

**KEEP UP WITH THE CHANGES IN THE ALCOHOL BEVERAGE INDUSTRY:
New Faces, New Policies and New Regulations Mean
the Liquor Laws are Constantly Evolving**

By: Michael J. Brown/May 2002

Over the last few years in Michigan, we have witnessed a significant number of changes in the alcohol beverage industry. For example, the change to Section 531 of the Liquor Control Code in 1998, allowing for county-wide transfer of licenses, has clearly impacted the availability of licenses in certain areas and also the value of those licenses. The last few years in Michigan have also seen the privatization of warehousing and delivery of spirits and the creation of the authorized distribution agent. Who would have predicted 10 years ago that we would see changes like these in the alcohol beverage industry?

Change seems to have become the one constant for bar and restaurant owners. In the last 10 years, Michigan has had only one Governor, but the MLCC has had four Chairpersons: Maxine Perry, Phillip Arthurhultz, Jacquelyn Stewart and now Dan Gustafson. Several other commissioners have come and gone over the years, and each one brings a different perspective and different ideas in regulating your business. By the time you read this article, Commissioner Walter Keck will have retired, creating yet another opportunity for a new commissioner to step in.

Change does not happen only at the commissioner level, however. At the staff level for the MLCC, significant new changes are underway as a result of the "early retirement" program for State employees. As many as 6,000 State employees will be retiring in the next few months, several from the MLCC. Many of the people opting for retirement are those in leadership positions such as department directors and assistant directors. Others represent the most-experienced people out in the field, including investigators and office personnel who you may have dealt with for years. Losing this vast array of experience, particularly in a short timespan, will undoubtedly cause changes in the way business gets done at the MLCC.

Already, changes are underway at the 21st Century MLCC. New regulations in the last few years have implemented electronic ordering, a streamlined licensing process, the ability to fax certain documents, and fostered the growth of the MLCC's website. You can now obtain practically any document you might need from the MLCC directly from its website, or correspond electronically with the MLCC.

Currently, the MLCC is preparing a new round of regulations and proposed changes in the hopes of creating even more efficiency to make up for lost staff positions. Proposals are being examined to change certain aspects of the violation hearing process, and also to speed up the license renewal system. In the coming weeks or months, the MLCC will

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likely hold public hearings to discuss and hear comments on some of these proposed changes and new regulations. You should do yourself a favor by staying informed of these changes, and by providing your input on matters related to your business. Some of the proposed changes may be ones that you like, while others may be to your dislike, but either way you should lend your voice to the process.

In about seven months, Michigan will have a new Governor for the first time in 12 years. About two-thirds of the Senate and the House will be new. Michigan will also have a new Secretary of State, and possibly, a new Attorney General. Who knows what these changes in the executive and legislative branches of the government might portend for additional change at the MLCC? What we do know is that the MLCC you see today, with its methods and regulations, is not likely to be the same MLCC you will encounter a year from today. Change is on its way, and the best way for you to know about and plan for change is to participate in the process. Stay informed, stay up to date, visit the MLCC website, and talk with other licensees in your area. Together, we can make change a positive experience for all.