

Leader of the Year	Reasoning
Jennifer Ciccodemarco	Jennifer is one of our Sobeys Wholesale Sales Representative. Jennifer supports our Vince's stores, and has done an outstanding job of ensuring that Vince's receives best in class customer support. She is always there to answer questions, provide support and ensure that the Vince's team has all of the tools available to them to grow their sales.
Rick Rabba	Great role model for other leaders in the marketplace. Hard working, ethical, and puts the community first.
Christy McMullen	Christy has built an inspirational career running a very successful third generation, family-owned, Canadian business, which has grown to an impressive 6 retail locations, a commissary, an event space, and a warehouse. Outside of Summerhill Market, Christy has earned her reputation as an advocate for smaller businesses, independent grocers in the food industry at large, for female business owners and women in the workplace in general. Christy is an accredited accounting professional, chair of the Ontario Food Terminal board, 2023 recipient of the Canadian Federation of Independent Grocers' (CFIG) Life Member Award and former board member of the CFIG, just to name a few of her most notable accomplishments. As the employer of over 450 employees, Christy has made it her personal mission to ensure each team member is given the opportunity to secure a meaningful career with continuous opportunity for professional learning, growth, stability and flexibility to establish balance within their personal lives. Christy employs women in all aspects of the company; inside the office, kitchens, the warehouse and the retail space and across diverse roles, encompassing vast skillsets in all facets of the business including executive level, management, cooks, marketing, IT, accounting and customer service professionals. She has also formed many close relationships with non-for-profit organizations in the community designed to support and provide opportunity to those in need.
Rina Virgilio	Set an example of how to be an effective manager, while being resilient in the face of hardships. Led operations and management of Greco's stores and shown a fine representation of strength and teamwork at her stores.
Kenny Shim	Has recently been appointed as the President of the Ontario Convenience Stores Association (OCSA). Kenny Shim is not only an independent store owner but is also the President of the Ontario Korean Businessmen's Association (OKBA). His exemplary leadership has left a lasting impact on the convenience store industry, and this nomination is a testament to his dedication and vision.
Brad Lawrence	Brad is the Director of Advertising and Marketing at Fine Foods Advertising Limited. Brad is a well respected, and hard working individual that keeps his finger on the pulse for all programs and marketing for over 400 plus program store at Fine Foods! Brad has over 30 years in the wholesale distribution with the last 4 years with Pratts Wholesale as the Director of Advertising & Marketing for Fine Foods Advertising Ltd. Brad's passion for helping indepent retailers is proven by his dedication to communicating with retailers, listening to their concerns and constantly finding new opportunities to help grow their business. Brad is well respected by the vendor community who also appreciates his dedication to the Independent Grocery Trade. Brad's "win win" approach ensures both the retailer and vendor benefit from programs. Brad is not shy to ask for a vendor deal to assistant with an anniversary sale or new ownership to help grow and spark the business. Brad is also a compassionate leader amongst his team with genuine caring for their mental health and team spirit. Friday team lunches and special outings to sports events go along way in today's world for a leader to show appreciation to staff and Brad believes in that 100%
Brian Bradley	Brian's leadership since assuming the role of President at Stong's has not gone unnoticed. His attention to detail and strong work ethic in carrying on the Stong's commitment to being a supporter of local suppliers and giving back to there local community through investing in schools, educational programs, local sports teams, local community programs and events. In previous year's, Stong's had to expand their Stong's Express online shopping service as it had very grown very quickly in a short period of time due to pandemic.
Kacee Kudrinko	<p>Owner Operator Kudrinko's Ltd in Westport, Ontario since 2010. Twenty years of grocery retail service to Westport prior to assuming ownership of the store with their wife Martha. Thirty-four years of combined service to the grocery industry.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Former member Board of Directors, Food Marketing Institute, Energy and Store Development Committee, and, Sustainability Executive Committee. • Leader in sustainability and energy efficiency having reduced the energy-related carbon emissions of the store by 90% since 2007. • Recipient of numerous industry awards -- 2012 Supermarket News Sustainability Excellent Award; 2014 Progressive Grocer Outstanding Independent Award - Greatness in Green; 2014 Canadian Grocer Generation Next Award; 2019 DCI Social Responsibility Award; 2022 Canadian Grocer Impact Award DE&I; 2023 Progressive Grocer Outstanding Independents Award DE&I; 2023 Inspire Award. In 2021, Kacee disclosed publicly that they are queer identifying. Along with their friend Jessica Roberts they were successful in getting the town council in their rural village of 700 people to raise the Pride Flag, and subsequently started Westport Pride. Westport Pride's accomplishments include fostering a more inclusive and affirming social environment in their community, hosting social events in the village, and establishing a queer lending library above Kacee and Martha's second store, Rosie Yumski's Fine Foods, as well as supporting community events such as Drag Storytime at local libraries. In 2022 Kacee added Gender Affirming Care benefits to their Employee Benefits program, ensuring that gender expansive employees or their dependents would have the support they need to affirm their gender and authentic identities. Kacee was subsequently successful in getting Sun Life to revise their Gender Affirming Care program to remove gendered language, thereby expanding benefits to nonbinary individuals, and expanding the list of supports available to plan members. These changes have benefits GAC qualifying Sun Life plan members in every industry, and in every province of the country. Kacee has been a volunteer mentor with the Canadian Gay and Lesbian Chamber of Commerce since 2022. They have mentored a vertical hydroponics farmer located in Northern Ontario, and a Pet Treats manufacturer, helping them get their products ready for market, sharing industry knowledge and expectations, and facilitating relationships with key contacts in the grocery and pet supply industries. Kacee has shared their coming out experience with large corporations such as Sobeys and Coco-Cola Canada. They have been highlighted in company newsletters with an aim of fostering a more inclusive and affirming grocery industry for all. Kacee is participating in their third PWA Friends for Life Bike Rally, a 600km bike ride from Toronto to Montreal that raises funds for people living with HIV and AIDS. The rally also seeks to educate people about HIV and reduce stigma around the disease. To date, with the help of donors and corporate partners, Kacee has raised over \$15,000 in support of Trellis HIV and Community Care which supports people in the greater Kingston area living with HIV and AIDS. Recently, Kacee further disclosed that they are trans nonbinary, they have changed their name and have affirmed their pronouns. While these disclosures aren't without risk given the current political climate, being true to themselves and providing leadership in their community of Westport, and the grocery industry more broadly are important to Kacee.