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## Pokegama Plaza Liquor under new ownership

**BY EMILY CARLSON**  
HERALD REVIEW

Pokegama Plaza Liquor in Grand Rapids, Minn. is now under new ownership after Tony and Crystal Serratore owned the business for nearly 31 years. The new owners, Cliff and Jill Tabke, are ready to continue building on their success.

Cliff and Jill became the official owners of Pokegama Plaza Liquor on November 21, 2020. Before moving to Grand Rapids, they lived in Carver, Massachusetts where they raised their two children. Cliff had worked in manufacturing for 30 years and was the plant manager for 23 years at Chatham Village Foods. Jill worked for Carver Middle High School as a cook for over 20 years. Jill's parents are from Thief River Falls, Minn. so the two were accustomed to visiting family in Minnesota.

"We always planned to retire here," said Cliff.

With their two kids moved out of the house, Cliff and Jill began reflecting on what they wanted for their future. They decided they needed a change of pace and began looking for opportunities in Minnesota. As they looked for businesses for sale, they came across Pokegama Plaza Liquor. Cliff took a trip to Grand Rapids to meet with a broker and was interviewed by previous owner Tony. He made an offer to buy the business that same day.

Cliff and Jill were able to keep all six of the Pokegama Plaza Liquor employees that had worked for Tony and Crystal. "They are a tremendous resource to our success," said Cliff. "A few of them are long-term and have been a pleasure to work with."

Jill added, "They made the transition easier for us."

They are also thankful to have the great mentorship of Tony and Crystal.



**New owners of Pokegama Plaza Liquor Cliff and Jill Tabke.**

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Crystal. When they became new owners in November, Tony continued to work at the business to help them get started. Tony and Crystal continue to support Cliff and Jill, and want them

to be successful. As they look ahead to their own future and the future of Pokegama Plaza Liquor, Cliff and Jill want to honor the success of Tony and Crystal.

"We would like to continue with the community legacy that Tony and Crystal built," Cliff said. "We want to build on his success." Pokegama Plaza Liquor is located in

the Pokegama Plaza at 1007 S Pokegama Ave, Grand Rapids, Minn., 55744. Store hours are 8 a.m.-20 p.m. Monday-Saturday, and 11 a.m.-6 p.m. Sunday.

## Eric Black to succeed Peter McDermott, who is retiring as MDI's president and CEO

McDermott has led the Minneapolis-based nonprofit manufacturer since 2008

Local nonprofit manufacturer MDI today announced that President and CEO Peter McDermott will retire on April 1. Taking over the position will be Eric Black, a global business development and integrated marketing leader who spent 23 years at Cargill before entering his current role at Univar Solutions as global director of marketing and technical sales. MDI is a nonprofit corrugated plastic manufacturer and assembly service provider headquartered in Minneapolis with locations in Hibbing, Grand Rapids and Cohasset, with the goal of providing employment for people with disabilities.

"MDI is a mission-minded organization that is driven to provide real results and quality solutions for its customers and employees alike," said Black. "I am eager and humbled to join the MDI team and add to its incredible momentum and growth."

Black will begin his role as president on February 15, overlapping with McDermott until April 1, at which point Black will assume CEO duties as well.

"We are thrilled to welcome Eric to MDI," said Jill Hesselroth, board chair of MDI. "His proven track record of product innovation, business growth and customer satisfaction paired with his deep ties to the community and dedication to relationship building will continue to elevate MDI's reputation, both as an inclusive employer and a reliable manufacturer."

"At the same time, we are deeply thankful for Peter and the decade-plus of growth, direction and impact he has had on our organization and the lives of each and every one of our employees," added Hesselroth. "Our business and our community are better thanks to his leadership."

McDermott has served as president and CEO for over 12 years. His passion and leadership have led MDI to tremendous growth, from \$11 million in sales and 123 employees to \$33 million in sales and 562 employees. He oversaw MDI's multi-year, \$15 million capital investment project of new and upgraded facilities; launched numerous programs that benefited youth and adults with disabilities; led the merger with Deer River Hired Hands; helped MDI obtain ISO quality certifications supporting new medical assembly offerings; and launched a polypropylene line that allowed the manufacturer to expand its products. Under his leadership, MDI grew its commercial sales from \$2 million to \$12 million, while maintaining a key



**Peter McDermott**



**Eric Black**

government customer whose order volatility ranged from \$7 million to more than \$37 million each year. Most notably, he improved the working conditions for people with disabilities and advocated on their behalf at the Minnesota Legislature and within the business community.

"I am grateful for the opportunity to lead the team at MDI and provide job opportunities for people with and without disabilities in an inclusive work environment - it has been the highlight of my career," said McDermott. "I know the organization and the outstanding people who work here will be well-served by Eric, who is a proven, passionate leader. My greatest source of pride has been showing others that people with disabilities can earn the independence, fulfillment and empowerment that employment provides when given the opportunity, and I know MDI will continue to exemplify this philosophy for years to come."

## Minnesota's unemployment rate at 4.4% in December

Minnesota's seasonally adjusted unemployment rate dropped to 4.4% in December, down from a revised 4.5% in November, according to numbers released today by the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED). The tenth of a percentage point tick down was due to people leaving the labor force, at least temporarily, and happened as Minnesota lost 49,800 jobs in December. The private sector lost 42,900 jobs in Minnesota in December, down 1.8% and Government lost 6,900 jobs, down 1.7%.

December employment numbers reflect impact of the late fall spike in COVID-19 cases. Sectors dependent on groups of people gathering together, including restaurants and bars, entertainment venues, and fitness centers, showed job losses. The Leisure & Hospitality sector led job losses in December with a decline of 41,100 jobs last month.

"Today's employment data confirms what we've expected - the spike in cases in late fall had an impact on the economy," said DEED Commissioner Steve Grove. "The predictable loss of jobs that accompanied the sacrifice that businesses and workers had to make may turn out to be temporary, as just 10% of those surveyed said their job loss was permanent."

Minnesota lost jobs for the second month in a row, losing 49,800 payroll jobs, down 1.8%, in December on a seasonally adjusted basis following a loss of 15,500 jobs (revised) in November. Job losses in November and December erase job gains made from August through October. Minnesota lost 387,800 jobs from February through April and has since gained 140,300 jobs, or 36.2% of the jobs lost on

a seasonally adjusted basis. This is down from October, when Minnesota had regained 205,600, or 52.5% of jobs lost during the pandemic, on a seasonally adjusted basis.

Over the year in December, Minnesota shed 238,056 payroll jobs, down 8.0%, with private sector jobs down 7.9% in December. U.S. over-the-year job loss stood at 6.0% with the private sector down 6.1% in December, unchanged from November.

Minnesota's labor participation rate fell 0.4 to 67.5% in December, and the U.S. labor force participation rate held steady at 61.5%. The U.S. unemployment rate also remained steady at 6.7%.

Minnesota tracks unemployment rates for certain ethnic groups based on rolling averages to help account for small sample sizes. Based on rolling averages over the last six months, from July to December 2020, the unemployment rate for Black Minnesotans fell to 5.5% in December from 11.1% in November. For Latinx Minnesotans, unemployment is at 6.0%, down from 7.7% in November. White Minnesotans have a six-month-rolling-average unemployment rate of 5.2%, down from 5.6% in November. Declines in six-month-rolling-average unemployment rates in December reflect the high unemployment month of June dropping out of the average, people finding employment, and people dropping out of the labor force, at least temporarily.

All supersectors continued to show over-the-year job loss in Minnesota and nationally. In Minnesota, over-the-year job losses were still greatest in Leisure & Hospitality, down 43.7% or 116,429 jobs, and Information, down 15.9% or 7,301 jobs. Other supersectors with a high share of job loss-

es were Other Services, down 13.5% or 15,499 jobs, Logging & Mining, down 11.4% or 694 jobs, and Government, down 8.4% or 36,152 jobs over the year.

Four supersectors in Minnesota showed strength over the year compared to the U.S.:

Trade, Transportation & Utilities was down 1.7% in Minnesota compared to 2.4% nationwide over the year. Strength here was in Retail Trade, down 505 jobs or 0.2% over the year compared to 2.7% nationally. Minnesota also showed strength in Utilities, which was flat over the year in Minnesota and down 1.8% nationwide.

Professional & Business Services was down 1.3% in Minnesota compared to 3.7% nationwide. Minnesota's strength was in both Management of Companies and Enterprises, down 1.2% in Minnesota and 3.2% nationwide, as well as Administrative & Support & Waste Services, down 0.5% in Minnesota and 6.0% nationwide. Within that sector, Employment Services (temp help) was up 0.9% or 543 jobs over the year in Minnesota compared to a drop of 6.4% nationwide.

Manufacturing fell 3.3% in Minnesota compared to 4.2% nationwide over the year in December. The strength here was in Nondurable Goods, particularly Food Manufacturing where Minnesota employment grew 3.2% over the year while nationally employment fell by 1.4%. Medical Equipment and Supplies also showed strength, up 2.3% over the year in Minnesota.

Logging & Mining job loss in Minnesota remains just below U.S. job loss, with Minnesota down 11.4% and the U.S. down 11.8%.

Employment fell in December over the year in all Minnesota Metropolitan Statistical Areas.