

# BUYER PERSPECTIVE

plan to improve the situation, but if sales don't move, it most likely will be deleted."

What makes a buyer effective, Hancock says, is "not being afraid to take risks and try something new; watching trends and talking with consumers; being honest with your broker and vendor partners, especially about trends and quality issues." He adds: "You have to listen, but insist on having good, qualitative information." Equally important is communicating promotional plans to vendors.

An example of the chain's most successful merchandising initiatives was a collaboration with Fannie May Confections Brands, Inc. and its broker, Bud Lowell at Carlin-O'Brien, that resulted in growing the brand to represent two of Jewel-Osco's top-performing seasonal SKUs. Hancock explains: "Starting in September, we developed a buy one, get one strategy for the Pixies and Meltaways items, thinking it would work well at the holidays. Bud suggested it to the manufacturer, we tried it, and those two items became our top-selling candy SKUs in terms of sales dollars, one and two, respectively. Customers continue to call us about the promotion and ask when it's going to happen again," he says.

## CLEARING A PATH TO PURCHASE

A challenge to merchandising is that Jewel-Osco stores have footprints ranging from 20,000 to 90,000 square feet, although the floor plan is scaled proportionately. Units carry a standard inline set spanning 32 feet supplemented by displays outside the set for subcategory, premium and boxed chocolate items. Premium items are displayed at the start of the set, and Hancock works with manufacturers such as Mars Chocolate North America, the Wm. Wrigley Jr. Co., Hershey, Ghirardelli Chocolate Co. and Lindt & Sprüngli (USA) Inc. to apply best practices in merchandising. A typical candy set represents 500 mainline SKUs, plus 110 Russell Stover products and 50 Fannie May items.

"We work to give the customers what they want at a good, fair price," he says, adding displays sell down quickly, often before a program's official end. "This is a very diverse market, and the managers help shape it. Sales data are customized to their store, and we tweak distribution based on their sales numbers. We try to present a diverse selection of items and customize the seasonal selections to the data."

Nostalgic candy sells well, particularly, Hancock says, for "the quick in-and-outs"; and he notes limited editions do well, but they're less common, although he's always on the lookout for them.

Theater boxes are popular among Jewel shoppers, and Hancock notes the addition of a

## GETTING PERSONAL

### JEFF HANCOCK



**Wife:** Donna, married 30 years

**Children:** Ryann, Sean and Allison

**Pets:** Remington (dog) and Lou (cat)

**What has been your greatest professional accomplishment?** That's a hard one. I have been with Jewel-Osco for 39 years, and I think I've accomplished a lot. Our biggest success as a company was when we entered the Milwaukee market in 1998. We bought five stores, closed

them on a Saturday and reopened them as Jewel-Osco the following Thursday. It was a huge team effort, and I am proud to have been a part of it.

**What's been the most valuable thing you've learned on the job?** You are always learning and can learn from anyone you come into contact with. Always keep an open mind and be flexible!



**The most interesting part of my job is . . .** working with different associates, vendors and supervisors. You always learn something new. In addition, every day is different, new challenges and opportunities makes every day unique.

**What your best advice for someone starting out as a buyer?** Be flexible, develop good listening skills, ask questions, be analytical and own up to your mistakes.

## JUST FOR FUN . . .

**When the going gets tough . . .** I think about what Frank Tyska would do. He was one of several district managers I worked for. Frank was firm, but fair, always gave clear direction, was a great mentor and always took time to listen and give sound advice.

**When I have free time, I choose to . . .** spend it with my wife and kids.

**I'd be lost without . . .** my iPad. The technology is amazing!

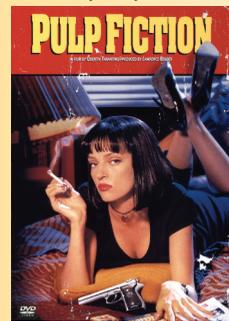
## JEFF'S FAVORITE . . .

**Movies:** *Pulp Fiction*, but I took my kids to see *The Lion King*, and thought that was great, too.

**Pastimes:** Golf, gardening and local festivals — I love to eat!

**Sports Teams:** The Chicago Bears and the Blackhawks, but I also like automobile racing: NASCAR, sprint cars and MG Midgets. My father owned a race car when I was young, so I was always at a racetrack with him.

**Charities:** The Denis Savard Foundation and the Northern Illinois Food Bank



pouch section because they're the fastest growing format for the chain.

Front end fixtures display another 125 candy and gum SKUs, and according to Hancock, featured placement at the check stands helps drive sales of the top five category SKUs: "The

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