

Center for Retailing Interim Director Gears Up for Global Conference

University Relations - Communications
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When people hear the word "retail," they might automatically think of a brick-and-mortar store with a clerk behind the counter. But retail today is more than that – much more – says Joan Sweeney, interim director of the UA's **Terry J. Lundgren Center for Retailing** ^[1].

"Retail is everywhere," Sweeney says. "Retail is the engine of American business. We're a consumer society, and two-thirds of the U.S. GDP flows through retail."

The idea of retail being "everywhere at once" is the theme of the UA's 19th annual **Global Retailing Conference** ^[2], which will take place on April 23 and 24 at the Westin La Paloma Resort and Spa.

The annual conference is the signature event for the Terry J. Lundgren Center for Retailing, which is housed in the **John and Doris Norton School of Family and Consumer Sciences** ^[3] in the UA **College of Agriculture and Life Sciences** ^[4].

One of the leading industry events of its kind, the conference brings together retail professionals and University students and faculty to focus on the future of retail in America and worldwide.

"This is where corporate America meets academia," Sweeney says.

The conference gives UA students exposure to the "real world" of retail and provides insight into available careers in the industry, ranging from management to marketing to product development and more.

"This crystallizes for students the many career opportunities and the depth and breadth of the retail industry," Sweeney said.

Sweeney, a member of the UA Foundation Board of Trustees and the Norton School advisory board, was appointed interim director of the Lundgren Center for Retailing earlier this month. A national search for a permanent director will launch soon.

A UA alumna, Sweeney earned her degree in accounting and management information in 1981 and worked in the finance and private equity field for 29 years before retiring in 2010. In her new role as interim director, she was tasked with creating a strategic plan for the Lundgren Center.

Her plans include enhancing the center's already robust professional development, executive education and mentoring opportunities for students in an effort to prepare them for careers.

"We have a wonderful reputation and following and now we want to take it to the next level," she says.

The UA's **retailing and consumer sciences program** ^[5] is nationally recognized, with many top U.S. companies recruiting talent from the program. In the last 18 months, students have been hired by corporations including Macy's, Nike, Dillard's, Target, Home Depot, Tiffany and Company, REI, Abercrombie and Fitch, AT&T and DreamWorks.

Sweeney has witnessed firsthand the effectiveness of the retailing and consumer sciences program and the Global Retailing Conference in helping prepare students for careers.

Her daughter earned a UA degree in retailing and consumer sciences in 2013 and now works as an assistant buyer at Macy's in New York. Sweeney recalls how thrilled her daughter was when, as a UA student, she got to meet and speak with fashion designer Tory Burch at the 2013 Global Retailing Conference.

"These students get this real-world exposure that's just amazing," Sweeney says. "If you think about the **Never Settle** ^[6] plan and its student engagement component, the Lundgren Center could be the poster child."

More than 100 students from retailing and consumer sciences and other majors are expected to attend this year's conference, along with about 350 retail industry representatives from around the globe.

Presenters at the event will include Macy's chairman and CEO Terry J. Lundgren – the UA alumnus for whom the University's retailing center is named – as well as representatives from Google, REI, The Container Store, PetSmart, Starbucks and more. The featured speaker will be Latina singer, actress and businesswoman Thalía Sodi.

"The Global Retailing Conference keeps growing and growing," Sweeney says. "This is a big deal for Tucson."

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