



# CENEX® STORE CHAMPIONS INCLUSIVITY AND COMMUNITY



Those who live or grew up in a small town know the importance of neighborly bonds. In towns like Grand Rapids, Minn., those connections come through at the businesses that make the town special. When local businesses are engrained in the community, it's more likely to be successful and be a place residents choose to return to time-and-time again.

The secret is having store owners and operators that are a connector. Northern Star Co-op retail manager Sarah Bellefy is a person people lean on. After 27 years of working at and managing Cenex® stores through Northern Star Co-op, Bellefy is known wherever she goes as “Cenex Sarah.”

As she climbed the ranks from part-time clerk to retail manager, Bellefy always ensured that the Cenex stores she helped manage reflected the same neighborly atmosphere exhibited throughout the towns they served. So, when she was given the opportunity to build a new store in Grand Rapids, she was determined to bring that same ambiance to the new location.

“What has kept me motivated for so long are the people,” said Bellefy. “This Grand Rapids Cenex location feels like when you’re here, you’re home. The people here are your family, and we’re here to serve the community. Everyone is treated the same here.”

When embarking on the store build, Bellefy, knew she needed to work with partners who understood the importance of community. She enlisted the help of the Cenex-brand and leveraged it's LIFT initiative, a lighting, image, and facilities transformation. The LIFT initiative was created to make it easier for all stores in the Cenex family to make improvements to both the interior and exterior of their location through low interest financing. The initiative also gives each store owner or operator the flexibility to customize their store in a way that makes the most sense for their community.

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Thanks to LIFT, Northern Star Co-op was able to easily create the most ideal store for its community—inside and out. Additionally, the initiative’s low interest funding gave Bellefy the creative freedom she never knew was possible. Bellefy also worked with local businesses like Casper Construction and other companies that provided services like painting and waste collection. By working with local businesses, Bellefy was able to make design and functionality decisions that truly represent Grand Rapids.

### Embracing the community

Upon walking into the store, customers will notice four murals that represent significant landmarks and aspects of the town. Additional in-store design components include log beams, new hardwood floors and nods to the Blandin Paper Company – a main source of jobs for many families in the community.

“The log theme reflects the history of Grand Rapids,” said Ken Peterson, store manager of the Grand Rapids Cenex. “The Blandin Paper Company used to bring all the wood down the rivers, and they employed log rollers. Plus, to this day Grand Rapids has Tall Timbers Days in August to celebrate our history. It’s a huge piece of our community, which is why we wanted to bring that element inside the store.”

In addition to bringing the history of the town into the store, it was vital for Bellefy to ensure that the store was accessible for all members of the community. Throughout



the planning process, ADA Accessibility Guidelines were kept top of mind so that all elements made exploring the store easy for residents who use wheelchairs or canes.

Bellefy and Peterson also made it a point to incorporate the Electronic Benefits Transfer (EBT) program, an electronic system that allows a Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) member to pay for food using SNAP benefits. Knowing that many residents in the community rely on assistance, it was extremely important to make EBT a payment option.

“With EBT, there needs to be a certain level of grocery and fresh food items available,” said Bellefy. “Sometimes in convenience stores, it’s not possible to have the quantity of what’s available. The partners available through LIFT helped us be compliant with EBT. It’s just one of the ways this store better serves our community by providing them with what they need.”

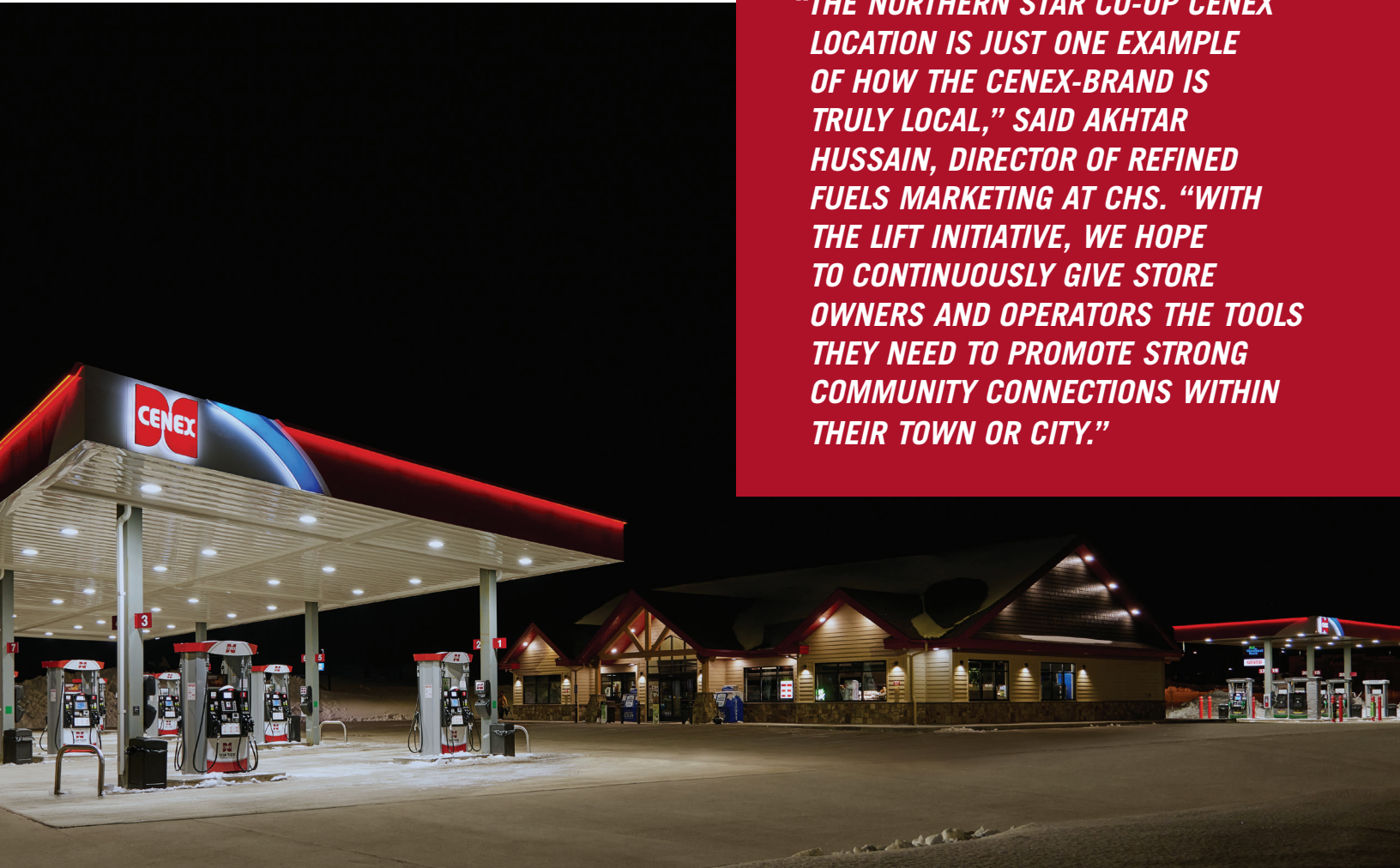
### Drawing customers in

As with any c-store, the interior can only be enjoyed if a customer is drawn in by the exterior. To drive consumer preference with improved curb appeal, all Cenex locations will receive an exterior image refresh called Halo. Halo is part of the LIFT initiative, and includes enhancements to the canopy and forecourt, including a three-dimensional Cenex logo, backlit blue arches and a 360-degree LED light band. This added lighting creates a safe and friendly



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environment for customers, allowing them to feel secure while visiting the store during later hours.

“The Halo image at the forecourt is a really great way to get customers feeling welcome and comfortable even before they walk in,” said Bellefy. “The bright lighting draws people in and makes them want to continue coming here for their necessities.”

In addition to Halo, the Grand Rapids Cenex location decided to invest in other welcoming features. These included a large parking lot that easily accommodates semi-trucks and other large vehicles or boats, along with a designated rest area for truck drivers to stop and sleep through the night.

“Our facility makes it so easy to just drive through, go around and get out,” said Peterson. “Our pumps allow people to pull in with campers and fish houses and be able to still turn in front of the building and get out. Or even the other way if they come in the other way. As a convenience store, we wanted to make it convenient.”

Since the store is still new to town, Bellefy and Peterson show no signs of letting up on their efforts. Through their partnership with the Cenex brand, they aim to foster connections among both employees and customers at the store.

“The Northern Star Co-op Cenex location is just one example of how the Cenex-brand is truly local,” said Akhtar Hussain, Director of Refined Fuels Marketing at CHS. “With the LIFT initiative, we hope to continuously give store owners and operators the tools they need to promote strong community connections within their town or city.” ■



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