



'The bottom line is, the food world is changing faster than it's ever changed.'

Know Your Market

NORTHERN CALIFORNIA



San Francisco's produce sales growing, B2



What's new in the Northern California market? Business updates, B3



Earl's Organic Produce wants to expand deliveries, B2

Northern California business has its ups, downs

By Tom Burfield

PRODUCE SALES in the Northern California market seem to vary by commodity and by company this fall.

"Business is growing," said Guy Davidoff, an owner of Twin Peaks Distributing Inc. on the Golden Gate Produce Terminal in South San Francisco.

Citrus, peppers, avocados, grapes, mangoes and cucumbers are some of the company's main commodities. "With the economy doing well, the Bay Area is a very special place," he said. "And we have some of the finest restaurants in the world, so foodservice (business) is good, and the wholesale market is good."

But some distributors had a different perspective.

"Business seems slower this year," said Vince Franzella, salesman at Franzella Pro-

duce Inc., also on the Golden Gate Produce Terminal.

The company ships a lot of vegetables and leafy greens, but Franzella said it's hard to project what's in store for the coming months.

The wholesaler usually has a pretty good hard squash program, he said, "but there have been weird weather patterns, and things have been coming in at different times than they normally do."

Business on the produce market seems to have been picking up over the past three months, said Pete Carcione, president of Carcione's Fresh Produce Co. Inc. on the Golden Gate Produce Terminal.

Buyers from smaller stores and others seeking high-quality produce seem to be coming back to the market, he said.

It's unfortunate that buyers from major supermar-

Business at the produce markets is picking up with the help of smaller retail buyers visiting the market, and being at full tenant capacity, distributors say.



Courtesy San Francisco Wholesale Produce Market

kets no longer visit the market, Carcione said.

"I'm trying to convince the chain buyers to take one or two days a week and take a walk around the market," he said.

Jacobs, Malcolm & Burt Inc. in San Francisco moved

off the market four years ago to concentrate on its shipping business rather than marketing, said Craig Rolandelli, vice president.

The company ships sweet corn and asparagus.

"They're both doing extremely well," he said, with

sweet corn sales spiking during the summer and asparagus sales highest from February through May.

ORGANICS

There's good news and bad news in the organic segment, said John Stair, domestic commodity manager for Pacific Organic Produce in San Francisco.

"We have certainly found challenges with regard to a degree of deflation in pricing, although in many commodities we have an uptick in units sold," he said.

Lemons out of the California desert are a current highlight for the company, which has "taken on a significant marketing role" for a major organic lemon grower.

Stair expects a heavier-than-normal lemon crop with promotable volume out of the desert through

January. Grapefruit also will be available.

Pacific Organic Produce also will have heavy volume of organic grapes and mangoes, and the Washington apple and pear season began in late summer.

Robert Lichtenberg, director of purchasing for Earl's Organic Produce on the San Francisco Wholesale Produce Market said supermarket organic sections seem to be expanding in Northern California.

"We actually have a couple of stores that don't have any conventional produce at all — that sell organic produce," he said.

The Northern California/San Francisco area is "one of the most-educated regions for organic food in the U.S.," he said, "and people are willing to pay a little more for quality." **P**



Carolyn Lasar (left) and Janna Cordeiro process items for the San Francisco Wholesale Produce Market's food recovery program. Market representatives go from business to business to recover as much food as possible each day, says Michael Janis, general manager.

Courtesy San Francisco Wholesale Produce Market

Markets continue improvements

By Tom Burfield

THE SAN FRANCISCO Wholesale Produce Market is in the early stages of its latest expansion program and has launched an innovative food recovery program, while the Golden Gate Produce Terminal in South San Francisco has begun producing electricity through its new solar energy project and has completed some renovations.

The San Francisco Wholesale Produce Market, which was built on just over 25 acres of city-owned land in 1963, signed a new 60-year ground lease in 2013 that included three additional acres and a multi-year \$100 million reinvestment plan to ensure the future of the market and its infrastructure, said Michael Janis, general manager.

In 2015, the added acreage became home to an 82,000-square-foot Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design-certified building that houses a distribution center for Mill Valley, Calif.-based Mollie Stone's Markets, an independent retail chain, and a younger company called Good Eggs, which combines technology, food and distribution, Janis said.

The combination of the old and the new is an example of how the market continues to evolve, he said.

"They're distributing food, but in different ways," he said.

With 32 tenants, the market is at full capacity, and thriving businesses continue to be challenged by space constraints, he said.

Janis attributes the strength of the market to a "strong infrastructure of governance" consisting of the board of directors made up of merchants and a number of volunteers who "bring expertise, perspective and experience to the table."

"It's something that has evolved very strongly over the last four years," he said.

In May, the board green-lighted its real estate development committee's recommendation for the market's next major improvement — another building.

"Planning has begun on that," Janis said.

The market also is engaged in community work, such as its food recovery program.

All markets have relationships with food banks, but the San Francisco market has taken that concept to the next level, he said.

The market has designated an employee whose sole function is to go from business to business to recover as much food as possible, Janis said.

GOLDEN GATE SOLAR Meanwhile, a solar project

launched two years ago at the Golden Gate Produce Terminal has begun producing electricity.

In mid-September, the \$3.8 million project was 95% complete, said Steve Hurwitz,

an owner and president of Bay Area Herbs and Specialties LLC and a member of the board of directors who worked with others on the board to help bring the project to fruition.

"We're actually producing electricity right now," he said.

It will produce more than 2 million kilowatts of energy annually, which is the equivalent of removing emissions from about 300 cars from the road and enough to provide electricity to 209 homes, he said.

It will save 1.5 million pounds of coal from being burned, he added.

The project will fill virtually all the energy needs of the tenants on the market and provide charging stations for electric trucks and vehicles in the future, Hurwitz said.

He called the project a "success from the tenants' and landlord perspective."

A solar energy project at the Golden Gate Produce Terminal will produce more than 2 million kilowatts of energy annually and will save 1.5 million pounds of coal from being burned.



Courtesy Weta Solar Inc.

The project means a tax credit plus a depreciation allowance for shareholders and lower energy bills for tenants, added Pete Carcione, president of Carcione's Fresh Produce Co. Inc. on the market and president of the market's board of directors.

"We've got to keep our tenants happy and keep them here," he said. "If we can help them with a break on their energy bills, I think that's a good way to go."

Carcione said he believes some buyers who strayed from the market over the years are starting to come back.

"They want to look at what they're buying before they buy it," he said.

Customers are realizing the benefit of buying fresh daily and enjoying the market's new infrastructure that includes more covered parking, improved traffic flow and better signage, Hurwitz added. **P**

CDS anticipates increase in Smittens

By Tom Burfield

SAN FRANCISCO-BASED CDS DISTRIBUTING Inc. will have a significant increase in volume of Smitten variety apples this season, as the company marks its 40th year in business, said Jan Garrett, vice president of marketing.

The firm started marketing Smitten apples the week of Sept. 10 and expects to ship them at least until the end of the year.

So far, the company has had good reaction to the Smitten variety.

"People who purchase it continue to come back and ask for it over and over," Garrett said.

Smitten is a "sweet, yet tart" cross between Fiesta, Falstaff, gala and braeburn varieties.

It seems to be an apple that is good for consumers, growers and the industry, she said.

CDS imports Smitten, fuji, braeburn and several other varieties from New Zealand during the summer, she added.

CDS is the exclusive distributor of the Smitten apple variety in the Bay Area and works with every major Northwest shipper to procure apples, she said.

The company also started marketing the fuji variety from the Northwest the week of Sept. 10.

Harmony Orchards, an affiliated company near Yakima, Wash., also grows heirloom apples, which are popular for processing and foodservice.

CDS will offer Lady apples, a rather small, flat, greenish-red round variety, from October until mid-January, she said.

Gravensteins are an excellent cooking apple and are a great ingredient for pies, cider and sauce, Garrett said.

CDS' variety is a red striped apple, while some others are green with red striping.

California's crop starts in late July and runs until the end of October. Gravensteins from the Northwest started in mid-September.

Supplies typically are tight and Garrett said they likely will remain so.

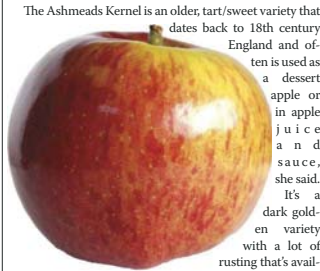
The Ashmeads Kernel is an older, tart/sweet variety that dates back to 18th century England and often is used as a dessert apple or in apple juice and sauce, she said. It's a dark golden variety with a lot of rusting that's available during November.

All of the company's specialty apples are organically grown, and many end up at the company's hard cider in Washington. CDS brokers apples, pears and cherries from the Northwest and also grows them through Harmony Orchards, she said.

The company provides year-round availability of all of its products except cherries thanks to a strong import program from Chile and New Zealand.

Cherries are imported from December through February and sourced domestically from May through early September.

This year, for the first time, the company will offer Tasmanian cherries during December. **P**



Northern California



California organic fruits accounted for 6% of fruit sales during the second quarter of 2017, with peaches as one of the top categories.

File photo

San Francisco sees 1% growth in produce sales

By Tom Burfield

PRODUCE SALES in California bounced back during the second quarter of 2017 following several sluggish quarters, according to the FPFC Market Report compiled by Fusion Marketing for the Anaheim, Calif.-based Fresh Produce & Floral Council.

California dollar sales for the 13 weeks ending July 2 reached a new high of nearly \$2 billion — a 4% increase compared to the prior year, the report said.

The increase was attributed to higher prices — up an average of 3% to \$1.65 per pound — as well as a state-wide 1% growth in volume.

Growth ranged from 1% in San Francisco to 6% in Los Angeles, and average prices varied from a high of \$1.97 per pound in San Francisco to a low of \$1.52

per pound in Los Angeles.

VEGETABLES

Top growth categories for vegetables in the San Francisco market for the second quarter were lettuce (\$700,000), bagged salads (\$700,000), asparagus (\$400,000), broccoli (\$400,000) and variety packages (\$400,000).

Vegetable sales were unchanged for the 52-week period at \$625 million, and volume was up 3% to 300 million pounds. Average price per pound of vegetables was down 3% to \$2.08.

Top random-weight vegetable categories were tomatoes, onions, peppers, asparagus and broccoli.

Organic vegetables accounted for 10% of vegetable sales in the San Francisco market during the second quarter but brought in 15% of the sales dollars.

Top growth categories for fruit items in the San Francisco market for the second quarter were tangerines (\$3.2 million), avocados (\$900,000), variety packages (\$800,000), grapes (\$600,000) and mangoes (\$400,000).

Fruit sales were unchanged for the 52-week period at \$652.7 million, and volume was down 2% to 372.1 million pounds. Average price per pound of fruit was up 2% to \$1.75.

The top random-weight fruit categories were bananas, apples, grapes, avocados and lemons.

Organic fruit accounted for 6% of fruit sales during the second quarter but accounted for 10% of the sales dollars.

Top organic fruit categories were berries, apples, bananas, grapes, avocados, lemons, pears, mangoes, peaches and oranges. **P**

Pace of retail change picks up

By Tom Burfield

AS IN MANY REGIONS of the U.S., the Northern California retail scene, which has seen gradual changes over the years, could be on the verge of another shakeup.

The acquisition of Whole Foods Market by Amazon will have a lot to do with that shake-up, but as of yet, no one knows for sure how extensive any changes will be, said Larry Brucia, president of the San Francisco Wholesale Produce Market board of directors and president, CEO and owner of Burlingame, Calif.-based John Sutti & Associates Inc.

As a designer and builder of supermarkets, John Sutti & Associates stays informed about the retail grocery segment, Brucia said.

"We tend to keep track of things, see trends and see where things are going," he said.

PACE OF CHANGE

Brucia has observed a significant uptick in the pace of change in the retail industry, which traditionally has evolved slowly because of the risks involved in investing money in new ideas with tiny profit margins.

"Over the last five years, the pace of change by the consumer has accelerated," he said. "The cell phone has become an extension of people's arms, brains, minds and experiences, and they're looking at it throughout the day."

That in turn is affecting the retail grocery industry and the brick-and-mortar industry as a whole, he said.

"The bottom line is, the food world is changing faster than it's ever changed," he said.

The Amazon acquisition of Whole Foods is just one example.

"(The purchase) triggered an anxious environment within the retail community because all of a sudden ... everyone is recognizing that something is going to change in retail with technology and with brick and mortar," he said.

The Whole Foods acquisition isn't the only change in the Northern California supermarket scene.

Portland, Ore.-based New Seasons Market,

a chain of 20 supermarkets that feature natural and organic food as well as conventional items, plans to open four Northern California stores by the end of 2018, Brucia said.

The chain opened a 29,000-square-foot store in Sunnyvale on Aug. 23, already has a store in San Jose and plans to open locations in San Francisco and Emeryville. The company also operates four New Leaf Community Market locations in Northern California.

San Francisco-based Gus's Community Market operates three stores under different banners in San Francisco and plans to open "quite a few more stores" in the San Francisco area under the Gus's Community Market banner, Brucia said.

Gus's offers a traditional produce department and is bucking the trend toward cutting back on bulk produce in favor of packaged salads and kits.

"They like offering an extensive wet rack," he said.

HISPANIC STORES MERGING

Finally, Ontario, Calif.-based Cardenas Markets, a group of 31 stores, many of which are in the Riverside/San Bernardino area east of Los Angeles, announced in early July that it is merging with San Jose-based Mi Pueblo, which operates 15 stores in the Bay Area, forming one of the nation's largest Hispanic supermarket chains.

The combined chains will operate under Cardenas Markets LLC, with Cardenas CEO John Gomez holding that position under the combined business.

Each banner will operate separately, managed under one executive team.

Hispanic markets are realizing their demographic is changing as second- and third-generation Hispanic consumers enter the marketplace, Brucia said.

Despite all the changes, Brucia said it's an exciting time to be in business in Northern California.

"A lot of people are fearful about all the change, but from my perspective, change is a time of great opportunity," he said. **P**

Earl's may expand deliveries

By Tom Burfield

"A REALLY STRONG year of growth" likely will result in seven-day-a-week deliveries for Earl's Organic Produce in the not-too-distant future," said Robert Lichtenberg, director of purchasing.

The wholesaler, based at the San Francisco Wholesale Produce Market, already delivers six days a week.

Expanded weekend deliveries — 90% of which are via the company's own trucks — will benefit retail customers with limited refrigeration and backroom storage space, he said.

"The stores that are really rocking need more frequent deliveries now," he said, "so we're trying to meet that need."

"The days of people coming to the market are kind of gone," he said.

The firm's delivery area is pretty much all of Northern California, he said.

"It's a pretty wide area of distribution."

Earl's Organic Produce employs more than 100 people, many of whom are involved in receiving, loading and delivering product, he said.

The company also has added a number of large and small growers and has upgraded its food safety program in order to be fully compliant with requirements of the Food Safety Modernization Act, he said.

About 90% of the company's business is with retailers, he added.

Earl's is different from other wholesalers because the company is not a commodity-based buying and selling operation, Lichtenberg said.

"When you look at our price list, it doesn't just say



Earl's Organic Produce likely will begin seven-day-a-week deliveries in the near future, says Robert Lichtenberg, director of purchasing. Most of the company's deliveries are made by its own trucks.

Courtesy Earl's Organic Produce

"broccoli," he said.

As a result, the company might have as many as four different broccolis listed at four different price levels with different attributes.

The company does not have its own label.

"We feel that we want to tell the story of the vendors — of the farms," he said.

Year-round availability of organic fruits and vegetables is becoming more common as gaps between seasons and

various growing areas narrow, Lichtenberg said.

The company tries, through its website and marketing efforts, to "educate people in terms of varieties, seasonality, where things are grown and who the growers are," he said.

Most of the people who work at Earl's Organic Produce are really into organic food and produce, he said.

"It's not just a job, it's part of a lifestyle that they have." **P**



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Good Eggs completes commercial kitchen

By Tom Burfield

GOOD EGGS, a full-line grocery delivery service, has completed its on-site commercial kitchen and now can prepare meal kits at its headquarters on the San Francisco Wholesale Produce Market, said Jamie Nessel, vice president of buying and merchandising.

The company offers an extensive selection of products, including produce, meat, fish, poultry, bakery and dairy that are delivered throughout the Bay Area.

In April, Good Eggs started offering meal kits, which were prepared in a commissary kitchen in nearby San Mateo until its own kitchen was finished.



Good Eggs has completed its on-site commercial kitchen and now can prepare meal kits there, says Jamie Nessel, vice president of buying and merchandising.

Courtesy Good Eggs

Construction began in January, and final inspection was set for mid-September.

The kitchen staff does much of the prep work, like pre-chopping vegetables or making a sauce.

It's then packaged and sent out to the customer with a recipe card.

The focus at Good Eggs is on local, organic produce, Nessel said. In fact, one-third of its sales are from produce.



The company obtains some items from distribu-

tors, she said, but procures most of them directly from local farmers.

Good Eggs got off to a big start in 2011 — apparently too big — and ended up closing locations in Los Angeles, New York City and New Orleans in 2015 and reportedly laying off nearly 140 employees.

The firm has since regrouped, focusing on the San Francisco area, and gradually will roll out once again, one region at a time, Nessel said. **P**

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Business Updates

Bay Area invests in infrastructure

Bay Area Herbs and Specialties LLC on the Golden Gate Produce Terminal in South San Francisco is investing in its infrastructure to improve customer service and food safety management, said Steven Hurwitz, an owner and president.

The company, which distributes specialty and organic produce and culinary herbs, added 10,000 square feet of refrigerated warehouse space and is stepping up its focus on food safety to address requirements of the Food Safety Modernization Act, he said.

The firm also added two new trucks — for a total of five — in order to expand its delivery service and to reach a broader customer base.

Bay Area Herbs and Specialties delivers throughout the Bay Area and as far away as Reno, Nev., and Monterey and Modesto in California, Hurwitz said.

Lady apple pouches new from CDS

San Francisco-based CDS Distributing Inc., which distributes apples, pears, cherries and other items, will offer the Lady apple variety in pouch bags for the first time this season, said Jan Garrett, vice president of marketing.

The company should have increased volume of the variety this year, with supplies shipping from Oct. 2 until mid-January.

Lady apples are a small variety — “not even as big as a size 138” — Garrett said. They’re a bit bigger than crab apples and lend themselves well to pouch bags, which will be labeled with Price Look-Up stickers and weigh approximately 1.25 pounds.

CDS, which is marking its 40th year in business this year, also is the exclusive distributor of Smitten apples in the Bay Area and should have increased supplies of that variety this season, Garrett said.

Grant J. Hunt South a year old

Strong analytical skills that we feel will really benefit our team and ultimately the growers who hire us,” Stair said. “We’re happy to have Nick on the team and look forward to his contribution.”

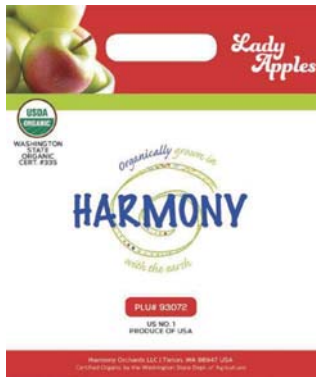
The new location came about when Leo Goscula and Hank Inwalle retired from Los Gatos, Calif.-based Bay Area Produce in 2016 after founding the company 42 years earlier, said Bob Loyst, general manager of the new branch and previously executive vice president at Bay Area Produce.

They closed the company but nearly all the Bay Area Produce employees were hired by Grant M. Hunt, president of the parent company, and his partners, when they saw the opportunity to broaden their customer and commodity base, Loyst said.

Grant made the decision to hire the Bay Area staff after conducting an on-site inspection of Bay Area’s consolidation dock in Rio Rico and interviewing each of the employees, Loyst said.

JMB ramps up sweet corn packs

San Ramon, Calif.-based



CDS Distributing Inc. will offer the Lady apple variety in pouch bags for the first time this season, says Jan Garrett, vice president of marketing.

Jacobs, Malcolm & Burt Inc. is ramping up production of its packaged sweet corn, said Craig Rolandelli, vice president.

“We created the first packaged corn 10 years ago,” Rolandelli said. The company got out of the program when its shipper pulled out, but returned to the deal a couple of years ago.

The firm has invested in husking and packing equipment.

“We’re starting to grow that business,” he said.

JMB offers four- and eight-count packs of conventional sweet corn year-round and organic sweet corn during the summer.

The company also is a major year-round asparagus shipper from California and Mexico, Rolandelli said, and has a strong asparagus export business.

Nick Burns joins Pacific Organic

Nick Burns, most recently with Jacobs Farm/Del Cabo, Santa Cruz, Calif., has been named commodity manager for Pacific Organic Produce, San Francisco, said John Stair, domestic commodity manager.

Burns will help handle the company’s import and domestic deals, including organic mangoes, citrus, apples and pears, Stair said.

“(Burns) brings some strong analytical skills that we feel will really benefit our team and ultimately the growers who hire us,” Stair said. “We’re happy to have Nick on the team and look forward to his contribution.”

Stanley Produce in new location

Stanley Produce Co. Inc. on the San Francisco Wholesale Produce Market moved to a new location on the market late last year, said Stanley Corria Jr., president.

The company, which has been on the market since it opened in the early 1960s, has a location consisting of three 60- by 100-foot stalls near the market entrance that provide the firm with greater visibility and, it is hoped, more wholesale business, Corria said.

The facility has roll-up doors and new refrigeration that maintains a temperature of 38 degrees to prevent spoilage, he said. Stanley Produce specializes in products like mush-

rooms, Belgian endive, shallots and radicchio.

“Our product line has expanded exponentially,” Corria said. “We have almost 1,000 different products now.”

Twin Peaks adds asparagus program

Twin Peaks Distributing Inc., on the Golden Gate Produce Terminal in South San Francisco, now offers asparagus from Coachella, Calif.-based Prime Time International, said Guy Davidoff, who owns Twin Peaks with Bob Scutotequazza.

The company will offer 11-pound cartons of asparagus grown in Baja California until January or February.

Asparagus will be shipped out of Coachella and Somis, Calif., “which will allow us to deliver overnight, which is a huge plus,” he said.

Twin Peaks, which represents Prime Time International in Northern California almost exclusively, also ships Prime Time’s red, yellow and green bell peppers, which also can be delivered overnight.

Twin Peaks is looking forward to a strong season of Texas oranges and grapefruit, lemons from California and Mexico, and California navel, satsumas and Halos brand mandarins, Davidoff said.

The company also will have a large program out of Nogales, Ariz., starting in December that will include Mexican vegetables, tomatoes and watermelon.

—By Tom Burfield

Mary Langford (from left) and Diana McClean of Ocean Mist Farms, talk with Tom Wheeler of Mollie Stone’s Market during the Anaheim, Calif.-based Fresh Produce & Floral Council’s Northern California Expo in late March. This year’s expo featured 200 exhibitors and hosted about 1,000 visitors.



Courtesy Fresh Produce & Floral Council

FPFC fills need in the north

By Tom Burfield

RETAILERS, SUPPLIERS and others in the Northern California produce industry continue to find that the Anaheim, Calif.-based Fresh Produce & Floral Council plays an important role in the region’s produce industry.

The FPFC has more than 400 member companies and about 1,000 individual members, president Carissa Mace said.

It’s hard to break down the membership between the northern and southern parts of the state, since many companies serve both regions, but Mace said the north supplies a “significant portion.”

The 52-year-old organization has held activities in Northern California since at least the early 2000s, she said.

The council currently hosts two luncheons, a golf tournament and a produce and floral expo in Northern California.

This year’s expo in late March featured 200 exhibitors and about 1,000 visitors, including store-level employees from chains such as Sacramento-based Raley’s Supermarkets, Emeryville-based Grocery Outlet and Pleasantville-based Safeway Inc.

The Northern California membership continues to evolve, Mace said. “They have a strong committee that has taken a fresh look at everything,” she said.

For example, the Northern California luncheons were the first to add a post-event networking social hour.

“They realized people wanted more networking

time, and there isn’t always enough before the lunches,” Mace said.

In 2016, Marvin Quebec, president and CEO of Quebec Distributing Co., Oakland, Calif., became the first FPFC member from Northern California to serve as chairman.

Quebec said membership in the council helped him grow professionally.

“When you get involved in any regional type of organization — like the FPFC — it really helps you connect with a lot of the major retailers,” he said. “These are opportunities you can’t pass up.”

The council is important for retailers, as well, said Michael Schutt, category manager at Raley’s and chairman

of the FPFC’s Northern California committee.

“The (council’s) mission statement is to provide a space where supply and retail can intersect,” he said. “That’s what the FPFC excels at, through lunches or social events.”

“We’re not in L.A. with the saturation of retailers and wholesalers and distributors, so for us it provides visibility,” he added.

The next Northern California event will be a luncheon Sept. 27 featuring guest speaker Kevin Coupe, retail analyst and author of the e-newsletter/blog “Morning News Beat.”

For information, visit fpfc.org. P



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