

McALEER'S OFFICE FURNITURE IS SILVER RETAILER OF THE YEAR

MOBILE – Sept. 16, 2021 – Melissa M. Cross, president of McAleer's Office Furniture in Mobile, today was named Alabama's 2021 Silver Retailer of the Year in the Annual Sales More Than \$5 Million category. McAleer's is one of 11 businesses honored as Retailers of the Year by the Alabama Retail Association. It has been a member of the association since 2020.

"Being named Alabama Retailer of the Year is a wonderful opportunity to recognize our amazingly talented team members and our dedicated customers. We are so fortunate to be a part of such a supportive community," Cross said when presented the award at the 3305 Springhill Ave. store. McAleer's Office Furniture also operates in Pensacola, Fla. The Gulf Coast retail and contract office furniture business employs a total of 20 full time. To differentiate itself from competitors, the business has nearly \$1 million of in-stock inventory, ready for same-day pickup or next-day delivery.

In 1979, when Jim and Camilla McAleer saw a need in Mobile for a store that exclusively sells office furniture, they mortgaged their home. In March of this year, the business the couple founded celebrated its 42nd anniversary. Their children have been running the family enterprise for almost a decade. Cross has been president of the company since 2012, while her brother, David McAleer, manages the Florida location. In 2015, Cross shared the Gold Retailer of the Year title with her dad in a lesser sales category. She has since grown the business to more than \$6 million in annual sales.

"As a second-generation, family-owned and -operated business, McAleer's Office Furniture is familiar to the local community," said Danette Richards, director of small business development for the Mobile Area Chamber of Commerce. In 2020 and 2021, Cross, who serves on the chamber's board, chaired its total resource campaign, leading a team of 40 volunteers to exceed the campaign's goal, both years. The Mobile chamber, the Eastern Shore Chamber of Commerce and an employee nominated Cross as a Retailer of the Year.

Paige Williams, who handles marketing and used furniture sales for the business, said, "Melissa Cross is dedicated to bettering herself as a business owner and by extension McAleer's Office Furniture." Cross also supports other entrepreneurs, participating in two mentoring programs – Real Advise Mentoring Program, or RAMP, a program developed at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology; and Innovation Portal, a Mobile start-up incubator that connects its members with mentors.

Sherry Coker, vice president/private banker with ServisFirst Bank, calls Cross, a "businesswoman extraordinaire. She has a solid grasp on where McAleer's currently stands and a vision for the future."

The Retailer of the Year judges praised McAleer's for investing in renovations and adapting to a workforce working from home during the pandemic. "In April 2020, during the strictest time of the lockdowns, we closed our doors for two weeks to renovate," Cross said in her Retailer of the Year entry. "We immediately changed our focus on what we were marketing and purchased multiple, affordable work-from-home sets that made it easy for consumers to get something at home fast."

McAleer's also partnered with AL-FLA Plastics, a Mobile company, to custom cut acrylic screens for its business customers. "We were able to get our customers what they needed fast and create a whole new revenue stream for ourselves, all while supporting a local manufacturer," Cross said.

The Alabama Retailer of the Year awards, started in 1999, honor retailers who have demonstrated growth, innovation and a commitment to their respective communities. This year's winners were selected from 49 entries submitted from a pool of 80 nominees.

"Melissa Cross is a retailer of the year EVERY year to her customers, her 14 Alabama employees and the Mobile and Eastern Shore communities," said Alabama Retail Association President Rick Brown.

The Alabama Retail Association represents retailers, the largest private employer in the state of Alabama, before the Alabama Legislature and the U.S. Congress. Through sales of food, clothing, furniture, medicine and more, our 4,300 independent merchant and national company members touch almost every aspect of daily living. Since 1943, we've worked to promote what's best for the retail industry in Alabama. Whether voicing the retail view when public policy is made, educating members about issues that impact them, negotiating rates for benefits and services or communicating the retail story, the Alabama Retail Association and its members are better together.