



JIM FISHER
is the CEO of IMST Corp., Houston. Reach
Jim at jfisher@imstcorp.com.

It's Time for Some Changes

Well, this is a first for me regarding the many years I have been a guest contributor to *CSP* magazine. Sitting here on a beautiful December day in Houston, I have asked myself, "What in the world can I pen for February (when the majority of the country is in the depths of winter and feeling the swells and lulls of the winter doldrums) that anyone is going to care about, much less read, enjoy, and have a takeaway as a result?"

For the past six out of seven weeks I have been traveling, and I've spent at least some portion of each week in snow and cold. And now, this week I am in Houston, in my office, in beautiful weather, and simply saying, "Thank you to Mother Nature and our Heavenly Father" for bringing this change for we south Texans to enjoy.

And so there was the idea: changes. That single word makes total sense for this month. Since October, I've seen the exuberance of beautiful fall colors in seven different states; watched ponds begin to freeze solid for the winter and ice chunks floating in rivers; witnessed the quietness of beautiful snow-covered landscapes; was mesmerized by a full moon in a cloudless sky shining down on a picturesque New England winter scene so lovely that not even a perfect photo could capture its illuminating beauty; and noticed cities and towns transforming themselves to prepare for the challenges that will come with each new season. These changes must be made to not only cope, but rather to achieve normalcy and excel in the face of new challenges.

Location vs. Market

Changes in themselves remind me of a master developer (and operator) within the hospitality/service industry that I was fortunate to meet and had the opportunity to study over the years. His long-term (beginning in 1958), enormous success came from always reinventing his product offering to meet the needs of



his potential customer once he had established what vacancies and/or emptiness existed in terms of need fulfillment. He succeeded because he never placed any restrictions on himself or his company; he made sure that his organization and its people always welcomed change.

He did not have a preconceived idea of only what his company did, but rather he identified what it could do. His company was forever changing, multiplying and emerging as different forces in various scenarios.

For years we have taken exception to so many pundits who emphatically state success is based on three factors: location, location, and location. We have never agreed, knowing that retail success is based upon many factors, including one that Mr. John Q. Hammonds (the person

of who I am writing) believed in: "market, market, market." We generally say this is a combination of many diverse trade areas that combine to create a marketplace. We are always looking for those nooks and crannies that have gone unseen due to tunnel vision or that cannot be seen by the preconceived eye.

We must recognize, embrace and move forward in harmony with the changes that make each company unique. Changes bring challenges and opportunities within each operational environment that every distinct retail facility must serve; those specific factors, influences and circumstances are systemically unique.

Our industry is one that has changed from service/gasoline stations in the 1960s and '70s to combined, integrated convenience store/fuel offerings in the 1980s and '90s, and acclaimed and recognized retail destinations (for specific need fulfillment) in the 2000s. Now we are positively moving forward into well-defined proprietary foodservice offerings showcasing products that equally stand with restaurant/foodservice menu selections. In some cases they are going beyond equal standing with restaurants and other foodservice selections. In many cases and by many companies, professionally created drive-thru programs are thriving—and opportunities beyond that have not been realized.

Yep, there's certainly a lot of good to be said about changes. They are what lead to greatness.

Have an inspiring, new and different tomorrow. ■