

Clark Associates Introduces New Convenience Store Division To Better Serve Its Customers

*What is your brand?
Who do you want to
be?*

"It's something that all convenience store retailers need to decide," says Marguerite Sottek, director at the newly formed Clark Convenience Store Products division, which is a division of Clark Associates, Inc., based in Lancaster, Pennsylvania.

With a renewed focus on the convenience store industry, Clark Convenience Store Products division is helping convenience store companies cultivate their brand, develop a uniform look and build their own unique identity.



From its beginning in 1971, Clark Associates has emphasized serving its customers' needs with quality service and products. The company has expanded into 13 divisions to specialize in specific areas of business. With divisions spanning design services to equipment, sales and service, Clark offers turnkey solutions to assist its customers with almost every project through a single contact person. This helps retailers save time and money since they don't have to juggle many different contractors.

Clark Service and Parts, its division located in Smoketown, Pennsylvania, offers service, installation and parts for commercial equipment. Through the years, the division provided comprehensive services for the education, restaurant and retirement industries, while dabbling in the convenience store business. In January 2009, the Clark Convenience Store Products division formally opened.

Vice President Glenn Clark Jr. leads the new division, which has worked on projects with large and independent convenience store retailers throughout eastern Pennsylvania. Marguerite Sottek joined him in 2008 after working for a convenience store wholesaler for 10 years.

Two years ago, the company expanded its relationship with York, Pennsylvania-based Rutter's Farm Stores by helping the company with a major store redesign.

"Mr Clark called on Rutter's with the Service and Parts division," explains Sottek. "They became comfortable with our service level. It was a natural progression to work on their design and build projects."

"Glenn has provided our equipment and service for nearly 10 years," says Tim Rutter, president and CEO, M&G Realty Company. "If there is a problem with a piece of equipment, he is a phone call away. While they've grown, they still provide small business attention to their customers' needs."

When Jerry Weiner, Rutter's vice president of food service, developed stir-fry dishes as a new food concept for Rutter's Farm Stores, Clark introduced the company to many different vendors to find the right equipment to meet their needs.

"Glenn was there for us as our right hand man from concept to fruition," Rutter says.

Rutter's selected the Induction Wok System to create its original stir-fry recipes. The wok system allows the company to create its signature stir-fry meals quickly and safely, since the wok burner does not heat until a pan is placed on it.

"The wok opened up a huge number of menu possibilities for us," Rutter says. "In addition to the stir-fry dishes, we're now offering fajitas and they've become very popular."

Sottek says retailers should develop a signature item. Rutter's made the bold choice to feature new oriental stir-fry dishes in its redesigned stores.

"They really stuck their neck out to put a label on who Rutter's is," she says. "It's new and innovative." Clark Convenience Store Products has helped incorporate other original equipment into convenience store designs, such as the Technibilt Shelf System, which features see-through wire racking systems; and a Lidsaver, which dispenses one lid at a time, promoting cleanliness while cutting down on waste.

Tim Rutter first saw the Lidsavers from a Midwest vendor and told Clark that he was interested in installing them in the stores. Clark quickly established a relationship with the vendor.

Other equipment ideas include the Turbo Chef High H, which gives companies the ability to bake fresh bread and pastries, and Perfect Fry Fryers, which are ventless and much cleaner for the stores.

Clark also builds custom cabinetry to create ideal coffee island solutions. Rutter's selected a black warehouse look for its interior. Clark installed a cold well on its coffee island that accepts refrigerated dairy drop-ins for condiments. This enables Rutter's to use fresh milk as opposed to bagged milk products.

"These solutions make it more of a restaurant destination," Sottek says.

Recognizing what consumers are looking for at their local convenience store helps Clark find the best solutions for retailers.

"Cleanliness is the most important thing to customers," Sottek says. "People don't want to feel like they are eating at the pump."

Equipment that operates cleaner and more efficient coupled with upscale interior design creates a pleasant dining experience for the customer.

Clark regularly reviews industry trends, articles and attends the national trade shows. At the NACS Show last October, they learned about the IceBell, an ice bin on casters that features new technology developed in Germany. The bin is more sanitary and requires less labor than the traditional display ice barrels. It accepts eight gallons of tap water through its built-in filtration system, makes and cleans its own chunklet ice. The coolers are great for holding beverages, produce, pre-packed sandwiches, yogurt and salad. They only require an electrical plug. No water line is necessary.

Clark is the IceBell distributor for the Mid-Atlantic region.

With the current downturn in the economy, some retailers may not think that this is the right time to grow or to remodel their stores. Sottek disagrees.

"For those who are positioned well, this is a good time for growth," she says. "It's a time to get ahead of the competition."

Sottek says Clark Convenience Store Products offers many reasonably priced design products to give stores a new look.

"Changing from the traditional sandstone to a black finish is a great facelift," she suggests. "Add new millwork and a coffee island with the new Lidsaver that will cut down waste."

She encourages retailers to focus on the most profitable areas of the store — hot beverages and fountain beverages. Retailers who own their own fountain and hot beverage equipment control their profit destiny, potentially making a higher profit versus a branded dispenser. Clark is a distributor of Cornelius beverage dispensing equipment, and among others, sells the Cornelius Flavor Fusion beverage dispenser.

"It offers the variety and selection that the customer is looking for, while giving the retailer the ability to decide what they want to dispense at potentially higher margins than a cooler vault can provide," she says. "It requires installation and set up, which we can provide."

Clark continues its superior service level for convenience stores with this new division. In addition to design, equipment procurement, installation and maintenance, millwork and construction, Clark Convenience Store Products provides consulting and merchandising services. The experienced staff can help retailers in developing their brand/identity. Call Marguerite Sottek at 800-678-5517, ext. 433 to get your project started.

Clarks Associates is made up of the following divisions:

- Clark Convenience Store Products
- Clark Fire — Hood suppression systems and fire extinguishers
- Clark Food Service Equipment — Design and Construction
- Clark IT — Supplies and Equipment/account sales
- Clark Mechanical Services, Inc. — Commercial electric, HVAC and communications
- Clark Service and Parts — service, repair and installation of refrigeration, beverage and food service equipment
- Clark Florida — Design and construction, based in Sarasota, Florida
- 11400 Food Service Equipment — Equipment Contract Bid Sales
- Commercial Stainless Inc. — Custom Stainless Steel Fabrication
- Hawk Industries — Custom Cabinetry Booth and Bar Manufacturer
- Noble Chemical Inc. — Institutional and Industrial Chemical Sales and Service
- The Restaurant Store — Kitchen equipment and supplies, tableware, janitorial supplies and food products
- The Webstaurant Store — Food service equipment and supplies on the web.

Visit Clark Associates on-line at www.clarkinc.biz.