

CCSW: A higher standard of retail



Retail is a difficult business to thrive in sometimes. Changing trends, supplying what the customer wants and being unique enough in a niche market are a challenge in this competitive industry.

That's why Creek Convenience Store Wetumpka (CCSW) stands out against the big chain gas stations in the area.

"We hold our store and employees to a higher standard," General Manager of CCSW Ellis Martin said. "Our customer service, our products and the maintenance of the store is a high priority and top-notch (compared to other convenience store operations). Our drive-through service is also something we excel in. Not all stores are as efficient as we are, and many don't even offer

drive-through service."

Martin is a Tribal Member, and a quick glance around the store and property shows he knows what he's talking about. The

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grounds are well-manicured, and the store and bathrooms are exceptionally cleaner than most public places. The items on shelves are lined up properly, and nothing seems out of place. You can even find Indian-related items for sale, such as Indian dolls, hand-made purses, Poarch Creek logo items (hats, shirts, cups) and more.

"I've been in the business for almost seven years," Martin said. "Interacting with the customers has been one of the most rewarding experiences, getting to know them as a person and learning what they like is how to make a better business so they enjoy coming here.

"We have had CCSW for only a year, but we are learning new things every day and constantly improving," he said.

CCSW employs 10 full-time workers, all who receive a full benefits package, 401(k), paid vacation and sick time. That, Martin said, is another way CCSW is different. Most gas stations don't offer benefits or paid time off, let alone a retirement plan.

Martin said working with his employees on the floor and in the office is what he enjoys most about his job as a manager.

"My daily routine consists of paperwork, of course; cigarette and gas pricing, dealing with vendors. But conversing with and teaching my employees about high quality customer service is why I come to work."

CCSW sells Shell brand gasoline, as do the two other stations owned and managed by Creek Indian Enterprises Development Authority (Creek Convenience Store Atmore and Creek Travel Plaza, both in Atmore). All three stations also participate in the Fuel Rewards Network (FRN), where customers can redeem points for cents off gas.

According to Shell Oil Co., it boasts the largest retail gasoline network in the U.S., with more than 14,700 branded stores. Shell also is the largest participant in FRN.

"Selling high-quality fuel at low prices also helps us stay competitive," Martin said. "But our customer service and inventory is by far our pride and joy."