



Retail Business Services

Supplier Partner Milo's Tea Makes Life a Little Sweeter as Women-Owned Business

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Retail Business Services, the services company of Ahold Delhaize USA, keeps diversity and inclusion at the heart of our business practices, continually striving to partner with companies and vendors that champion differences

During Women's History Month in March, we were proud to sit down with a diverse business partner that has been raising the bar on gender equality all along: Milo's Tea.

Leading a certified women-owned company wasn't where Milo's Tea CEO Tricia Wallwork thought she'd end up in life – but it turned out to be her calling.

"Initially, I went to law school. I wanted to make a difference, I wanted to save the world, but when I started practicing, I realized it wasn't the right fit," she said. "So I went home and got into the family business. I quickly realized it was my passion and, after that, it was really a no-brainer."

Milo's got its start in Birmingham, Ala., in 1946 when Wallwork's grandparents, Milo and Bea Carlton, launched a small restaurant in the city's working-class sector.

"This was a decade before McDonald's, so it was a new concept to have 'fast food' hamburgers and such," Wallwork said. "Eventually, my grandparents started noticing that people would come to the drive-through just for the tea – so they started selling it on its own."

At the time, there wasn't anything like Milo's tea on the market – home brewed and free from chemicals and preservatives. The recipe was modeled after the tea Carlton made for her family each day. But that's only part of her legacy – something Wallwork is thinking about a lot this Women's History Month.

"It's exceptionally important to acknowledge the sacrifices of prior generations who enabled us to achieve what we have – and I can't help but think of my grandmother," Wallwork said. "It was the 1940s, and she was in that restaurant making pies and fries and tea, while also raising kids at home. She didn't realize how innovative that was at the time. But because of her, I was raised to believe I could do anything I wanted with some hard work, passion and grit. We can all do anything."

When Wallwork took over the company in 2002, she knew she wanted to continue her grandmother's legacy of breaking down barriers. It's part of what motivated her to have Milo's certified as a women-owned business.

"I'm proud to have that certification and appreciative of the values installed in me by my grandmother," she said. "Like Retail Business Services and Ahold Delhaize USA, diversity and inclusion are important to all aspects of the Milo's organization. We are committed to creating a culture of people first and respect in the workplace. Today, more than 40 percent of all company salaries go to women, and we have more women on the board than men."

Further, more than half of Milo's associates are racially diverse, and the company has added flex time and paternity-leave policies that cover scenarios such as a single parent having to care for a sick child.

"We try to look at what's best for our people," Wallwork said. "And when you're a certified women-owned business, when you have these inclusive policies, it creates more interest from more diverse candidates – whether that's racial diversity or gender diversity. When you do this people flock to you, and now we have some really strong female leaders at Milo's. Helping them develop professionally has become one of my passions."

It's a model that's led to success. Since Wallwork took over the company, Milo's has gained store placements throughout the United States, including at more than 1,000 Food Lion locations. The brand is the fastest-growing tea nationwide and is posting strong sales and share growth within Food Lion's refrigerated tea segment.

"We compete with big food – it's a little bit like David and Goliath," she said. "But we believe that a company our size is nimbler and better able to meet customer needs. We're really moving the needle."

Milo's is also verified as a Zero Waste manufacturer and as a company which donates 1 percent of profits.

"I firmly believe business can be used as a force for good in the world," Wallwork said. "Milo's desire to care for its associates and community grew out of being a family business – because of course you're going to take care of your family. When we empower our people to grow, it helps our company grow and it helps our community grow. It's just part of our DNA."