

The Plainfield Co-op Newsletter

Summer 2017

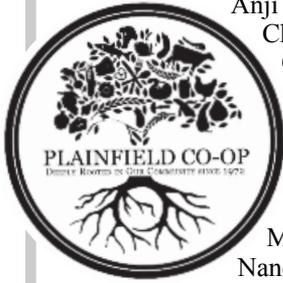


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 Staff photos: Glenda Bissex, except photo
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Newsletter Advertising Rates

Ad size	Single issue	4 Consecutive issues (prepaid: 20% discount)
Full page	\$75	\$240
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Quarter page	\$25	\$80

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August 15 for the Fall issue

Ad copy should be submitted to:

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Electronic graphics files preferred, but we are able to work with any clear copy. For questions about ad copy, contact Sarah Albert, 802-476-0526 or sarah@vtlink.net



About This Newsletter



Here's your Co-op summer reading—

Who's who: long-time staff (Pillars of the Co-op, see cover and pages 15–17) and new Board members.

What's been happening: Annual Meeting report and photos, Management Collective report, Treasurer's report, Outgoing President's report.

What will be happening: Repairing and Updating our Building, Incoming President's report, and a co-op vision for the future (A Bigger Picture).

There's a lot to digest here--including some summer recipes—so you might want to keep your print newsletter around. You can also view it, with illustrations in color, on the Co-op website: www.PlainfieldCoop.com.

We welcome your contributions—artwork and photos, letters, articles, and does anybody know any good co-op jokes? How many Co-op members does it take to change a light bulb? Submit your answers and other stuff to the editor by August 15 for the fall issue.

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Thanks to Eliza Cleary for help with mailing print newsletters. ♦

PLAINFIELD COMMUNITY CENTER



Space available for your:

- Classes**
- Meetings**
- Parties**



Workshops

Art Gallery Exhibitions & Special Events

\$9/hr. for Co-op Members, \$15/hr. for Non-Members

Events: \$35 for Members, \$50 for Non-Members

Scheduling Book at Co-op Register

More Information?

Contact Chris Carnes at libertyloungevt@gmail.com

Using the Community Center benefits The Plainfield Co-op

Outgoing President's Report

by Gail Falk

When I think back over my six and a half years on the Board, I am impressed both with our little store's stability in the face of the strong winds of competition and also the many ways we have adapted and grown into our mission as a cooperative neighborhood grocery and community center.

Many changes have occurred so quietly that most members are probably unaware of them. Taken together, they show that our Co-op is a dynamic and resilient organization, capable of change and growth while remaining faithful to our core values. Here is a list of major changes during the past seven years. No one person was responsible for any of these changes; they reflect the work of Board, Management Collective, staff, and volunteers.

1. We revised our Ends to include the goal of *affordability* and *sustaining the environment through our operations and products* we offer. The Ends are the Goals of the organizations. They are the ideals we continually strive to attain. Adding *affordability* and *sustainability* to our Ends means that the Management Collective will continually strive to improve in these areas.
2. We adopted a Point of Sale (POS) digital register and record system. This took a big investment of money and staff training four years ago. As a customer, you may have primarily noticed the change to digital cash registers, but the store operations have been greatly improved by this system. For the first time, we can track sales by department and measure how much of our sales are Organic, Local, Fair trade, and produced by another co-op.
3. Our social media and electronic communications have blossomed. To our very wonderful print newsletter, we have added the electronic version of the newsletter, which you may be reading now. We have a new and improved website, Twitter and Instagram accounts, a Facebook page and presence on the Plainfield People Facebook Page, and an e-sales flyer.
4. Our building looks about the same on the outside (except for our sturdy ramp), but inside we have a new spice shelves, coffee counter, bread shelf, beams to shore up the floors, and renovations to the back work space. We have a beautiful sign on Main Street, and a boat landing on the Winooksi. In addition, we completed boundary agreements with the Town of Plainfield and a neighboring landowner which clarified and slightly expanded the boundaries of our property. We obtained a flood plain survey, which determined that we are not in the Flood Plain of the Winooski although we are in the River Corridor.
5. We have undertaken several actions to make us safer, including the installation of ice jams on the roof, installation of a new fire alarm and security system, and installation of

mirrors and anti-theft protocols. The Board of Directors now has liability insurance, and working members have limited coverage in case of injury. We had a financial review by an accountant.

6. After approval at annual meeting in 2011, we adopted Equity membership. Our members are now member/owners and receive dividends in the years we are profitable. All equity payments go into our Capital Fund, which is used only for capital expenditures.
7. We have a Strategic Plan to guide our next stages of development.

8. All long-term loans have been paid off.

There are some goals we have not yet achieved. We do not yet pay a livable wage to most of our staff. People on low budgets still have trouble affording the products we sell. We have a long way to go in outreach and marketing. We need to implement our Strategic Plan. And... we need to have more fun together.

The members elected a fabulous board at the April Annual Meeting. I will miss serving on the Board, but I am excited and confident that the Co-op will be going forward in such good hands. ♦



WWW.JASPERHILLFARM.COM
GREENSBORO, VT
ARTISAN CAVE AGED CHEESE

Incoming President's Report

by Jean Hamilton

After four years of highly enjoyable shopping at the Co-op, I am honored to be the new Board President. I joined the Board last fall to fill a vacant seat and was voted in at the annual meeting in April. We all benefitted from Gail Falk's years of Board leadership, and I am very grateful for her ongoing assistance during this transition.

Though I am relatively new to Plainfield, it is plainly clear how important the Co-op has been to this community for many years. From our creation story (see Jim Higgins' essay series) to the ongoing evolution of new product offerings, engaging community events, and collaborative management, I am proud of the way our co-op embodies an all hands on deck approach to community empowerment. As a Co-op we represent the International Cooperative Values, right here in Central Vermont:

Co-operatives are based on the values of self-help, self responsibility, democracy, equality, equity, and solidarity. In the tradition of their founders, co-operative members believe in the ethical values of honesty, openness, social responsibility, and caring for others.

– International Cooperative Alliance

The board is undertaking a number of projects to improve the Co-op's ability to serve the member owners and to strengthen member owner engagement in their asset. We continue to work with the Management Collective to move forward on the strategic plan. Current priorities related to the plan include: developing Membership Engagement and Food Security programs and conducting market research to inform scale and scope of building improvements.

We are also focused on strengthening our governance and management through group trainings on Policy Governance and listening sessions with the Co-op staff. The sessions will help us cultivate one of the most important tools of community development: clear communication.

As Board President, I am in service to you, so please feel free to reach out to me by email jean.myung.hamilton@gmail.com or phone 454-7874. Please join me in welcoming the new board officers: Vice President Giordano Checchi, Treasurer Bob Fancher, and Secretary Sarah Phillips and members Alicia White, Chris Jackson, and Peter Colman. ♦

Working Members by Charlotte Domino

Hello dear Co-opites! So, I keep hearing about working membership. What the heck is it? Well, working members are individuals (like you!) who come to the store to help out.

Small as we are, our Co-op does many things. This means we have many chores for anyone's interest! Produce is filled with veggies and fruits that would love to see you. There are snacks waiting to be packed, there are drinks and beans and noodles yearning to be on the shelves! We have a construction team of one, the dust never sleeps, our little garden needs tending—water (*continued next page*)

Plainfield Co-op – 2016 Annual Review

by Bob Fancher, Treasurer

2017 First Quarter. The news from the first quarter of 2017 is much, much better than it was at the end of 2016. Due to the tremendous efforts made by The Management Collective (MC), the financials have turned around and the Co-op is back on track. Late in 2016 the MC instituted many changes to reverse the downturn we had experienced. I am pleased to report that as of the end of March, we are on budget for Sales and Gross Profit. Our Expenses are under budget and our Net Profit is in the green and much higher than anticipated.

And, the work continues. The MC is still making changes to keep Expenses under control and to increase Sales. You will continue to see changes in the store – some new paint, some changes in product placement and new products. There will be changes behind the scenes too, like increased staffing efficiency and additional cost trimming.

The amount we owe our suppliers is still lagging and some payments are overdue. This has been a persistent problem for a while now. The MC has tried many things to correct the problem and

improvements have been made, but there is still work to do. We value our suppliers and want to have a good solid relationship with them. We will keep working on this until it is resolved.

Some additional good news, the results from April are in and the numbers are even better than at the end of March. There are a lot of reasons to be optimistic about 2017.

Renovations and Expansion.

Elsewhere in this issue you will find an update by Sarah Phillips on our renovation and expansion project. This is an exciting project with many facets. We are hoping to hear soon from the US Department of Agriculture about our grant application for a formal feasibility study. The study will give us real numbers for our planning process. Once the study is complete, we will have the financial information to help us decide if we go ahead with the detailed planning and actual construction. Check out Sarah's article for more details.

As always, thanks to all our members for their continuing support. ♦

and love, and the back picnic area needs raking and clipping to really shine.

Now that you're on board to help the Co-op, the Co-op wants to help you! What could be better than a sweet place to hang out, learning about the inner workings of the store and knowing you've helped our Co-op survive another day? There's a discount on everything except beer and wine for working members—1 hr/week=3% discount, 2hr/week=7% discount. Working Members get a great price on special orders—15% over cost!

If you're interested, just stop in and we'll give you the simple form at the register. No experience needed, just enthusiasm and love for our little community store. ♦

Annual Meeting 2017

by Gail Falk

The 2017 Annual Meeting at Twin Valley Senior Center on April 2 was a great success in many ways. Attendance was more than twice that of the 2016 meeting. The afternoon was filled with lively discussion and important information for and from our members. As one participant said, “Lots of people spoke up and nobody whined.”

At the outset, members were asked to introduce themselves and answer the question “What would you tell someone new to town about the Co-op?” Here are some of the answers:

Lots of great produce that you don't have to drive far for! You can see your friends there! They sell spinach! Kid's playhouse! When you are new in town, volunteering at the Co-op is a great way to become part of the community! Great to support local farmers! Nothing is more convenient! It's outrageous if you don't shop there! I count everyone at the Co-op as a friend! Great staff with lots of knowledge! Good friends and good politics and good announcements! Great meeting space upstairs! It's personal – you know the people behind the counter, and they know who you are! It's a totally different experience than the supermarket! It's participation in a local sustainable economy! I've never been turned down when I asked for a hug! 40% of what we sell is locally or regionally produced!

Treasurer Bob Fancher reported that there is no member dividend this year because the store ended 2016 in the red by about \$11,000.00. See Treasurer's report (pg. 7) in this issue for more details.

Staff member Karen Starr described the efforts of the Management Collective to cut costs and increase sales, including adding more affordable products (*see pages 11–14*).

Board President Gail Falk reviewed the many changes that the Co-op has experienced during the 6½ years she has been on the Board. See President's report on pages 4–5.

Sarah Phillips provided a detailed report on the status of building expansion financing and planning, which she has summarized on pages 18–20.

The members present unanimously approved a By-laws change which authorizes the Board, in its discretion, to notify members by email of dividend payments and/or membership meetings. Members who do not want to be contacted by email will continue to receive notices by U.S. Mail.

Joseph Gainza and Gail Falk are ending their Board service because they have served the limit of two consecutive terms. Giordano Checchi, the Vice President, will continue to serve in that role. Bob Fancher, the Treasurer, was re-elected to a second term. Sarah Phillips



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and Jean Hamilton, who were appointed to fill unexpired terms midyear, were both elected to the Board, as were Pete Colman, Alicia White, and Chris Jackson.

The heart of the meeting was a lengthy comment and question period in which many members participated. Here is a selection of the Comments and Questions:

In the process of trying to increase traffic, have we thought about making the Co-op more visible? It's not easy for people new to Plainfield to find and the signage may not always be effective. A larger sign on the outside of the building would help.

We are missing an opportunity to expand sales by offering a discount to low income customers or customers with a disability. This is one of the activities to be considered by the Food Security committee at the Strategic Plan. Implementing the Strategic Plan goals could positively impact the finances of the Co-op.

I love the Co-op for its funkiness. This is part of its attractiveness to some – but does it work for new members of our community?

Getting into the building can be tough. The entrance is difficult for folks who aren't familiar with the layout. It feels too much like an obstacle course. The entrance would feel more welcoming if the door into the store were glass and/or if there were art on the door.

More events and more celebrating our work would inspire and motivate all of us to do more!

There was a second on the need for additional discount opportunities. A mini “truckload” sale might be a way to bring new folks to the Co-op.



There was a recognition that we offer competitive prices on products; we are not just a boutique or expensive convenient store. Our market basket study showed that we are generally competitive – “for a co-op, we are not expensive”. The MC has been working actively to add more conventional, affordable whole food products. There was some discussion about the importance of getting the word out – **MARKETING!** – of the new products.

Hunger Mountain has been purchasing advertisements on the Plainfield/ Marshfield Front Porch Forum. We should too.

Does the Co-op accept “food stamps” – now called 3SquaresVt or EBT? Yes.

Could the Co-op could take advantage of purchasing short-dated products? Yes, the MC sometimes does this; doing it on a larger scale would take some additional research and planning.

We need to paint the floor. There was some discussion about the paint products used in the past and potential paint products.

We should do better outreach at Goddard College. ♦

New Co-op Board Members

Chris Jackson

I've lived in Plainfield since 2003. I worked at the Co-op from 2006 till 2012, and was one of the founding members of the Management Collective. After leaving the staff, I served as Board president for 3 years. I have a background in organic farming, permaculture, and I am currently a student at Goddard in psychology. I am also a member of the Plainfield Fire and Fast Squad.

Chris Jackson <kairos.chris@gmail.com>



Alicia White

Many of my closest friends will refer to me as that “foodie” who runs fast! Truth be told I live my life in the slow lane, and it’s great. I am a native Vermonter, raised in Danville where I live now with my beautiful family in our old farmhouse. Since 2005 I have worked full time for Vermont State Employees Credit Union (VSECU). I never imagined I’d be a banker but the knowledge and experiences I have gained working for a banking cooperative has truly enriched my life. Danville

doesn’t have a Food Co-op, so I support the Plainfield Co-op. I have a deeply rooted passion for supporting local food systems. I educate and inspire everyone I know about the importance of thoughtfully and purposely spending our hard earned dollars, locally. My passion for healthy living embodies who I am as a marathon runner, a mother and wife, an organic gardener and farmer. This, coupled with my other passion as a smart consumer are two key reasons why I would love to be a part of this board to see to it that the Plainfield Co-op thrives for another 45 years!

Contact Alicia White at 522-7936, 26.2ready2run@gmail.com



Peter Colman

I have been a Plainfield community member for 20 years as well as a supporter of the Co-op. I’m interested in joining the Board to provide support for my small hometown grocer as well as garner further understanding of the challenges associated with running a grocery store in a rural town. I believe my experience in organic agriculture, sales and owning my own business provide the competency needed to properly support the Co-op.

Peter Colman, standing beside 10-years-ago photo of himself and his parents, Richard and Sally Wiswall of Cate Farm.

Contact me at 802-454-1010,
pete@vermontsalumi.com

Management Report

by Karen Starr

Spring has proceeded at a slow pace this year, lots of gray skies, cold, and rain. Still, change is in the air and everyone is beginning to breathe a little sigh of relief at winter passing. Many of our visiting birds have arrived and nesting is underway as critters and people, aware of our short summer, try to pack in as much as possible. Gardens are started, house-cleaning from the long winter carried out, modest picnics enjoyed out of doors in practice for the full extravagance when high summer arrives. The Winter Wrens and Chimney Swifts are back!

As many of you probably know, sales for the Co-op were a disappointment last year. Unfortunately, since we operate so close to the bone, there were and continue to be very few places to cut expenses. As it turns out, retail sales nationally took a real nosedive, and our sad sales numbers were undoubtedly part of that trend. The Management Collective has written a very conservative budget for 2017, but really for the Co-op to be a healthy, vibrant part of the community we need everyone who wants us to continue to help us increase sales by shopping here and encouraging your friends to do so as well. We do understand that sometimes people cannot afford to shop with us as much as they like, But we encourage you to shop with us as much as possible. You might even discover that we are actually more affordable than you imagine. And you'd be surprised how much members can save by special ordering items; splitting cases and bulk items can save you even more. Just ask at the store for details.

To fill folks in who were not at the Member Meeting, here are highlights of some of the things the Management Collective has been doing to help turn our sales around and manage our expenses as efficiently as possible.

The Finance Committee met with Jean Hamilton, a Board member with significant sales experience, to begin development of an overall marketing plan for the store, tools to help set sales goals for departments, and creation of new reports to assist the Finance Committee and buyers in analyzing financial information.

Jean and Jeannine DeWald met in February to develop report formats to aid buyers in making good purchasing decisions and increase buyer financial knowledge.

Jeannine, Jean, and Karen also met with Annie Harlow from Farm to Plate to discuss in-store marketing strategies. We looked at shelf placements, cross marketing opportunities, product analysis, and close financial review of sales data. She left us with a number of useful tools and these, as well as the ones developed by Jean and Jeannine, are now being utilized by department buyers. We will also be integrating social media more clearly into our marketing plan. We are currently on FaceBook, Instagram, and Pinterest.

Buyers continue to explore the possibilities of some variable pricing, within the limits of our handicapped purchasing power compared to Hunger Mountain and other larger outlets. We hope to make some modest inroads toward improving our price image over the next few months.

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The Finance Committee, led by Jeannine, also conducted an analysis of hours worked by the MC in an attempt to understand how much time is being spent on departments in relationship to the income realized from each. This is part of our work to determine if there needs to be a shift in focus to different products and departments within the store to maximize sales. Since wages for 2017 are budgeted 2.4% lower than 2016 actuals, we are focusing on shifting what management hours we can to areas of work that help increase sales. Decreasing the budget for hours overall is not feasible without significantly impacting the operation of the store. Of the total budgeted 317.5 hours per week, 185 of them are register and stocking/receiving/register back-up shifts, leaving only 132.5 hours for all management related duties, including ordering, specialized receiving, financial management, office management, meetings, communications, marketing, board reports, hiring, training, personnel, etc..... There is simply no way to reduce the amount of hours that go into running the store, as we are already struggling with finding the time to focus on the work we need to do to create growth. A better use of our time is to look at shifting what hours we can from smaller departments with lower profit per labor hour toward focusing on marketing and creating the right mix of products in the store to maximize sales and profit. Labor hours have been cut from smaller departments to facilitate this, and ongoing adjustments to labor hours per department, as well as department presence on the sales floor will be coming.

Although cutting staff discount or labor hours were carefully considered, it was

determined such measures would only be detrimental to the process of achieving what the Co-op actually needs: sales growth. Staff discounts for FY 2016 totaled \$24,967. At a discount rate of 18%, staff purchases, excluding alcohol, account for 13.7% of total discount eligible Co-op sales. Not one Co-op staff member earns a livable wage according to family size, and many rely on government funded health insurance and other programs to subsidize their income. Decreasing the staff discount would decrease the affordability of staff shopping at the Co-op, and consequently, lead to a decrease in sales. Any decrease in sales not only places the Co-op in a more compromised financial situation than it currently is, but could also potentially lead to increased staff turnover at great financial and structural cost to the Co-op. In fact, staff turnover in 2015 and 2016 significantly contributed to the financial stress of the Co-op as a result of lost institutional knowledge and increased hours required for hiring and training new staff.

Reducing store hours by opening later or closing earlier were also considered. Though sales are slower in the first and last hours of the day, these sales are still very significant. Current co-op store hours are 9AM to 8PM, seven days per week 360 days per year. By analyzing average sales and taking into account staffing and other applicable expenses, we could incur a loss of \$4,611 annually by opening one hour later. The average sales per hour between 7PM and 7:59PM are even higher. We would likely lose \$17,654.40 annually by closing one hour earlier. Attempts to save money by reducing store hours on a seasonal basis have been tried in the past, and were clearly detrimental to sales. Customers were confused by which hours we were

open, and felt frustrated showing up to shop, only to find the doors locked. Reducing store hours led to a reduction in sales and had a negative impact on our relationship with our customers. Reducing them now would lead to a clear loss in profit for the store.

Matt and Karen are reviewing the current management structure to identify possible opportunities for increased efficiency. They will be making recommendations at a Management Collective meeting this summer. The Board will be apprised of any contemplated changes in management structure and the membership will be updated.

The Outreach and Marketing Committee (formerly the Communication Committee) will soon begin meeting regularly. The Management Collective

looks forward to their support in growing membership, community visibility, and sales. The committee is looking for new members. Please be in touch with a Board member, or Karen or Chloe Budnick at the store if you are interested in being a part of this effort.

On a happy note, we had an wonderful turnout at the Annual Meeting this Spring. It was really encouraging to see so many new and longtime members in a range of ages come together to consider the Co-op's future. There were some excellent suggestions about how to turn things around and we heard you! Members talked about the front entrance being...not so welcoming. Changes are happening, many with the help from working members! Amy

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EAST HILL TREE FARM

Nursery for Fruit Trees, Nuts, and Berries



3499 East Hill Rd. Plainfield, VT
Check: www.easthilltreefarm.com

Summer Recipes *by Debra Stoleroff*

When I think of summer food I think of fresh, colorful fruits and vegetables grown in my garden or locally. On hot days I want to eat cool and cold dishes. Hopefully, these recipes will be as refreshing for you as they are for me. (See also pg. 22.)

Fruit Sorbets

INGREDIENTS

- 3 cups water
- 1 cup sugar
- 5 cups fresh or frozen strawberries
- 2 tablespoons lemon juice



PREPARATION

1. Bring 3 cups water and sugar just to a boil in a medium saucepan over high heat, stirring until sugar dissolves. Remove from heat. Cool.
2. Process sugar syrup and fruit, in batches, in a blender until smooth. Stir in lemon juice. Cover and chill 2 hours.
3. Pour mixture into the freezer container of a 1-gallon ice-cream maker, and freeze according to manufacturer's instructions.

Grapefruit Sorbet: 3 cups fresh grapefruit juice and 1 teaspoon chopped fresh mint. Proceed as directed.

Pineapple Sorbet: 2 cups chopped pineapple. Strain and discard pulp after processing mixture in blender, if desired. Proceed as directed.

Lemon Sorbet: 1/2 cup fresh lemon juice and 2 teaspoons grated lemon rind. Proceed as directed.

Orange Sorbet: 3 cups fresh orange juice and 2 teaspoons grated orange rind

Watermelon Sorbet: 4 cups seeded, chopped watermelon and 1/4 cup lime juice. Proceed as directed

Cantaloupe Sorbet: 4 cups chopped cantaloupe. Proceed as directed.

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Lester is painting the front entrance, the bathroom, and the stairwell. Folks on the Building Committee are keeping their eyes open for a door with a larger window. We are not stopping with the entrance: Laura Zeigler has the gardens looking super beautiful. Amy is helping keep the outside of the building looking spiffy, while Jason Mallery, Adrienne Allison and Annette DelSuarez are helping spruce up the retail space. We are also painting the retail floor! Plans are in the works to improve our outside signage. We are also working on plans to reconfigure the register area this summer to facilitate more convenient checkout. We hope to do this with a minimum of expense, but will be approaching the Board with detailed requests as the timeline becomes clearer. Thank you for your input; keep it coming!

As we move on into the Summer, the Management Collective invites you all to include tiny Plainfield Co-op in your celebration of what is so exceptionally wonderful about this season in Vermont and about Plainfield in particular. We often hear from local folks who first discover us that they had no idea the Co-op was here. So, why not bring a friend or two in for a visit? Make it a fun outing and introduce more people to what many of us think is one of the most underappreciated shopping destinations and organizations in Central Vermont. We hear it all the time from amazed out of towners, "We don't have anything like this where I live." But we do! Isn't that pretty awesome! ♦

Pillars of the Plainfield Co-op: Long-time Staff

by Glenda Bissex

From Dorothy Wallace, who has been with the Co-op 9 years, to Nancy Ellen, who has been here 19(!) years, we have staff who have stuck with us through some tough times as well as upbeat ones. These are the people who, as Karen Starr says, "hold the history of the institution." With only long-time staffers, the Co-op could become a fossil; with only new staff, an unstable ship. We need you *all*. But now we salute the longest committed and most experienced hands.

Dorothy Wallace was one of the single moms in Plainfield in the early 1980's. She lived across the street from the Co-op and was a working member until nine years ago when Margie Yoder (who was already working at the Co-op) told her there was a job opening. Nancy Ellen (who had been on the Co-op staff for 10 years already) interviewed her, she was trained mainly by Aaron James and started working weekends. She was here when the staff voted for the Management Collective structure, initiated by Chris Jackson (see new Board members elsewhere in this newsletter). Jill Frink



(Thompson) was doing herbs and teas then, and knew of Dorothy's interest in these and of her work with herbs at Tulsi Tea Room. So when Jill

decided to leave the Co-op, she asked Dorothy if she wanted to take over the herb and tea department. That's what Dorothy has been doing beautifully ever since.

She says she's stayed at the Co-op for so long because of the people--so smart, funny and kind. She also appreciates the steadiness of the job, unlike her other work doing free-lance copy editing for medical journals.

Dorothy was **Margie Yoder's** first friend here; they met when Margie wanted to get a library card at the Jaquith. For 30 years, before taking a job at the Co-op, Margie had worked in health care. Going from Western medicine to homeopathics was a learning challenge, she says. She started working here in July, 2007.



No one could be more enthusiastic about the Co-op than Margie is. Ask her what she likes about it and why she's stayed here for 10 years, and you'll get a long list of "likes." She likes being part of this community. She likes her friendly co-workers and how they're able to work together, to communicate, to give each

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other suggestions. She likes the management structure, which enables her to use her own judgment, take risks, not be micromanaged. It gives the staff responsibility, including financial responsibility, for the store: "The buck stops with us," she says. She likes having a flexible schedule, not being stressed, and being able to walk to work. She loves her job-- finding out what Co-op shoppers want, then working with local vendors and other co-ops to get it.



Jeannine DeWald also started working at the Co-op in the summer of 2007. One day when she came in to shop (she was working at Cate Farm then) she saw

a sign that the Co-op was hiring.

She applied and Nancy hired her. At that time Nancy, Chuck Alaimo, and Jenny Jenkins were co-managers. When Chuck and Jenny left, neither Nancy nor Kristin wanted to be manager. As an alternative to the Board hiring a manager from outside, the present Management Collective (M.C.) structure was initiated by Chris Jackson, who was a staff member then, and the Board agreed to the proposal. The original Management Collective was Jeannine, Jill, Margie, Nancy, Dorothy, Chris, Aaron. Over the years, the members of the M.C. have changed but not the structure. Jeannine, by the way, has an amazing memory for the

details of the Co-op history during her 10 years here--years when both the front and back of the store were renovated, and when reshelving and floor painting projects were undertaken.

Jeannine continues to manage grocery and bulk. For years she has been on the Finance Committee. She is also the Lead Buyer, which means she looks at buying in a wholistic way, co-ordinating with Finance. She enjoys the people she works with and the community. She appreciates the supportive environment and the flexibility she was given when her daughter was younger. The Co-op treats people as individuals, she says. She hopes that more of the community will see us as their store, as the neighborhood grocery, and that our products and prices can change enough to encourage them to shop here.

Kristin Brosky started out as a working member, making her beautiful and now famous signs. She got involved with the Co-op to meet people in the community, and met some of her best friends at the pancake breakfast annual meetings. She was hired on staff a year or two before Jeannine and Margie were. She was trained by Ellen Bresler, just before Ellen left (which marked the end of an era of Co-op history). When



Kristin started working here, her kids were little and she appreciated being

able to bring them in with her or to change her schedule if she needed to.

She was on the management team with Nancy and Chuck, but didn't want to be a manager. She was a produce buyer and a bakery buyer, but that wasn't really what she wanted to do either. Kristin is a people person—she wanted to be at the register! She has stayed with the Co-op for almost 12 years because of the people who work here and who shop here, and because she supports local producers. She supports local producers not only by working at the Co-op but by shopping here—when she totalled her family's purchases, they had bought the most of any members! True to her nature as a people person, she is studying for an M.A. in Counseling at Johnson.

Nancy Ellen has experienced and shaped a lot of Co-op history. Back in the summer of 1998, she was working at Hunger Mountain Co-op, but for both personal and political reasons, left to work at the Plainfield Co-op instead. She was here when Ellen [whom everyone loved - ed.] was manager and when Ellen was abruptly fired. Nancy was on the committee that hired Ellen's successor, the committee that couldn't believe what a dream candidate they had—until the dream turned into a nightmare as she started "managing." She had to go. Did Nancy want to become manager? Not unless she was part of a team, which was what happened, as described above. When people on the management team left, the Management Collective was formed.

Nancy does not view the M.C. uncritically. She says it's hard for the Co-op to pay a manager for that work, and the

work has gotten more and more complex, putting more demands on staff, especially responsibilities for financial management. Recent turnover in the M.C. is a challenge because it's hard to replace the staff who left. The M.C. relationship with the Board changed when Les Snow introduced Policy Management, requiring M.C. reports to the Board describing how the store is carrying out goals established by the Board. While these reports are extra work, they also put the kaibosh on micromanaging. Hiring is now entirely up to the M.C., and they decide whether they can pay themselves more.



Nancy likes working in the community where she lives, she likes the people, she likes the flexibility, and she tends to be a stick-with-it kind of person. She wants the Co-op to be responsive to the needs and requests of the community. She thinks more could be done with working members. Expansion she sees as a mixed bag. Her vision is that the Co-op becomes more fully who we are, doing the things we do better. With all her experience and her calm wisdom, Nancy is the sage of the Co-op staff.

I loved talking with these five long time staffers, learning more about each of them and seeing how they not only hold but are woven into the history of our Co-op. ♦

Repairing and Updating our Building to Secure the Future

by Sarah Phillips

The Co-op's recently completed strategic planning process revealed that both members and non-members favored increasing the store size, making the store and Community Center accessible to all and undertaking a building project, even if the project required a loan. A 2014 in-depth building survey by the Building Committee revealed some major projects that are either costly or interconnected with an expansion and larger upgrades. The Strategic Plan calls for a master building plan which takes into account a variety of long-term building needs.

Building and store needs include...

Major Repairs: new siding, safer stairwell to the Community Center, front entryway improvements, store floor resurfacing, replacement of original windows, and electrical and plumbing code upgrades.

Lack of Space: The current staff workspace is insufficient, back stock shelving is limited and leads to inefficient inventory management, and a general lack of shelf space prevents us from expanding our product line. In particular, we want to grow our "Co-op Basics" offering of low cost, staple foods.

Lack of Accessibility: While we've made accessibility improvements (e.g., restroom, front entry ramp), the internal layout of the store is not wheelchair accessible. There is no elevator to the 2nd floor Community Center, and the existing stairwell is challenging for anyone with mobility concerns.

Congested Layout: Store aisles are so narrow they accommodate only one small shopping cart at a time, leaving most of us limited to what we can carry in a basket. The front entryway and register area are congested and create security concerns. Improvements in both of these areas would also support a more welcoming Co-op.

Energy Inefficiency: Freezer and coolers need upgrades. Additional weatherization is possible.

What would we do as part of a building master plan?

- Build a one-story expansion of approximately 600-700 square feet
- Remodel the existing building and include repairs and improvements
- Purchase needed equipment

Why now?

These changes will also help our Co-op remain financially sustainable. While the Co-op remains a financially viable business in the short-term, recent financial statements show stagnant income compared to inflation. Attracting increasing sales (and expanding our customer base) is critical to the financial sustainability of the Co-op.

Building repairs, upgrades and expansion will also:

- Create a more welcoming and accessible store and Community Center – a benefit in itself, but also key to retaining customers and expanding the Co-op customer base.

- Preserve historic building features as part of a vibrant Plainfield Village.
- Improve ease of shopping, which can support increased sales on each shopping trip as well as return visits.
- Increase energy efficiency through new windows and upgraded equipment.
- Improve efficiency of operations through more functional office and back inventory space.
- Expand retail shelf space to allow for expanded inventory, including a more diverse product line and increase in local products.

Next Step: Feasibility Assessment

It's important that we gather together all of the information to make a decision on *if* and *how* we move forward with an expansion and building upgrades. The Board has decided to focus the remainder of this calendar year on **feasibility**. A Building Finance Committee is actively looking to secure funds to hire consultants to help us complete a full feasibility assessment. The four components of a feasibility assessment include: market study, readiness assessment, design feasibility and financial feasibility.



Market Study

To determine market feasibility, an outside consultant with expertise in natural

food/co-op grocery businesses will complete a full market study to assess the market opportunity. A market study will look at our **customers + community + competition**. It can answer a lot of questions for us, like: What kind of increased sales can we expect at an expanded/improved Co-op? Look at who shops at the Co-op, where they live, who else lives in our community, the other places people shop for groceries – Is it practical to think that we could support a slightly larger retail space? How much would sales increase with this larger space and improved Co-op at the current location? The market study will provide a sales forecast based on expansion, location, demographics, competition, etc.

Internal Readiness Assessment

A readiness assessment can help to uncover operational hurdles to the project. This work will help to clarify Board and management capabilities and roles, and create a project management plan. The assessment will also generate shared agreement on expansion “green light” requirements – that is, what are the key factors that need to be met before we decide together to move forward with this project?

We also will want to talk with members to understand capacity for donated time/expertise, financial donations and member loans (owner equity). We may work with a fundraising consultant to determine a reasonable member loan/giving goal.

Financial Feasibility

A project consultant will develop a financial Pro Forma which provides a Source/Use budget (sources of capital and uses of project funds), financial pro-

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jections for the remaining time prior to opening of the expanded store, and financial projections for years 1 - 10 of the expanded store. The key questions answered by the financial feasibility work are: What kind of debt could we afford? Where will the money come from for the project? What will managing the project cost?

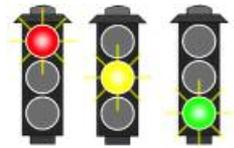
Design Feasibility

We will complete preliminary schematic/design work in order to get initial bids for building improvements and equipment. Design feasibility work will also identify workable solutions to structure, site and environmental issues. We will also work through necessary permits and site reviews.

Timeline

We expect the rest of 2017 to focus on the 4 interconnected pieces of the Feasibility Assessment. These pieces are not necessarily linear, but will inform each other. At the end of 2017, the board will look at all the information, assess, and decide:

- Stop the project (unrealistic and beyond our capacity)
- Slow down. Identify issues that need to be addressed and a timetable for addressing them.
- Green light -- Go ahead.



If everything meets our “green light requirements” then in 2018, we would prepare for construction by hiring a project manager, completing final design work, securing financing, and then building.

We Want You!

Are you interested in helping with any of this feasibility work? Does it match your skills, interest or expertise? The Building Finance Committee would welcome your help! Join our committee and be a Co-op working member. Do this kind of work as a professional consultant? We have issued a Request for Qualifications (RFQ) in preparation for hiring one or more consultants this summer. You can find the RFQ on the Co-op website www.PlainfieldCoop.com ♦



Co-ops: A Bigger Picture, Part 1

by *Giordano Checchi*

A Board member shares his inspiring vision of a society guided by cooperative values. This is the first of several installments of his writing on this topic.

Our cozy Co-op is most definitely the warmest place in a chilly winter and the most welcoming place on any other day of the calendar. It is also an astonishing source of good food and groceries, and one shall wonder how the management is able to fit so many products in such a small space. There is a bit of everything and a bit for every taste. A dream that is real, in a world driven by one single value: money. Instead, the impact our co-op has on the local community, the center point of its very existence, touches values that go well beyond and high above the arid value of money. It provides for the members and the community, it helps those that have limited resources, it is an outlet for the products of local farmers and suppliers, it builds relationships, it is a forum for opinions and ideas, it is a diverse way to run a business, and a living example of a great alternative way to approach business in general. Let us keep it the dream it is. Yes..?

If the world around us would not change and would remain still through the passing of time, we would without hesitation answer: yes! The trouble is that the world is changing, as a matter of fact, it has been changing for centuries, and history tells us that we cannot freeze a moment in time, unless it is a picture, a snapshot, like those beautiful tarnished photographs that show us how things were in the past. We need to be aware of changes, we cannot ignore them, especially if we

want to continue to sustain and push the values that our co-op holds..

One of these changes is the dimension of the entities that surround us. Traditional businesses keep growing, not because the demand grows, but because the larger a business is, the more it can control its market. More control means more profit. The growth is indeed money driven. More control also means less care in general, less care about customers, less care about quality, less care about competition. Ironically, the more a business grows, the more it shouts to the four corners how great their customer care is, how great the quality of their products is, and how competitive they are. Regretfully they do exactly the opposite.

Fortunately, there is a looming danger in growing constantly, and that is the reduction of diversity. Diversity is at the very base of survival; inbreeding, everyone knows, is the sure cause of extinction. Constant growth is also an insane principle given that we live on a minuscule planet that is already overpopulated. The system that adopts money as its single value can only sustain itself by constantly growing, but in an overpopulated planet, it can only grow at the expense of someone else. We witness every day small businesses that disappear, gobbled up by the competition of a bigger business or businesses that “merge” with others. What a euphemism! A “merger” wants to be seen as the union of two friendly entities, while instead it shows only the aggressiveness of one business towards

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Peach Gazpacho

INGREDIENTS

- 6 to 8 soft to mushy peaches, peeled, pitted & cut into quarters
- 1/2 medium cucumber, peeled, seeded and cut into chunks
- 1 small clove garlic, minced
- 1 tablespoon champagne or white balsamic vinegar
- 2 tablespoons extra-virgin olive oil, plus more for drizzling
- 1/2 teaspoon coarse sea or kosher salt, or more to taste
- 1/4 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper, or more to taste
- 1/2 to 3/4 cup water
- 2 tablespoons coarsely chopped fresh cilantro or flat-leaf parsley leaves
- Red bell pepper slices and peeled avocado slices (garnish optional)

PREPARATIONS

1. Peel the peaches by scoring an X in the bottom of each. Place in large bowl of just-boiled or very hot water, just long enough for skin on the bottom to release. Drain & peel when cool enough to handle.
2. Combine the peaches, cucumber, garlic, vinegar, oil, salt, pepper and 1/2 cup of the water in a food processor; pulse to form a pureed soup. If the consistency seems too thick, add the remaining 1/4 cup water and pulse just to incorporate.
3. Transfer to a bowl, cover and refrigerate for at least 2 hours and up to overnight.
4. Just before serving, taste the soup and adjust the seasoning as needed. Stir in the cilantro or parsley. Divide among individual bowls and drizzle each with a little oil. Garnish with the bell pepper and avocado, if desired. Serve right away.

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the other, or an alliance forged to fight their competitors. Greed elevated to the power of two. Luckily new small businesses continue to reappear, challenging the giants, in this biblical confrontation.

What can the co-op movement do to defend itself from the changes that surround us? What example can the co-op movement provide to the world that surrounds us? What can the co-op movement do to push forward the values it believes in? The answer is actually relatively simple, even if it requires long and patient work. The co-op movement can and shall be the future of the economy of the world, but it requires a wide and deep vision of the future, very wide and very deep. And bold and audacious.

But the alternative to a capitalistic economy is possible, and it is a proven model. Imagine all the businesses around you, instead of being owned by shareholders, instead of being driven by the egoistic principle of making money, are owned by the consumers of the business. First we need to widen the concept of “business and consumer” well beyond the simplistic concept of a capitalistic economy driving an entire nation, or the entire planet. A simple example is the one of a manufacturing company. Let’s imagine that this “business” manufactures printing presses. The “consumers” of the business are in the very first row those that work within the business, workers that machine the components, assemble the presses, design them, those that do the accounting of the business. They are “consumers” in the sense they derive their salary, the means to sustain their families, from the very business they work for. Then we can include among the “consumers” the suppliers of the raw materials, the suppliers of services, and

eventually the people that will buy the presses to run their business. And these people can be the owners of their printing business. Imagine that the printing business prints school books. We can now include the students in the category of consumers, and so on. This is the concept of a very close network, totally inter-related, commingled, and self sustaining.

Let's try another example. Farming, so important and so poorly supported by the principles of capitalism. At the very base of farming there is the fact that farmers are dealing with living things, quite different from manufacturing that deals with inanimate, brainless materials and components. To sustain farming, biologists tell us that "diversity" is extremely important. But diversity doesn't interest the capitalists; actually the more mass production of one thing, the

better for their pockets. Monsanto pioneered the annihilation of diversity through engineering corn that cannot reproduce itself. How more contorted can the greed for money be? For this reason farming is at a higher level of importance than manufacturing. Not only is this a business that can be done by the very same individuals that own the farm and by their "consumers", but because they would be driven by values that go above and beyond the simple money making idea, they can also contribute to the diversity preached by biologists as so essential for mankind's future. Now let's extend this concept to banking, insurance, health care, distribution, transportation, pharmaceuticals, communications, legal services. The list can be as long and as deep as one wants. ♦

This is only the beginning—stay tuned for more in future newsletters.

