosts Successful Annual Meeting of Beverage Alcohol Retailers; Recognizes Industry Leaders; Elects New Officers

BETHESDA, MD – American Beverage Licensees (ABL) concluded its 2026 Annual Meeting last week, bringing together beverage alcohol retailers, industry partners, and thought leaders from across the country for productive discussions, networking, and collaboration focused on the future of the beverage alcohol marketplace.

Held in Louisville, Kentucky on April 18-20, the meeting featured a robust program of general sessions, panels, and networking events designed to address some of the most pressing issues facing beverage licensees today. Attendees heard from industry CEOs, representatives from all three tiers of the beverage alcohol industry, and new voices representing technology firms with whom beverage licensees are engaging to make their businesses more efficient and profitable.

“The 2026 Annual Meeting once again demonstrated the strength and resilience of beverage alcohol retailers,” said ABL Executive Director John Bodnovich. “Our members continue to navigate a rapidly changing marketplace while remaining committed to their communities, their customers, and the responsible sale of beverage alcohol. This meeting reaffirmed the importance of working together to address the challenges and opportunities ahead.”

The meeting kicked off with a Sunday breakfast briefing from Surfside.io’s Eric Meth and Tim Sullivan, who walked attendees through how beverage alcohol retailers are driving new customer acquisition and incremental revenue with Surfside.

During Sunday’s general session, attendees received industry data insights from Dave Williams of BUMP Williams Consulting; were briefed on the latest in payment policy and trends from Beth Provenzano of the Merchant Advisory Group; learned the latest developments in the ongoing policy discussion surrounding intoxicating-THC products and beverages from Chelsea Crucitti of the Wine & Spirits Wholesalers of America; and heard an update on how competition issues in Washington, DC and the courts are shaping the beverage alcohol and consumer products industries from Chris Jones of the Main Street Competition Coalition.

On Monday, leadership from Sazerac Company, including Executive Chairman Mark Brown, CEO Jake Wenz, and Chief Legal Officer Maurice Loebel discussed external and internal pressures that are shaping the beverage alcohol marketplace, the path forward for spirits, and efforts to stop counterfeiting to preserve public safety and product integrity. Amanda Nguyen, President and CEO of the American Distilled Spirits Alliance shared with the audience a message of collaboration between leading distillers and retailers through trade association engagement, and the importance of supporting the system in which they all operate.

In addition to educational programming, attendees participated in a variety of networking opportunities, including the ABL Brand Showcase, which highlighted a diverse range of products from twenty-three suppliers and provided a platform for meaningful engagement between retailers and industry partners. Off-site events included tours and tastings at some of the most iconic bourbon distilleries and locations in Kentucky including Buffalo Trace Distillery, the Evan Williams Bourbon Experience and Rabbit Hole Distillery.

During the annual luncheon supported by Molson Coors Brewing Company, ABL recognized leaders for their service to ABL and the broader industry. A highlight of the meeting was the presentation of the ABL Top Shelf Award to Fred Noe III, Master Distiller of Jim Beam Brands, recognizing his enduring impact on the bourbon industry and his role in carrying forward a distinguished family legacy. Fred graced attendees with his unique reflections and humor on his life in the bourbon industry.

Bobby Greenawalt, completing his second term as ABL President, recognized JJ Moran of the Four Winds Liquor and Lounge in Cheyenne, Wyoming; and David Jabour of Twin Liquors in Austin, Texas with the ABL President's Award in recognition of their dedication and their meaningful contributions to ABL. ABL also honored individual licensees nominated by their state retail beverage associations with the Retailer of the Year awards.

During its business meeting, the ABL Board of Directors elected new officers to serve two-year terms. Nick Fede, Jr. of Kingstown Liquor Mart in North Kingstown, Rhode Island was elected President; Keith Kern of Jimmy's Saloon in Superior, Wisconsin was elected Vice President – On-Premise; Dirk van Veen of Mary's Liquors in Tahlequah, Oklahoma was elected Vice President – Off-Premise; and Brian Edwards of Cellar Door Wine & Spirits and Thoroughbred Spirits in Murray, Kentucky was elected as an At-Large member of the ABL Executive Committee.

"I am thrilled and humbled to be elected by my peers as the next President of American Beverage Licensees," said newly elected ABL President Nick Fede, Jr. "My family has been advocating for independent beverage licensees for over fifty years and I'm eager to bring my passion to this new role on a national stage. I look forward to building upon the work of my predecessors, especially Immediate Past-President Bobby Greenawalt, in protecting the three-tier system and the interests of ABL members nationwide."

ABL recognized its outgoing officers for their service and leadership to the organization and the industry including outgoing two-term President Bobby Greenawalt of Greenawalt Hospitality in Auburn, Alabama; outgoing Vice President – Off-Premise Nick Fede, Jr., outgoing Vice President – On-Premise Keith Kern; and outgoing At-Large member Mark O'Callaghan of Exit 9 Wine & Liquor Warehouse in Clifton Park, New York.

ABL extends its appreciation to all attendees, speakers, and sponsors whose participation made the 2026 Annual Meeting a success. For more information about ABL, please visit www.ablusa.org.

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American Beverage Licensees (ABL)

American Beverage Licensees is the preeminent national trade association for beverage alcohol retailers. Direct retail beverage alcohol sales in the United States generate more than 2.03 million well-paying jobs. ABL's thousands of on-premise and off-premise licensee members are independent and often family-owned establishments. The beverage retailing industry pays over \$27.9 billion in federal taxes and \$25.8 billion in state and local taxes annually.

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