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## **Packwood Grocer Hal Blanton WFIA 2018-19 Retailer of the Year**

*Blanton's IGA owner honored for industry contributions, community service*

**PACKWOOD** — Stop by Hal Blanton's IGA in Packwood sometime, and you'll soon be reminded of that famous TV show – the one where everyone knows your name.

Hal sure does.

This grocery store-turned community center, coupled with Blanton's long-time service as an independent grocer, made him a natural choice for 2018-19 Retailer of the Year by the Washington Food Industry Association (WFIA).

A third-generation grocer, Blanton runs the store his grandfather built more than 40 years ago. Though the store has been remodeled, their commitment to a quality shopping experience and outstanding customer service has remained steady over time.

"Hal has been a strong supporter of training for his employees in this remote community where experience and prior time in the industry is hard to come by," said Jan Gee, WFIA president and CEO. "Visit and walk through the store with Hal, and you'll quickly see there are few customers that Hal does not know by their first name," she added.

Blanton's IGA has built a reputation for having "fresh" departments that are up to the standards of much larger operations even though they are a remote, rural, establishment

located over an hour away from larger stores. The staff pride themselves on those departments and makes frequent visits to the “big city” to view and visit competitors, keeping up to date on the latest trends and offerings.

But it is Hal Blanton who remains the heart of the store. He plays an integral part in annual community events such as the Packwood Town Picnic and the Packwood Mountain Festival serving as a lead sponsor of both. He contributes to numerous community groups including the local food bank, the Packwood Senior Citizens Center, the Elementary Student of the Week Program, and the Packwood Family Emergency Assistance Program. The Blanton family also coordinates local fundraisers as needed.

The WFIA Retailer of the Year award honors a retailer’s lifetime of commitment to the industry and exemplification of business leadership. The award also recognizes a commitment to the prosperity, ethics, and image of the independent food industry and WFIA.

“Hal is a treasure and we are so honored to recognize him this year for his longtime dedication and excellence as an independent grocer,” said Gee.

**About the Washington Food Industry Association**

*The Washington Food Industry Association (WFIA) is dedicated to promoting and protecting the independent, community-focused grocery industry and its suppliers. Founded in 1899, the WFIA represents the state’s independent grocers. Membership includes all levels of the food and beverage distribution industry who collaborate to promote the principles of free enterprise to ensure a vigorous, competitive, economically healthy food industry. The grocery industry provides about 50,000 Washington jobs. For more information, visit [www.wa-food-ind.org](http://www.wa-food-ind.org).*