

# FAST FORWARD

*A newsletter from the Association of Taco John's Franchisees*

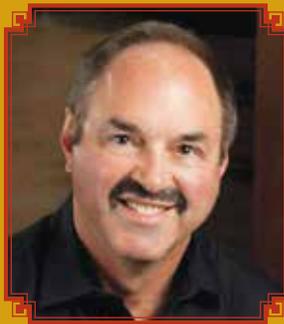
Summer 2017

## 2017 CONVENTION MARKS NEW BEGINNINGS

*By Bryon Itterman, Association President*

**T**he JW Marriott Starr Pass Resort in Tucson, Arizona, was the ideal setting for the April 2017 Taco John's National Convention. More than 400 people came together to "GO BIG" – this year's convention theme. All gathered in support of a call to go above and beyond; a commitment to delivering better-than-expected results; and a vow to meet high expectations and ambitious goals.

For the past five years, I've had the privilege to serve as Association president. Each year, I've opened the convention by reflecting on the state



of the chain from the franchise owner point of view. I am happy to report that the unrest, lack of trust within the chain and sharply divided opinions regarding our direction have been replaced by real positivity, thanks to Jim Creel, now at the helm as CEO. Jim is working to rebuild positive franchisee relations and in doing so has demonstrated an inclusive leadership style and a commitment for making the Taco John's business model work for all of us.

It was exciting to hear from TJI shareholders and board members their commitment to a strategic plan for the future of the chain. I believe we have the opportunity to be truly unified in creating the vision, planning and execution toward the future. As a franchisee, for the first time in years, I have

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*Welcome Reception at the 2017 National Convention, which was held in Tucson.*

## *Our Mission*

**"TO PROVIDE OUR MEMBERSHIP AN ENVIRONMENT FOR INCREASING LONG-TERM PROFITABILITY IN SUPPORT OF IMPROVED BUSINESS VALUE AND BRAND EQUITY."**

# Association Directory

## ADVERTISING PRODUCTION COMMITTEE

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<b>Brian Fuder, Vice Chairman</b>	<i>tacojohn@prtcl.com</i>	<b>218-998-1993</b>
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These franchisees serve on various boards and strive to represent your interests. Call them with your questions, comments and concerns. They want to hear from you.

## ASSOCIATION BOARD OF DIRECTORS

<b>Bryon Itterman President</b>	<i>itterman@pentexmanagement.com</i>	<b>605-229-2005</b>
<b>Walt Cressman 1st VP, Secretary &amp; Insurance/Legal/Finance/IT Liaison</b>	<i>waltcres10@aol.com</i>	<b>612-804-9200</b>
<b>Jim Atkinson VP, Treasurer &amp; Operations/Training Liaison</b>	<i>jimatkinson58@gmail.com</i>	<b>507-451-2023</b>
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<b>Gary Wofford Executive Director</b>	<i>garywofford@atjf.net</i>	<b>877-455-4749</b>

*To learn more about Association membership or committee or Board participation, contact any member of the Board of Directors or the Association office by phone at 877-455-4749 or by email to [ATJFranchisees@comcast.net](mailto:ATJFranchisees@comcast.net).*

## HELLO, TACO JOHN'S FRANCHISEES

I'm very proud to join the Taco John's family as the new vice president of marketing. I strongly believe we can increase sales by cultivating an engaging brand story for Taco John's and combining it with our already great food, efficient operations and festive atmosphere.

I come to Taco John's with a love of the restaurant industry, and a great deal of experience working with franchisees. I've spent much of my career working on a variety of restaurant brands both from the corporate level and the advertising agency side.

Out of college, I worked at the Carl's Jr. corporate office on everything from kid's meals to field marketing. Here I learned the importance of truly understanding the whole business: food costs, operations and the marketing calendar. My next restaurant was Del Taco. As director of marketing at Del Taco, I introduced a new brand story, a series of new products and core menu promotions that reversed declining transactions.

For the past decade, I've worked as agency account director for KFC's largest co-op of 251 restaurants in Los Angeles, plus 40 company restaurants in San Diego and the Arizona co-op of 45 restaurants. My team and I won the

*A letter from Tom Meyers, the new vice president of marketing for Taco John's International*



award for best local agency in the KFC system, two years in a row. My proudest moment came when I was named the first-ever non-franchisee to win the KFC Franchisee Associations' Shining Star Award. I also ran Papa John's largest co-op and achieved 102 weeks of positive comp sales out of the 115 weeks I worked on the account. Other accounts I worked on were Mimi's Cafe and TGI Fridays.

I have an extensive media background and, over the next few months, I'll be working closely with the advertising production committee to determine a new course for Taco John's, one that brings its brand story to life, better engages with customers and increases awareness and love for the brand.

By the time you read this, I'll have already worked in a Taco John's restaurant to help me better understand the brand, food and customers. I look forward to working with the Association of Taco John's Franchisees, the Advertising Production Committee and your co-ops to strengthen the brand and your investment in Taco John's.

# 2017 CONVENTION MARKS NEW BEGINNINGS *Continued from page 1*

renewed confidence that our collective expertise will leverage our strategic planning process.

We all must take responsibility to achieve our goals. For the TJI board of directors, this means providing vision for the future and the resources necessary to support the brand. TJI management has a responsibility as well, to chart our course and provide the tools and direction needed to reach new levels.

Franchise owners also have responsibilities. We must be active in the planning process and committed to both our vision for the future and the execution of newly defined chain-wide strategies.

Longevity is no longer a guarantee of success. Look at Sears, JCPenney and Kmart. The restaurant industry is overbuilt and not every concept will survive. It's imperative we all work together as we establish the proper identity for Taco John's for today's customers and those in the future.

Most importantly, we must ensure that Taco John's is a healthy, growing chain with a bright future. The Taco John's business model must provide a ROI that is attractive and

compelling in the marketplace. New restaurant growth will only become reality if Taco John's offers a competitive return on investment compared to other investor options. We must evolve. Staying the same will lead to the demise of our brand. A constant focus on meeting the expectations of an evolving customer base is the only real way to ensure a successful future!

At the April 2017 convention, I took the stage for the last time as Association president. I'd like to thank you all for the opportunity to help guide the Association these past five years. Taco John's is "family" and the Association is a big part of what holds our family together.

In Tucson, backed by the music and lyrics of Tim McGraw's "Humble And Kind," I shared my advice for being happy, successful and living a life you can be proud of. In my view, being humble and kind is what makes Taco John's special. I believe it will continue to be great as we set our new direction for the future. I am truly honored by your support.

Enjoy the summer spending quality time creating memories with family and friends. 



*Walter Bond presents during a general session.*



*Dick Hamilton (holding award) with Jeannette to his left surrounded by their family and company representatives.*



*Convention attendees look on as (l to r) Clint Langer, Janet Taylor, Kelley Digby, Terry O'Connor and Jim Creel engage in a fireside chat.*



*Bryon Itterman shares advice at the National Convention.*

# NATIONAL CONVENTION RECEIVES HIGH RATINGS

By Gary Wofford, Executive Director

From the opening Welcome Reception to the final closing party, it was apparent a new era has begun for Taco John's. General attitudes were upbeat and positive with attendees enjoying strong business content, terrific guest speakers, great food and entertainment in a near-perfect setting. Yes, our 2017 convention can be labeled a success!

Association president Bryon Itterman and TJI president & CEO Jim Creel welcomed convention attendees at the first general session highlighted by the first-ever "Fireside Chat," facilitated by Jim Creel. Presentations by Ted Suor, vice president of supply chain; Stacie Homan, director of training; and Van Ingram, vice president of franchise development followed with each department introducing their teams and presenting their future plans and strategies.

Keynote speaker Walter Bond provided a great message focused on having the right "Methodology" to not only achieve, but to exceed your goals and take your business to the next level through proper leadership, thinking and execution.

The Association membership's annual meeting followed Tuesday's general session. Key topics included a presentation of the year-ending 2016 Operating Profit study by franchisee and ATJF board member Jeff Brands. There was also a special presentation on succession planning and business valuation.

The Golf Calcutta auction was the highlight of Tuesday evening. For the first time, this annual event was augmented by a fundraiser to benefit Make-A-Wish Foundation. A total of \$7,500 was raised to help grant the wish of a particular

child. The money raised came from the selling of raffle tickets to attendees and voluntary contributions. New products, technologies and services were a huge hit at the Vendor Show, where 72 exhibitors previewed things to come for the Taco John's chain.

The awards program Wednesday evening recognized top performing restaurants for sales achievements in 2016, along with special awards. Jeff Brands of Taco John's of Iowa was recognized as "Mr. Taco" for significant contributions in 2016 to franchisees and Taco John's. (See profile on Jeff on page 5.)

Dick and Jeannette Hamilton, Rapid City, South Dakota, received the "Lifetime Achievement Award." Dick has mentored many franchisees who started their Taco John's career in one of the Hamiltons stores. The Hamilton's also received the "Founder's Cup" in recognition of the highest sales for 2016 (Campbell Street location in Rapid City).

Presentations by Bob Karisny, vice president of menu strategy and innovation; Jimmy Orr, director of digital marketing strategy; and Rocky Clark, vice president for Operations; kicked off the second general business session on the final day.

Special guest speaker John Foley, former lead pilot for the Blue Angels, delivered a captivating presentation on teamwork and taking performance to a higher level. He delivered on his promise to bring a new understanding to his theme "Glad to Be Here."



## ATTENDEES RATE THE 2017 TJ NATIONAL CONVENTION

Rating Scale: Excellent = 5; Very Good = 4; Adequate = 3; Fair = 2; Poor = 1

### GENERAL SESSIONS

Bryon Itterman Presentation	★★★★★	4.40
Jim Creel Fireside Chat	★★★★★	4.18
TJI Department Presentations	★★★★★	4.13
Walter Bond Presentation	★★★★★	4.12
John Foley Presentation	★★★★★	4.48
Vendor Show	★★★★★	4.57
Association Membership Meeting	★★★★★	4.00
Awards Program	★★★★★	4.52

### OTHER

Information Provided in Advance	★★★★★	4.47
On-site Registration Process	★★★★★	4.81
JW Marriott Resort (Overall)	★★★★★	4.36

### SOCIAL EVENTS

Welcome Reception	★★★★★	4.51
Golf Calcutta	★★★★★	4.42
Make-A-Wish Fundraiser	★★★★★	4.44
Golf Tournament	★★★★★	4.42

**2018 National Convention details will be announced during the fall of 2017!**

# JEFF BRANDS HONORED AS MR. TACO

**H**onored but humbled. That's how Jeff Brands describes his reaction to receiving the Mr. Taco award at the 2017 annual convention. "It was definitely a great honor to receive the award," Jeff explains, "but it was humbling because there were many other qualified, deserving people in that room."

That response from Jeff is right in character, as the terms "servant leader, humble and kind" were included in his introduction and have characterized his leadership style throughout his 22-year association with Taco John's. In his personal goals, Jeff notes he wants "to be an ordinary person quietly producing extraordinary results."

After earning his accounting degree, Jeff began his career with a Big 8 public accounting firm in Kansas City. Eight years later, Jeff met Bill Byrne, and joined Taco John's of Iowa (TJIA) in 1994 as their director of accounting and finance. He moved back into public accounting in 1999, then rejoined TJIA in 2000 as vice president and chief financial officer. Over time, Jeff became more involved in the operations side of the enterprise and was named president in 2005.

## TEAM AWARD

Jeff is not fond of the spotlight and will always defer praise to his team. "I'm a believer in the team approach to leadership," he states. "Awards like this are a recognition of our team. I'm able to do the things I do because of those supporting me."

The team approach is just one aspect of his leadership style. Over the years, he's built his philosophy on a foundation of core beliefs while incorporating concepts gleaned from his faith, an extensive reading list and other leaders. "My overall goal is to glorify and honor God by serving Him, and to add value to others by serving them," Jeff states. "In 2016, we adopted a new company mission statement: 'To SERVE our guests, our vendor partners and each other as we would like to be served.' We strive for a culture of service above self."

"At Taco John's restaurants, we may not beat our competition on price, but I believe we will beat them with our food," he continues. "So, if we can also top them with our service, we win. Service must be the differentiator – always improving. And, if I want our staff to practice service above self, it has to start with me."

Service has been evident in Jeff's involvement with the franchisee



*Jim Creel, left, presents the Mr. Taco award to Jeff Brands.*

association over the years. He's served two terms on the board, one year as president and on several committees. Jeff also played a major role in the creation of the association profit study, which helps franchises compare their financial performance to association-wide benchmarks.

"Taco John's has given me a lot over 22 years," Jeff notes. "Association involvement is just one way I can give something back."

## ALWAYS EVOLVING

Jeff views the Mr. Taco award not as an indication that he has arrived but as a sign he is heading in the right direction. "As a team, we're always working to make it better," Jeff says. "If you're not growing, the world is passing you by."

"There are many different definitions of success," Jeff concludes. "Mine has been the same for the past 20 years—success is having those closest to me, love and respect me the most. That keeps a lot of things in perspective." 

## MARKETING UPDATES

*By Jeff Bremer, ATJF Director and Marketing Liaison*

- F**ollowing are a few highlights and updates from the May 2017 Ad Production Committee meetings:
- July 2017 Managers' Event in Minneapolis – If attending, take time to become acquainted with the TJ Rewards program and the use of the readers. Training will be provided and questions answered.
  - Upcoming National Promotions –
    - July/August: Sirloin Steak Tacos
    - August – October: Pork Carnitas Breakfast Taco
    - Secondary Promotions include "Fiesta Hour" and "Taco Blitz" with a chance to win tickets to the Super Bowl, Feb. 4, 2018 – Minneapolis, Minnesota
    - November/December: Nachos Navidad® and Apple Grande

**Reminder:** The LSM Quarterly Asset Calendar allows you to plan ahead for potential marketing opportunities. Each month showcases suggested dates and promotions to run for awareness, pushing ticket average, driving transactions and promoting goodwill.

Please note holiday assets should be posted two weeks in advance.

The purpose of quarterly planning is to allow you to align current local store marketing (LSM) resources with each month's seasonal events. When considering each opportunity, it is important that the event meets one or more of the following objectives:

1. Generate awareness
2. Create goodwill
3. Drive transactions
4. Increase check average

As you select your LSM efforts, please make sure to visit the on-demand resources at [www.gfxsymphony.com/tacojohns](http://www.gfxsymphony.com/tacojohns) to explore all items currently available. If you require additional graphic support, email your custom request to [graphics@tacojohns.com](mailto:graphics@tacojohns.com). If you have any questions or concerns, please contact Rachel Peterson, marketing specialist - [graphics@tacojohns.com](mailto:graphics@tacojohns.com)

