

ONE MEMBER'S ROLE IN TAKING THE GAZETTE FULLY ONLINE

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PHOTO BY JOHN MIDGLEY

The Gazette used to be on paper. Now, it's digital only.

GOING MOBILE: MATTHEW LANDFIELD AND THE DIGITIZATION OF THE *LINEWAITERS' GAZETTE*

By Liora Fishman

In 2002, Matthew Landfield found himself living just a stone's throw away from the Coop, in an apartment on Union and 5th Avenue. Though he was working in publishing, Landfield fulfilled his membership duties in the office upstairs, processing new members. What the Coop community and Landfield himself didn't know was that, in a few short years, he would become a pivotal member of the *Linewaiters' Gazette*. "At that time [that I joined the Coop], I was working in magazine publishing. And as I was reading the *Gazette*, I saw that they were looking for someone with publishing experience," Landfield said of his early beginnings on the publication.

Landfield joined the staff of the *Gazette* and helped with the layout of the print publication for more than 18 years. As a paper publication, the *Gazette* was prepared by Coop members and sent to an outside vendor for printing. "Every time it was printed, a massive stack of papers would be delivered and distributed to members," Landfield recalled.



PHOTO BY JOHN MIDGLEY

Matt Landfield poses with an old print edition of the *Gazette*.

Yet, in 2020, the Coop, the *Gazette* and much of our lives came to a screeching halt because of the pandemic. “I was an art director at the time,” Landfield said, speaking of the tumultuous months of the spring of 2020. “Member labor had been suspended. There was a big question of what do we do? Where do we go from here?”

UNPRECEDENTED TIMES

With the city eerily quiet, the hum of traffic and pedestrian chatter briefly replaced by banging pots and pans in the evening and otherwise not much else, the fate of the Coop and the *Linewaiters’ Gazette* hung in the balance. The paper had relied, in part, on in-person communication and coordination—a task that felt pretty daunting and frightening due to the pandemic.

“[COORDINATING EDITOR NANCY ROSENBERG] CALLED ME AND SAID SHE WANTED TO CONTINUE PUBLISHING THE *GAZETTE*—ON THE INTERNET”

—MATTHEW LANDFIELD

“Long before COVID, there had been a couple conversations about what it would mean to take the *Gazette* digital,” Landfield said. Yet these conversations had been in the abstract, and hadn’t resolved the additional manpower and work that digitization would require. The pivotal moment came in the summer of 2020, when *Gazette* Coordinating Editor Nancy Rosenberg decided that, with the pandemic still hanging over our heads, taking the publication digital was no longer an abstract idea but a critical one.

“Nancy called me and said she wanted to continue publishing the *Gazette*—on the internet,” Landfield recounted. “And I thought, OK, that sounds like a good idea, but we’d need to figure out how, exactly, to do it.” Other members of the *Gazette* team

joined in and helped Landfield and Rosenberg figure out how to keep the newsletter running.



Landfield sits at a computer in the Coop offices.

You may, at this point, wonder why exactly it was so important to the coordinating editors to take the *Gazette* digital at a time when so many other things (the fate of the world, perhaps) felt more pressing. After all, the Coop itself was not yet back to normal business. But it was the *Gazette*'s granularity and locality that made its digitization feel so urgent: It provided a sense of normalcy. "There is a need for community to be connected, to communicate with each other," Landfield explained. And so the process began.

THE WORK BEGINS

"We talked to everyone that touched the *Gazette*—coordinators, reporters—to figure out what we'd need to do this, and what we would lose by doing this," Landfield said.

Pre-pandemic Coop members will recall that the *Linewaiters' Gazette* contained classifieds, calendars and ads that were not able to be carried over to its digital version.

What was born of out this undertaking was a skeleton version of the *Gazette*, but a skeleton that represented the very core of the publication: articles by reporters, letters to the editor and member submissions. "It represents an archive of the Coop's history, going all the way back to the beginning," Landfield said.

Throughout the spring and summer of 2020, the *Linewaiters' Gazette* was still being published entirely by members, despite member labor being suspended. But those working at the *Gazette* at the time felt that it was a cause worthy of the late, thankless hours. "The whole world was going through this enormous transition," Landfield explained, "and there were very important things to keep the community informed about."

As so often happens, the *Gazette's* technological transition led to additional innovations. As art director, Landfield took the opportunity to experiment with content and explore opportunities: "We tried to incorporate a new kind of flavor to the paper, including color, more photographs, new illustrations, and new types of columns like recipe columns," Landfield explained. He wanted to be sure that they were "using this platform for what it really could do."



Landfield lounges next to another Coop print favorite—the cookbooks section.

A FATE UNKNOWN

In the fall of 2020, the Coop hired members as temporary staff until member labor came back.

“I wasn’t interested in creating some sort of second class of worker, which is what I was concerned is what we were approaching,” Landfield said. “It wasn’t clear to us when member labor would come back, and it didn’t make sense to expect people to volunteer their time to publish the *Gazette* without any timeline for return to the Coop.”

But when it became clear that member labor would, in fact, return, Coordinating Editors Nancy Rosenberg and Carey Meyers agreed that it was time to relaunch the *Gazette*—this time fully digital.

BACK IN ACTION

Prior to member labor restarting, the *Gazette* was operating as an entirely volunteer-run publication. Now it would require the infrastructure to put member labor to work. Contributors needed to work in WordPress at the same time, collaborate via email, and ultimately present a cohesive and vibrant publication that was entirely digital, yet still captured the essence of the Coop and the *Gazette* itself.

In the spring of 2021, the *Gazette* relaunched with a new structure and workflow to allow for a 70-person team to collaborate online. After months of backend work and writing, the publication relaunched for Coop readers in the fall of 2021.

“It was kind of crazy,” Landfield remembered. “There were financial decisions to take into account, logistics to consider when it came to allowing members to collaborate on this kind of work remotely...but I did it—I built the digital infrastructure,” Landfield said, acknowledging that his work was no small feat—and that it went above and beyond what is expected of a Coop member.

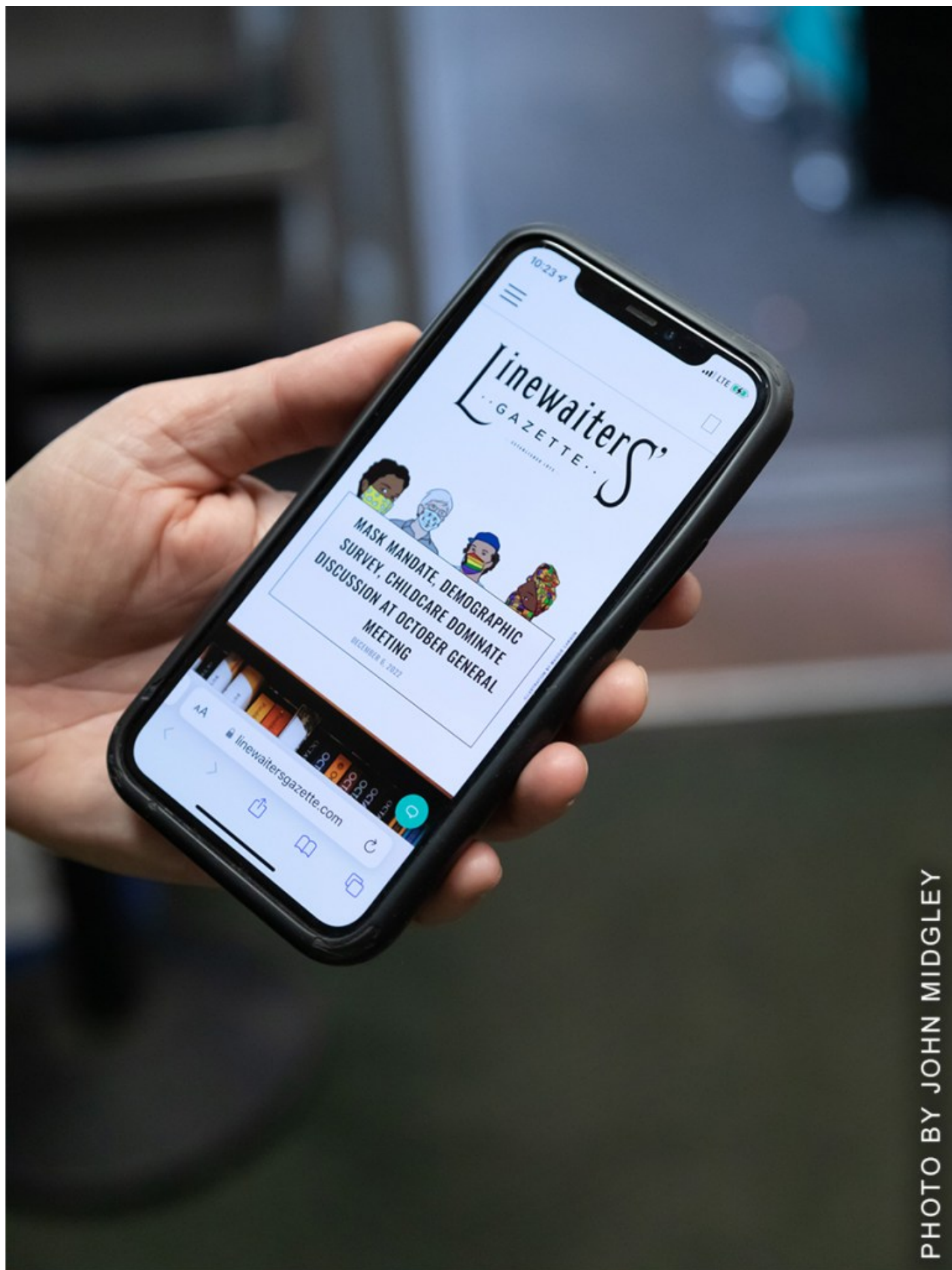


PHOTO BY JOHN MIDGLEY

A phone displays the new digital *Gazette*.

THINKING BACK

Landfield is stepping down from his role as coordinating editor of the *Linewaiters' Gazette* this year. "I'm a small business owner, and with the pandemic, I had time on my hands," Landfield explained. "But now I need to care for my business and myself."

It's a big shift for the publication: What does a digital *Gazette* look like without the man who built that infrastructure? Yet Landfield is confident that he leaves the publication not only in good hands but in a self-sufficient place.

THE PSFC IS NOT JUST A GROCERY STORE, IT IS A COMMUNITY.

—MATTHEW LANDFIELD

"It has not been the easiest process," Landfield said of the digital migration. "Much of this was pulled together with spit and chewing gum at first. I'm proud of the work that's been done, and the publication seems to be functioning without too much input from me—which to me is a sign that I did what I set out to do: to transition the publication from a place of complete cessation to a sustainable place."

"The *Gazette* went from being defunct completely, to a functioning, viable publication, Landfield said. "[The staff] all worked together to create it and I'm very proud of having been a part of that."



Signs around the Coop tout the digital publication.

Landfield intends on spending more time with his family and taking more time to leave the city and explore upstate. But the Coop and the *Gazette* itself have left a lasting impression on him. When asked what lessons he's taken away from his experience in the Coop for so many years, as well as the *Gazette*, Landfield said: "The PSFC is not just a grocery store, it is a community. And that community is bound by food, but it is also a community that exists online—it needs to be connected and stay connected. The online *Gazette* is an opportunity to do that. And there's still so much more that can be done."

In the true spirit of the Coop, Landfield also mentioned that the digital migration would not have been possible with his counterparts. "I would have never done any of this without Nancy Rosenberg," Landfield said firmly. "She did all of the hard labor of mobilizing the staff, and seeing her do that was remarkable."

Landfield's tenure at the *Gazette* is one of lasting significance. His 20-plus years of

service for the publication is impressive alone, but, with the digital migration of the *Gazette*, he was critical to its resurgence in the wake of the pandemic. It cannot be understated how important that last bit is. Throughout the pandemic, the *Linewaiters' Gazette* stood for community, consistency, and discourse. Now, with Landfield's leadership, it's a digitized archive of the Coop and its members throughout some of the most tumultuous times in history.

Yet for Landfield, it's the spirit and the ethos of the *Gazette* that he's most proud of. "The *Gazette* is a representation of the Coop's ethos of cooperation. It is a publication that is the product of a community collaborating with one another. It has produced excellence, and it represents the best of what the Coop is: a cooperative project."

Before our conversation concluded, Landfield underscored his enduring sentiment, one that can speak to his unyielding dedication to the Coop and the *Gazette* itself: "The Coop is a community first—not just a physical place."

Liora Fishman lives in Prospect Heights. She's been a Coop member since 2021.