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Perseverance is key in business, Pizitz advises

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Perseverance is the key to success in retailing, Richard A. Pizitz Sr. told merchants from across the state who gathered Thursday in Birmingham.

The past president of Pizitz Management Group spoke about his family's long history in the retail business at the annual Retail Day event sponsored by the University of Alabama at Birmingham's business school and the Alabama Retail Association.

The family's retailing roots date to 1895, when Pizitz's grandfather opened a dry goods store. The business moved to Birmingham in 1899, and it grew into the Pizitz department store chain.

Although the chain was sold in 1986, the Pizitz family has remained in retailing, with holdings that include cookie stores, yogurt shops and the Gus Mayer high-end department store.

Over the years, the family has learned a lot about different markets, Pizitz said.

"I know of nobody else in the world who sells cookies, yogurt and designer dresses," he said.

During Thursday's event, select retailers were honored with retailer of the year awards.

A key winner among Birmingham area businesses was James C. Lee III, chief executive of **Buffalo Rock** Co., who won a silver award in his category and also was recognized as a centennial retailer.

The Pepsi-Cola bottler started in 1901 as the wholesale Alabama Grocery Co.

The latest moves for Pizitz Management Group include a makeover for its local Gus Mayer store. In February, the store moved from its longtime home at Colonial Brookwood Village to a space at The Summit shopping center, adding a more contemporary look and a new merchandise mix.

And last year, Pizitz Management Group launched a self-serve frozen yogurt bar concept called 32 degrees, which continues to add new locations. So far, there are 12 stores in five states, with two more locations slated to open in November.

This week, California based yogurt shop chain Pinkberry said it would open its first Alabama location this fall at The Summit, taking over the space previously occupied by 32 degrees.

The store's equipment was sold to Pinkberry, because 32 degrees is doing better in mid-size markets, Jeff Pizitz, president of Pizitz Management Group, said Thursday.

"It was a great opportunity for us to redeploy our assets in mid-size markets," he said, citing Cullman, Hattiesburg, Miss.; and Carrollton, Ga., as examples.

The 32 degrees store in Crestline remains open.

Other local retailers recognized at the event are:

-- Annual sales less than \$1 million: Linda Parker, co-owner of Bruster's Real Ice Cream, Vestavia Hills, gold award.

-- Annual sales \$1 million to \$5 million: Terry Chapman, president of Business Electronics Corp., Homewood, gold award; Sarah Brown and Terry Shea, owners of Wrapsody Inc., Hoover and Auburn, silver award.

-- Annual sales \$5 million to \$20 million: Stuart Shevin and the management team at Standard Furniture Co., Birmingham, silver award; Andy Virciglio, co-owner of Piggly Wiggly Food Stores of Jefferson County Inc., bronze award.

-- Annual sales more than \$20 million: Rodney and Mark Barstein and the Janak Shah family, owners of Simply Fashion Stores Ltd., Birmingham, gold award; James C. Lee III of **Buffalo Rock**, Birmingham, silver award-tie; Scott Crump of Scott Crump Toyota, Jasper, silver award tie; Benny Larussa Sr., Charles Mizerany and Billy Wentz, management team for Jack's Family Restaurants Inc., Homewood, bronze award-tie; Bill Wakefield, president of Wakefield's and Martin's Family Clothing, Anniston, bronze award-tie.