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The Expansion of Workforce Opportunities in the Retail Industry



Bridget Lambert
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Retailers Association

Bridget Lambert is President of the West Virginia Retailers Association, a statewide trade association serving as the voice of the retail industry. Her work focuses on advancing and safeguarding the well-being of the retail industry as it undergoes unprecedented change. She has served on the board of the national Council of State Retail Associations and serves as the Chairwoman of the West Virginia Business and Industry Council. Lambert takes particular interest in watching the development of the next generation of community, civic, and business leaders – a passion that led to her past service as Board President of the Youth Leadership Association of OH/WV.

Retail remains the nation's largest private-sector employer, so it is no surprise that the retail industry in West Virginia supports 26% of the jobs statewide. The growth and evolution of the industry is unprecedented with the explosion of online shopping and delivery at the front door.



**WEST VIRGINIA
RETAILERS
ASSOCIATION**

The West Virginia Retailers Association has been representing all facets of retail across the state since 1941. Merchants strive to meet their customers' needs and expectations daily. One way that retailers are succeeding in this goal is the emergence of new and resourceful shopping options. And these new shopping options are helping to expand workforce opportunities both locally and regionally.

Customers most notably think of cashiers when they think of retail employees. In many instances, it is the cashier who builds a retailers' relationship with the community and keeps customers returning time and

students. The retail industry remains the largest employer of individuals aged 16-24. The team building skills taught and valued by the retail industry prove important for these young workers as they move forward in their career paths. A retail job also provides great opportunities for our senior citizens and those over age 55 who yearn for social interaction outside of the house and some padding to their retirement account.

Retailers strive to hire veterans in our communities, recognizing the talent, skill, and value they bring to our workplaces. Retailers offer professional growth opportunities to

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again. Now, in 2024, customers interact online, through omnichannel shopping, and acknowledge delivery drivers as an intricate part of securing goods at their household. The delivery of goods to a customer is becoming a part of everyday life and another way that retail supports ancillary industries.

Local merchants are often the first entry-level job for young high school and college

military families as they transition into civilian life. West Virginia is proud to be home to one of the largest per capita veteran populations in the country.

As community members in every part of the state, the retail industry, the West Virginia Retailers Association, and our employees never hesitate to respond in times of crisis. Whether it is a weather or health-related incident, our



team members are always quick to engage and assist. Retail members have a strong history of stepping up to supply tractor trailer loads of water, warm blankets, generators, vital medicine, groceries, gasoline, and pet supplies. Our members support and encourage employee volunteer days in their local communities.

Seasonal employment remains a cornerstone of the industry as retailers strive to meet consumer demand during the busy holiday season. Seasonal hiring provides an economic boost to local communities and the households of employees who join our workforce. Retailers from Main Street to the mall cherish serving their customers during the holiday season.

Our industry provides job seekers the ability to earn extra income while choosing a flexible schedule. A hallmark of the industry is its flexible scheduling and is the reason hundreds of West Virginians choose a retail career path.

Retail is where trained and skilled individuals can find a job close to home. Local trade schools provide the industry with the trained HVAC technicians that keep the stores cool, our food cooler, and the freezers humming. Highly skilled IT specialists keep online stores up and running, merchandise moving, while also servicing local in-house operations.

Retail is also where trained and skilled CDL-licensed drivers pursue a career that can take them across the country or from county-to-county transporting and delivering retail stock.

Over-the-road truck drivers transport the foods that fill our pantries, lifesaving prescriptions and over-the-counter medicines, automobile parts, gasoline, and the everyday necessities that fulfill our lives and sustain our communities.

Local CDL-licensed drivers transport goods from home building retailers to construction sites where the labor force is growing our economy. Retailers supply the goods that build our communities close to home.

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Vendors serving the retail industry operate out of small and large distribution warehouses, moving their brands onto store shelves. Goods warehoused near our grocery and convenience stores provide the assurance that shelves can be stocked at a moment's notice.

The West Virginia Community College system promotes a job-driven focus for public/private partnerships. The Eastern Panhandle has proven time and again the importance of these partnerships for regional economic growth.

When Macy's chose to locate one of the largest fulfillment centers on the East Coast in Martinsburg, they partnered with Blue Ridge Community and Technical College to prepare a work-ready workforce. Macy's commissioned the construction of a fulfillment center that encompasses 2.1 million square feet and houses over 14 miles of conveyors. Core employment at the center is 1,240, with hundreds of seasonal employees hired each fall, offering a variety of part-time and full-time opportunities in the region.

Overall, the retail industry employs over 200,000 workers in West Virginia and is one of the largest industry segments in the state. We provide exceptional educational opportunities, upward mobility, and flexibility to those choosing a retail career. West Virginia Retailers Association members are constantly evolving to meet customers' needs and will always play an integral role in all our communities. 