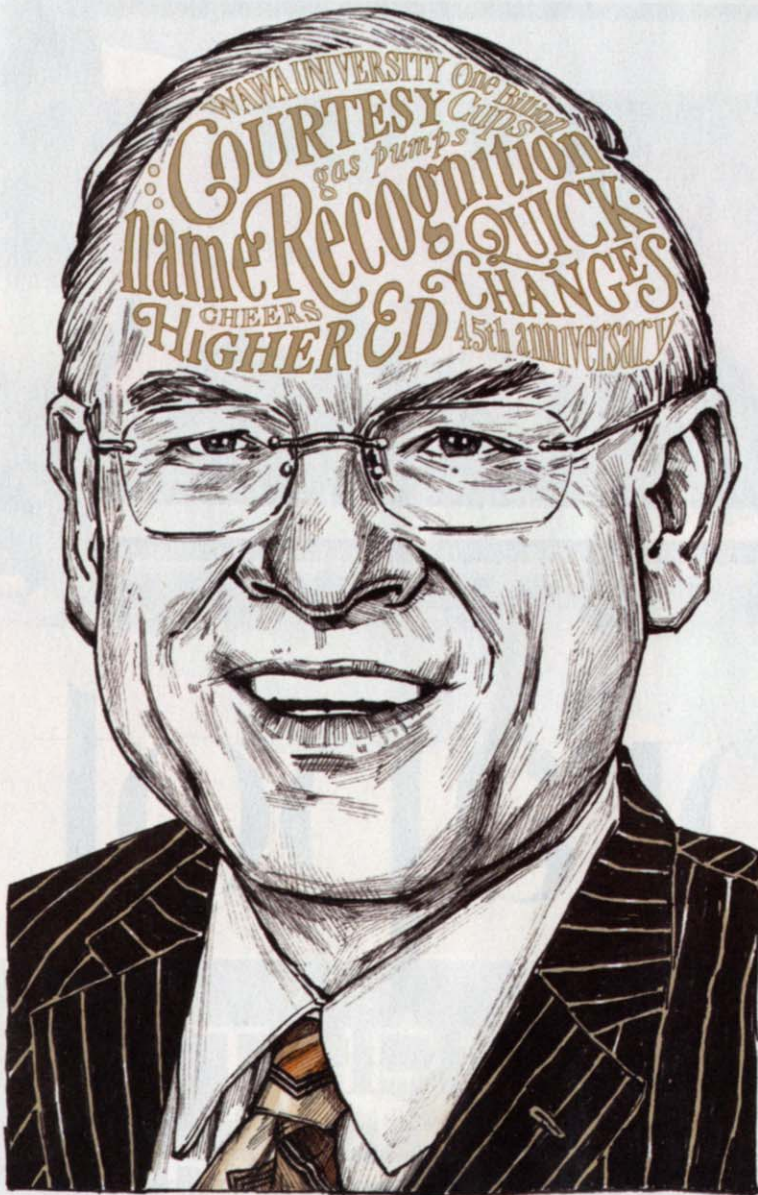


Howard Stoeckel

The CEO of Wawa Food Markets lets us take a peek at what's on his mind.



TOP GROCER Howard Stoeckel is the CEO of Wawa Food Markets. The Media, Pennsylvania-based convenience store chain kicks off its 45th anniversary celebration this year and recently sold its 1 billionth cup of coffee.

COURTESY 'Our goal is to create the *Cheers* of convenience stores. Our associates greet you by name. They're active in the community. Let's face it: Nobody looks forward to buying gas or picking up milk, but if you can provide those services better than everybody else, you'll build a powerful reservoir of trust and loyalty.'

NAME RECOGNITION 'When I became VP of marketing, I thought Wawa should partner with national brands like Pizza Hut and Dunkin Donuts. It failed miserably. What I learned was that people loved our brand, and they were giving us a huge opportunity to do more with it. We had credibility we didn't even understand.'

QUICK CHANGES 'Wawa has manufactured everything from cannonballs to baby diapers. We survived because we embrace change. About a decade ago, we added gas pumps. It was a great success. Despite being in only five states with 250 pumps, Wawa now sells more than 1 percent of all the gas in the United States.'

HIGHER ED 'Most people didn't come to Wawa to make a career, but they found a place to flourish. We started Wawa University and partnered with colleges to help people develop management skills.'