

# GAME ON!

## TOP-SELLER IN STATE PERSEVERES THROUGH TROUBLING TIMES

By Mandy Detwiler, Contributing Writer

Oak Grove, Kentucky is a little off the beaten path in Western Kentucky, sitting just on the Kentucky/ Tennessee line. For the 16 years Julie Bryant has owned Pal's, the store has been the number one seller of lottery tickets in the state.

Enter the county health inspector, who stepped into the shop and declared it non-essential in the wake of state mandates against operations.

"I am really a convenience store, but Lottery is what we do," Bryant says. "We have snacks and drinks and cigarettes, but the Lottery is what keeps us afloat ... and we do it very well. Our customers have stuck with us all these years and that's what we strive for -- to make sure our customers are taken care of."

Following a COVID-19 compliance health inspection, it seemed Bryant had one of two choices: close completely or find a way to sell while following state mandates.

Game on.



Chris Green, the Lottery's western regional sales manager, says: "When COVID-19 hit, Julie at Pal's was taking all the precautions and doing everything that they could to stay open with social distancing. It really didn't affect sales. They were wearing masks and standing so far apart. The health department came by and said they couldn't do it."

Bryant asked if they could do curbside service like other retailers, even though that was a "really big challenge, as it is for anybody," Green says. Curbside service? Not a problem.

Bryant had IGT move their Keno monitor to a window so customers could see the numbers. This meant a lot of running in and out of the store for the employees.

"Julie is very proactive and very pro-lottery, and she's had a great attitude through all of this," Green adds. "She said 'We're GONNA do what we can do.'"

Although sales are admittedly down, "she still is maintaining the title of the number one retailer in the state of Kentucky," Green says. "Curbside service is a big deal because it's not like in a restaurant when you're taking out one person's order and they leave. You're talking about Lottery players where you're going back and forth constantly."

Bryant credits her staff for their positive attitudes throughout a difficult retail atmosphere where some businesses closed indefinitely. First and foremost was the safety of the Pal's employees. Store hours were amended as the days got longer. While the store was closed, the employees did a clean sweep and installed Plexiglass at the cashiers' stations. Thinking outside the box, it seems, was the key to success.

"Keep on taking care of your employees, first of all," Bryant says. "I think that's very important. Make sure you're keeping them safe. Keep pressing forward through all this stuff and just make it work."

