

FDFA 2023 summary: the convention returns, talks rebuilding land border business



Philippe Bachand, President at Philipsburg Duty Free & FDFA Board Member, and FDFA Executive Director
Barbara Barrett

Frontier Duty Free Association's annual convention returned in full force this year for the first time since 2019. The main theme of this year's show, "Canadian Duty Free - Building Tomorrow," was brought to life during the week through a wide range of activities including operator and supplier meetings, trade floor exhibitions, group presentations and networking events. In addition, delegates of the intimate and community-oriented show were invited to join in a host of experiences such as a craft spirits tasting and hospitality lounge.

Global Travel Retail Magazine (GTR Magazine) sat down with FDFA Executive Director Barbara Barrett and Philippe Bachand, President at Philipsburg Duty Free & FDFA Board Member, for an association update and show overview. Barrett described the convention as a "family reunion." Along with duty free's position as an integral part of the growing tourism sector in Canada, we discussed FDFA's ongoing advocacy and partnership work. Stay tuned for more on our exclusive interview.

In a letter addressed to delegates Barrett shared, "This year, the convention's theme 'Building Tomorrow' is set to inspire current and prospective members to work together to build back our strong and resilient industry after difficult times and to reposition Canada as global leader in the duty free sector. Our goal during this four-day convention is to ensure that our members make meaningful and valuable connections with one another and to recognize our industry's best."

Through its government relation activities, the association fights for industry concerns and communicates its message across all levels of government. She continued, "Over the past year, we have succeeded on a number of advocacy fronts as we helped the industry through its continued recovery."

Barrett shared the following figures of those in attendance at the event:

- 18 Canadian border stores, two airport companies and two US border store operators (covering all northern US border stores)
- 45 supplier companies and 98 supplier delegates (down 30% from 2019)

The convention took place at the Omni King Edward Hotel in Toronto, Canada.

Annual general meeting & feature speaker



John McDonnell, International Managing Director, Tito's Handmade Vodka

On day one, John McDonnell, International Managing Director, Tito's Handmade Vodka, took the floor to speak about the desire among today's consumer for digital convenience. McDonnell says the industry needs to explore the concept of high-tech to high-touch and work together with trade organizations to develop a global duty free app to enhance the channel's relevance among the digital generation.

"We don't have a [shared] way to call out to the customer to take action and enter the duty free shop. We're not competitors in this, we're all potential partners and that's why we all need to rally around this," he said.

McDonnell offered examples of comparable developments among other industries, most notably, the app [Drizly](#), which is the leading on-demand alcohol marketplace in the United States. Available in over 1,400 cities across the country, Drizly partners with local retailers to bring their inventory to users. According to its website, the company provides the widest selection of wine, beer and spirits online and several different fulfillment options including on-demand delivery, scheduled delivery, ground shipping and in-state shipping where available.

In 2021, Uber acquired Drizly for approximately US\$1.1 billion in stock and cash. Over half of its business is made up of consumers 35 years and under.

According to McDonnell, during the pandemic Tito's Vodka practiced high-tech to high-touch to high-tech via a TikTok challenge that encouraged followers to invite their favorite brand(s) to their wedding. The company's headquarters in Austin, Texas, received 200 wedding invitations. As a response, Tito's Vodka sent a personalized and handwritten message of congratulations to each couple, along with a pair of copper mugs with the names of the couple and date of their union. Couples went on to record and post the opening and/or receiving of the gift online and across social media.

Opening cocktail



GTR Magazine's Laura Shirk with Barbara Barrett and Tania Lee, President at Blue Water Bridge Duty Free & FDFA President at the opening cocktail



Barrett welcomed delegates and thanked those in attendance for their commitment to the industry and support of the association



The cocktail was sponsored by Andrew Sella, Bacardi, Beam Suntory, Campari, Labatt Breweries, Mark Anthony Wine & Spirits, PMA, Pernod Ricard and Wine Classics International

Women in Travel Retail (WiTR) reception

A highlight of day two, [Women in Travel Retail](#) hosted a well-attended reception, drawing on the community aspect of the convention. The event featured networking opportunities, drinks and appetizers and a charity raffle. Barrett shared a few words on her experience in the industry as a female leader.



A snapshot of WiTR's reception at FDFA 2023

Trade show floor



Proudly Canadian clothing brand Strong & Free served as first-time exhibitors



Molson Coors showed off its popular line of Vizzy Hard Seltzers



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2023 Gold Standard Awards



Barrett served as host of the event

Day three closed with the 2023 Gold Standard Awards. Before announcing the winners, Associate

Minister of Small Business & Member of Provincial Parliament for Mississauga-Streetsville Nina Tangri delivered a brief keynote address. It was also revealed that with the help of its supporters at the show, FDFA raised almost CA\$13,000 for the non-profit organization Missing Children Society of Canada.

An honorable mention, Chris Foster, Operations Manager at Queenstown-Lewiston was awarded "Outstanding Contributor of the Year." Allison Gardner, Manager of Operations at FDFA was also recognized for her continued excellence.

A full list of winners will be shared shortly.



Associate Minister of Small Business & MPP of Mississauga-Streetsville Nina Tangri



Lee also took the stage to extend thanks to those in attendance



The gala & awards show was sponsored in part by Retail Council of Canada

See more photos of the show below:





















