

The Plainfield Co-op Newsletter

Winter 2025

Our Evolving Co-op

The Time Has Come!



The time has come to say a bittersweet goodbye to the Plainfield Village location of Plainfield Co-op, a haven we have cherished for generations. The magic that took place in that building will not be forgotten - the connections made, the building's charm, the kid's corner, the Plainfield Community Center's dance classes, art gallery, and gatherings.



Just as Plainfield Hardware had its roots in Plainfield Village before moving to the Route 2 location, Plainfield Co-op has made the same move, marking the long-awaited union of two integral community businesses. With grocery, deli, and hardware all under one roof, this move offers a unique opportunity to expand our membership and service to the greater Plainfield area while preserving local ownership. The Plainfield Co-op has been feeding our families and building community for more than 50 years and we are looking forward to the next 50!



— Jeannine

General Manager, Plainfield Co-op

About This Newsletter

by Glenda Bissex, Editor

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by Rose Paul, Board President

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from the Board

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by Jan Waterman, Co-op member and Board member

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Spicy Corn and Coconut Soup

A delicious, creamy, spicy winter soup...



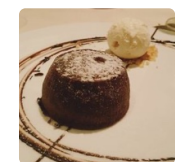
Potato Latkes

This recipe comes from my sister.



Chocolate Lava Cake

This one of the fastest fancy desserts...



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About This Newsletter, Winter 2025



by Glenda Bissex, Editor

Our Co-op is evolving, a term used by General Manager Jeannine DeWald to describe what's happening. "Evolving is what we do to survive," reflects Gail Falk, a former Board president. "Beings don't evolve because they want to, but as a necessity of survival in a changing environment." After living through many crises, and exploring many possible solutions, our changing environment has finally pushed the Co-op to take a big leap. For many in our community, it was a bitter-sweet choice. The evolving is now emotional as well physical.

You will see in this newsletter photos and words from shoppers in the village store during its last hour of operation. You will meet the new General Manager, Jeannine DeWald, and get an inside view of some of the complexities and challenges and aspirations in this evolution. You will find current information in the Community Update, take a look ahead in the President's report, and be inspired by Jan Waterman's "Big, Audacious Leaps." Because all the financial data isn't yet collected, there is no Treasurer's report in this issue. But as always, you'll find delicious recipes you can make mostly with ingredients from your neighborhood Co-op.

As our Co-op is evolving, the Newsletter Committee is wondering how the newsletter can evolve to serve our expanded community. Hopefully, we will have many new members. What would Hardware Store customers like to know about what being part of a cooperative means for them? What would Co-op members like to know about their new, expanded family and opportunities?



Lisa's delightful Plainfield People posts keep readers aware of the store's latest offerings, from a wall of Darn Tough socks to chicken and dumplings from the deli. The quarterly newsletter has traditionally looked at the bigger picture of Co-op operations, including finances, to inform us as member-owners. It has featured in-depth profiles of Co-op people and local vendors, shared seasonal recipes and information about nutrition, healthy foods and the food industry. It has reminded us of the co-operative principles we are based in. At times it has been a forum for discussing issues affecting the Co-op. We are still searching for a way to consistently include voices from the staff.

Perhaps our expanded Co-op needs some new forms of communication. Let us know what you want. You can email the editor, Glenda Bissex at songboat@vtlink.com

The Newsletter Committee:

- Glenda Bissex, Editor, songboat@vtlink.net
- Gail Falk, Staff Writer
- Elizabeth Mathai, Design & Layout, and Ad Coordinator
- Debra Stoleroff, Recipe Editor

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President's Report, February 2025



2025, Reports and Updates



by Rose Paul, Board President

As I write this, the village store is scheduled to close in five days. I love the fact that members have posted for folks to shop up a storm on the last day, and some musicians will be playing on the stone wall to honor and celebrate what was.

It is a passing and a beginning. We cherished our funky little out-of-the-way store with friendly staff where everyone knew everyone else. But we all shopped there less and less. Plenty of visitors remarked how quaint our store was, but quaint, funky, and out-of-the-way did not translate to a healthy business as the years went by.

I was surprised when I joined the board to learn that the Co-op is not a non-profit. Nope, we pay state and federal income taxes. And we are a business. We have a mission and global ends (see <https://plainfieldcoop.com/mission/>) to do good for our community, but we can't do good unless we have the flexibility of enough cash flow to support programs like the Community Center and the FreeCycle that *foster a sense of community*—one of our global ends.

Looking ahead, there is much to be optimistic about. Our new General Manager, Jeannine DeWald, is skilled and capable and is part of our community. Our Route 2 location will attract new shoppers who never stopped in at the village store—meeting another of our global ends: to *foster awareness about the quality and source of our food*. Selling hardware helps to diversify our customer base. Seasonal goods like Christmas trees and the spring greenhouse are income boosters.

And the throughline is you, our Co-op membership. This is a great time to pay your member equity share and add some money to your gift card. Please stop in at the Route 2 store, and shop there as much as you can. The first year at a new location can be a precarious time with transition costs taking away from revenues. Check out the new, fully stocked produce coolers. Try something at the deli and ask if you don't see it—there are vegetarian and gluten free options for breakfast and lunch and the supply will follow the demand, so speak up and ask for it!

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The Co-op board will be scheduling information sessions to discuss the future of the village building. A membership vote is needed before the building can be sold. Please attend and participate. Your voice, your Co-op!

To understand the roots of the co-op movement and how much the demand for healthy whole foods slowly changed the mainstream food industry, check out a fascinating book, [Going Up the Country](#), by Yvonne Daley (University Press of New England, 2018) available at all our local

libraries. She traces the counterculture movement in Vermont through interviews, news articles and photos, and Plainfield is prominently featured. It helps to understand the pressures that a small food co-op like ours faces today versus the popular demand of 25 and more years ago.

Helping Hands Needed for our Building Committee

If you have builder's skills, the Co-op could use your help. We have several maintenance and repair needs, some immediate and some of which will, of course, continue routinely into the future. We're looking for interested people who are excited about having a more proactive committee focused on identifying issues and future planning.

If you can spare a bit of time to help along the move and the ongoing health of the new store, please get in touch with Jan Waterman, jmwinvt@hotmail.com or Jeannine at gm@plainfieldcoop.com

Thank you.
Onward.
And hats off to our marvelous Co-op community!

Board Members

- Rose Paul, President
- Anne Van Couvering, Vice President
- John Cleary, Treasurer
- Claire Dumas
- Jan Waterman
- Andy Robinson

Contact: board@plainfieldcoop.com

More information at: <https://plainfieldcoop.com/board-of-directors/>

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Plainfield Co-op Community Update



2025, Reports and Updates

One Location – The move to Route 2 is complete! Please excuse our appearance as we continue unpacking and settling in. We will never forget you, Plainfield Village Location!

Progress All Around – Much appreciation to our heroic General Manager, Jeannine DeWald, and all the hardworking, talented Co-op staff who have worked through all kinds of challenges the past several months. Thank you for your creativity and dedication!

- Grocery, deli, and hardware all under one roof!
- New produce coolers installed and fully stocked
- New produce prep area – sink and counters
- More shelving, more grocery options
- Bulk section – a Co-op essential!
- New sign outside the building

POS System Challenges Resolved – We're bringing in an expert to help merge all of our data—tens of thousands of items—into one point-of-sale (POS) system by mid-February. Vital to the operations of any retail business, our new POS system will scan items, process payments, offer Co-op member benefits, accept EBT transactions, and track inventory.

Sale of the Village Building – We received a professional appraisal of the building and we're in contact with potential buyers. Once the Board negotiates the details of a potential sale, we will host meetings in person and on





Zoom to share the plans and answer your questions. All real estate transactions require a vote of the members so stay tuned for details.

The village Co-op has been an important touchstone and gathering place for many, many people. We acknowledge the deep sadness that accompanies this sale. We also believe that the building, under new ownership, will continue to be an asset for our community. We're excited to invest the proceeds into developing and growing our new home on Route 2.

Fundraising – Our campaign is nearly complete; with your support, we will finish strong.

To participate, please contact the Board at board@plainfieldcoop.com

Onward Together,

Your Plainfield Co-op Board



Jeannine DeWald, Co-op GM, in front of new produce cooler

Last Day, Last Walk, Last Shop



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Photos and text by Jodi Vilardi

A bunch of Co-op members walked to the village location on its closing day, Thursday, February 6th. This was Paula Emery's brilliant idea for ONE last Walk. The event was a mix of playfulness and loss. We paraded from the church wall to the Co-op and shopped, sang and played kazoos and instruments inside, sharing merriment and stories with the closing Co-op staff. We kazooed "Taps" as the village Co-op "OPEN" flag was lowered one last time.



Heard during this event:

"How long have you been a member?" "Since '82 ... '99 ... '87, etc."

"My parents were members, now I am a member too"

"I have been a member for 26 years."

"I have been a member since April"

"The Co-op's got such a long rich history, I wanted to be a part of this"

“That corner has herbed and spiced my meals for 40 years”

The closing of the village Co-op signifies the end of an era. There was lots of discussion about a walking path to the Plainfield Co-op on Route 2. TBD

Goodbye, 153 Main Street!



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Our Evolving Co-op



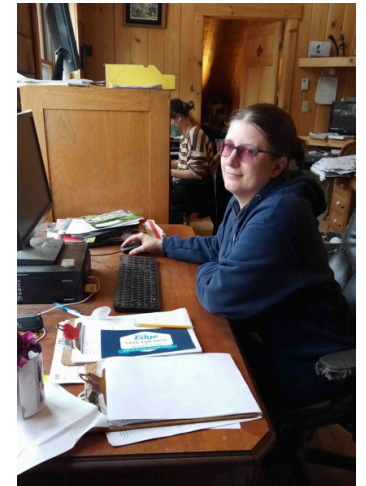
Interview with General Manager Jeannine DeWald

by Glenda Bissex

Jeannine is no stranger to the Plainfield Co-op, having worked at the village store for years on staff and as a member of the management collective. She recalls walking through the old building with Sam Clark long ago as they were planning to renovate the interior space. Now, as General Manager, Jeannine oversees the whole expanded Co-op organization. Michael Hoffman, a familiar friendly face, is the Hardware and Operations Manager. Theis Bergstrom is Administration and Data Systems Co-ordinator. A Grocery Manager is still to be hired.

I talked with Jeannine in the hardware store section, in the large loft that is office space and staff space—bright and open compared to the dark and small—or cozy—village store’s back rooms. The stairway is easy to climb. Leaning against the walls are whiteboards with diagrams and lists—evidence of all the planning that is ongoing.

Jeannine works a 6-day week, including evenings, dealing with several complicated projects all needing to be done at once. There are the obvious projects, like rearranging the grocery section of the Route 2 store to make space for the products coming up from the village store; then organizing the trucking of those products as well as equipment to hold them. I looked down from the loft at the pet section that has been moved twice, the second time to make space for legally required new sinks dedicated to washing produce.

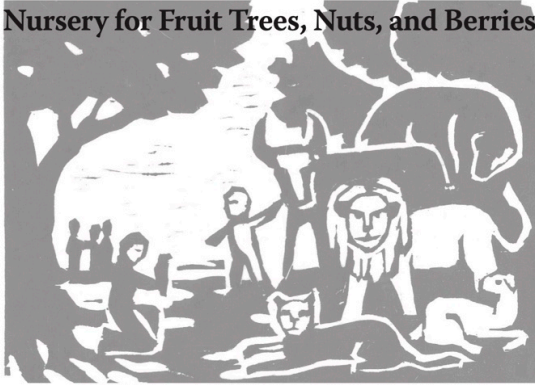


Then there are the less obvious projects, like combining the data about purchases (POS) from a conventional business with data from a cooperatively run business. Just look at all the information on your sales receipt!

----- Article continues after ad -----

EAST HILL TREE FARM

Nursery for Fruit Trees, Nuts, and Berries



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“Things are changing rapidly at the Co-op,” said Jeannine. “Unfortunately the nature of this merger involves several moving pieces that are interdependent. When one piece is ready to move, the rest have to go with it, so it makes advanced planning and communication very challenging. We received confirmation from our POS company that they will be flying in from Minnesota on Monday, February 10th to remove the POS system from the village store to install it at Route 2. This means the last day for village store operations is February 6th, as the store cannot operate without the POS.” The POS system includes the member database so now Co-op members can have their purchases recorded and use their gift cards. We can also welcome new Co-op members.

Jeannine envisions a store serving the WHOLE community with selected conventional as well as organic foods and fresh produce, making a more complete grocery. And in the spring, a store for gardeners, with a large selection of plants plus soil amendments and gardening tools, bringing more of us together

Buying grocery items in larger quantities should bring prices down—but not instantly. For example, National Co-operative Grocers, our largest supplier, needs proof of positive financials over an extended period before giving us a larger discount.

Both Plainfield Hardware and the Plainfield Co-op have been passionate about buying local, supporting our local economy. Our commitment is stronger together. Produce from local farmers, baked goods and other products from local producers join Christmas trees grown on a farm in East Montpelier and spring plants for sale in the greenhouse along with soil amendments, all locally sourced.

The word “transition” has been used frequently to describe what’s happening, but Jeannine suggested another word—“evolving.” “Transition” implies moving from one known thing to a different known thing, like caterpillar to butterfly, while in our case the butterfly is not an entirely known species. It is evolving, will be evolving for some time. This is exciting but the uncertainties can also feel uncomfortable. Perhaps none of us grasped how many months the process of merging would take. It includes many opportunities for unknowns to pop up. And it also opens opportunities for anyone in the community to contribute creative ideas to our evolution.

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Big, Audacious Leaps



by Jan Waterman, Co-op member and Board member

I see big, audacious leaps all around me these days. There was that beautiful leap into action in the wake of the flood in July. There was the Co-op membership vote to move the store to Route 2 and combine with the Hardware Store. There is the oh so audacious, hopeful, visionary leap into possibility gifted to us by the people working on the village expansion plan.

All these attempts to change for the betterment of our corner of the world have happened and are happening without the security of all the information needed to make rational, sound decisions. All important decisions are made despite incomplete information. In order to get anywhere, we proceed with what we have. If we're lucky, we have a whole lot of vision, hope and faith that we — especially "we" collectively, cooperatively — will figure it out. We can deal with the challenges we can't foresee.

Via the grapevine, I saw something written by Rebecca Solnit* the other day that really got me thinking about this sort of situation. From her words, I "got" how some people, in a desire to guarantee a perfect outcome, want to know **everything** before they make a commitment to change. It reminds me of the saying "Don't let the perfect be the enemy of the good." Or as Solnit said, "...what we do begins with what we believe we can do. It begins with being open to the possibilities and interested in the complexities." I really liked that.

Thank you, all you audacious leapers and dreamers, for the beautiful visions your hard work and faith bring into reality. Thank you for carrying forward the wholeness of our community, by just showing up to see how to help, by mucking out basements, by supporting a little store as it goes through growing pains and transformation, by creating possibilities. Thank you all who embrace possibilities and the unknowable.

**Harper's Magazine, May 2016, "The Habits of Highly Cynical People"*

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The United Nations has proclaimed 2025 as the International Year of Cooperatives, with the theme "Cooperatives Build a Better World." According to a [UN announcement](#), the theme emphasizes the enduring worldwide influence of cooperatives, noting that the cooperative model offers a vital solution to many global issues.

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Spicy Corn and Coconut Soup



2025, Recipes

Collected by Debra Stoleroff

A delicious, creamy, spicy winter soup adapted from a 5 star NYT recipe.

Ingredients

- 5 cups of corn kernels
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 2 shallots or red onions, thinly sliced into rings
- 3 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 (1-inch) piece ginger, peeled and minced
- 1 Serrano (or other hot) pepper, minced
- 2 small red potatoes (6 to 8 ounces total), cut into 1/2-inch cubes
- 2 1/2 cups vegetable broth (or 2 1/2 cups of hot water whisked with 1 1/2 teaspoons jarred bouillon)
- 1 (15-ounce) can full-fat coconut milk
- 1 tablespoon lime juice (from 1/2 lime)
- Kosher salt, to season
- Garnish (optional) with: torn cilantro leaves, toasted coconut flakes, chopped roasted peanuts, crispy fried shallots, lime wedges, more sliced Serrano chiles



Preparation

1. In a large stockpot over medium heat, heat olive oil. Add shallots, garlic, ginger and chile, and sauté, stirring occasionally, until soft and fragrant, 3 to 5 minutes. Add corn kernels and juices to the pot, and sauté until the corn is softer and brighter, about 3 minutes more.
2. Add potato pieces, and stir to coat, 1 to 2 minutes.

3. Now, pour in the vegetable broth and coconut milk. Bring to a boil, reduce to a simmer, cover, and cook for 8 to 10 minutes, until the potatoes are tender all the way through.
4. Use an immersion blender to roughly purée the soup, so that it's creamy with some kernels of corn, chunks of potato, and chile flecks remaining. (Alternatively, ladle about half of the soup into a blender, blend until smooth, and return to the pot.) Season with lime juice and salt, and mix to combine. Ladle soup into bowls and garnish with toppings of your choice.



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Potato Latkes



2025, Recipes

from Jane Stoleroff, collected by Debra Stoleroff

This recipe comes from my sister. I've never used this recipe to make potato latkes but I've tasted them and can attest that they are good.

Ingredients

Yield: Makes about 4 dozen latkes

- 4 pounds unpeeled russet potatoes (about 5 large potatoes)
- 1 pound yellow onions (about 2 medium onions)
- 1/4 cup matzo meal
- 2 teaspoons kosher salt, plus more to taste
- 1/2 teaspoon freshly ground black pepper
- 2 large eggs, lightly beaten
- 1/4- 1/2 cup (or more) vegetable oil
- 1/4 cup (or more) schmaltz (rendered chicken fat; optional)
- Apple sauce, for serving
- Sour cream, for serving



Special Equipment

- Food processor with grating blade or box grater
- 2 large wire cooling racks
- 2 large rimmed baking sheets

Preparation

1. Preheat the oven to 250°F. Set racks in upper and lower thirds of the oven. Place

wire cooling racks in the rimmed baking sheets and place in the oven.

2. Using a food processor with a grating insert, grate the potatoes and then the onions, transferring grated vegetables to a large bowl when the bowl of the food processor is filled. Alternately, use a box grater. Working in batches, place the potatoes and onions in a clean dishtowel and thoroughly wring out the excess liquid over the sink, then transfer the potato-onion mixture to a large bowl. The more liquid you remove, the crispier your latkes will be, so take your time and use several dish towels if necessary. Reserve the potato-onion mixture.
3. In another large bowl, whisk together the matzo meal, salt, and pepper. Add the eggs and whisk to combine. Add the potato-onion mixture and mix well.
4. In a large skillet over medium heat, melt equal parts schmaltz and oil (or oil only if omitting the schmaltz) until a scant 1/4-inch depth of fat is reached. Drop 2 tablespoons of latke mixture into the hot fat, spacing them 2 inches apart. Flatten latkes slightly using a spatula and cook, turning once, until crisp, golden brown, and cooked through, 3 to 4 minutes per side.
5. Transfer latkes to wire racks and season with salt; return to the oven to keep warm. As you remove latkes from the pan, replace them with fresh spoonfuls of potato mixture to maintain oil temperature. Add additional schmaltz and/or oil around the edge of the pan as needed to maintain a scant 1/4-inch depth of fat.
6. Keep latkes warm in the oven and serve hot with applesauce or sour cream.

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Chocolate Lava Cake



©2025, Recipes

from the Preppy Kitchen, collected by Debra Stoleroff

This one of the fastest fancy desserts you can make. Made from just a few ingredients. It's rich and super chocolatey. I highly recommend eating it with a really good vanilla ice cream.

Ingredients

- 1/2 cup unsalted butter (113g)
- 6 ounces bittersweet chocolate chopped (168g) DON'T USE CHIPS
- 2 large eggs
- 2 large egg yolks
- 1/4 cup granulated sugar (50g)
- 1/8 teaspoon salt
- 2 tablespoons all-purpose flour



Preparation

1. Preheat the oven to 450F. Butter and lightly flour 6 (4- to 5-ounce) ramekins and place them on a baking sheet.
2. Combine the butter and chocolate in a double boiler and melt over low heat, stirring until smooth. Or, place the butter and chocolate in a microwave-safe bowl and microwave on high, stirring every 30 seconds until melted. Whisk together until smooth.
3. In a large mixing bowl, combine the eggs, egg yolks, sugar, and salt. Beat on medium speed until thick and pale yellow. Fold the chocolate mixture and flour into the egg mixture until well combined. Divide the batter among the prepared ramekins.
4. Bake for 6 to 8 minutes or until the sides of the cakes are firm but the center is jiggly. Let the cakes cool in the ramekins for 1 minute.
5. Place a small dessert plate over the top of each ramekin and carefully turn it over,

inverting the cake onto the plate. Let stand for about 10 seconds, then remove the ramekin to unmold the cakes. Sift powdered sugar on top and garnish with berries, if desired. Serve immediately.

Notes

- Do not pack the flour into the measuring spoon. Fluff the flour and then sprinkle it into the tablespoons. You do not want to add too much flour to the lava cake batter as it'll make the center firm.
- Make sure the oven is fully heated before adding the ramekins inside. The high temperature helps the exterior of the cake bake faster than the inside. This leaves you with the exterior perfectly cooked while the chocolate lava filling stays gooey!
- Use room temperature eggs, so they mix into the batter without over-mixing. Place your eggs in a bowl of warm tap water if they are cold.
- Keep a very close eye on the lava cakes in the oven as you do not want them to overbake. The center should still be jiggly.

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