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VERC Enterprises earns Convenience Store News Spirit Awards for Community Outreach

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A recent study found that U.S. consumers can't get enough of cause-related programs. In fact, 91% of the individuals who participated in the study indicated that they want even more of the products and services they use to support a cause, and 89% said they are likely to switch brands to one associated with a cause, given comparable price and quality.

This is certainly positive news for the winners of this year's Convenience Store News Spirit Awards for Community Outreach. Now in its fifth year, the Spirit Awards program honors convenience retailers that are involved in community service programs aimed at bettering the lives of the people in the markets they serve.

This year's Spirit Award winners are:

- * Grand Award: VERC Enterprises
- * Companies with one to 99 stores: St. Romain Oil Co.
- * Companies with 100 to 499 stores: Alon Brands Inc.
- * Companies with 500-plus stores: Corner Store.

VERC Enterprises garnered the top honor for its efforts to reach out to those in the community with physical or mental disabilities and associated challenges, and offer them a place within the VERC Enterprises family. Employment, according to president and CEO Leo Vercollone, not only supplies a paycheck, but also a sense of one's "place in the world."

Small chain winner, St. Romain Oil, expanded its community service efforts in 2012. Inspired by a Biblical teaching, the convenience retailer's new Corporate Works of Mercy program incorporates partnerships with four local organizations: Food Bank of Central Louisiana, Turning Point Battered Women's Shelter, Re-Entry Solutions and the Alzheimer's Association.

Mid-sized chain winner, Alon Brands, also believes in supporting a wide variety of causes close to home, but in a twist, the company this year asked customers to help it select the organizations deserving of winning a new car in its Clean 13 Cars-4-Cause program. The campaign gave away 13 new cars to loyal customers, exceptional employees and community champions.

Finally, large chain winner Corner Store/CST Brands Inc. is continuing its community service efforts with the same vigor as before its May 1 spinoff from Valero Energy Corp. In fact, just one week after becoming its own company, CST deployed 100 employee volunteers to construct a new playground near San Antonio's east side, not far from its new corporate headquarters.