THE YEAR IN REVIEW AND THE YEAR AHEAD—WHAT 2023 HOLDS FOR THE COOP

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Masked members smile with their eyes as they stock the shelves.

By Travis Hartman

NOTABLE EVENTS IN 2022 AS REPORTED BY THE *LINEWAITERS' GAZETTE*

First let's look back, and then into the new year. In late 2021, the 20-month membership freeze was lifted, allowing membership to grow again. In February 2020, the Coop had over 17,000 members but membership had fallen to 12,555 by the end of November 2021. This is a 26 percent drop in less than two years, and the Coop's lowest member total since February 2004. When the freeze lifted, orientations were shifted online and the Coop enrolled more than 100 people on the first week of the new interim process.

JANUARY:

Those at the General Meeting learned that Coop finances have taken a significant turn to the positive, one major factor being the pandemic price increase. The increase

took the markup from 21 percent to the current 25 percent, which helped to close the operating loss short-term by bringing in an additional $25,000 per week.

FEBRUARY:
Membership Coordinator Annette Laskaris retires after 21 years.

Russia declares war on Ukraine, causing shockwaves up and down the supply chain. The war impacts gas prices and causes transit issues, which in turn affects prices of the goods being transported. The region is known as the breadbasket of Europe, and the stresses of war caused the price for wheat per bushel to rise to the highest level in 14 years, surging nearly 80 percent over the previous year.



Tags await shopping members at the entrance door.

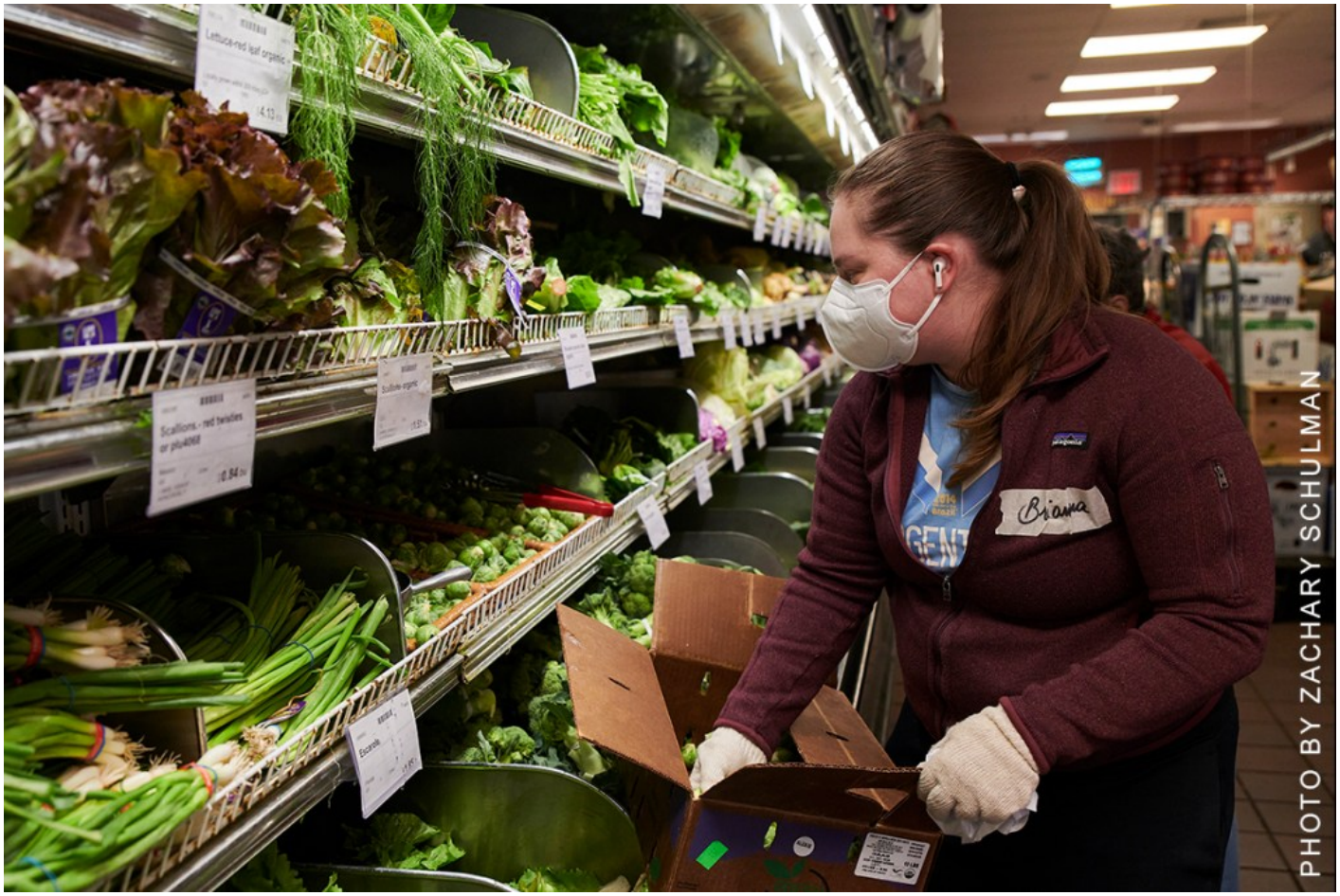
MARCH:
The Coop's membership climbs to 13,000 and has a backlog of 600 people who have completed orientation but who have not yet joined due to limited new member enroll-

ment appointments.

APRIL:
The member labor cycle expands to six weeks due to membership growth. Coop staff analyzes the over 10,000 working members and shifts available and finds that there are fewer shifts available than people who need them.

The Coop ushers in a new era with a sign at the entrance that flashes green and says “Next Member.”

JUNE:
The election of the Board of Officers for the Coop sees Imani Q’ryn elected president, Shayna Moliver elected vice president, Elizabeth Tobier elected secretary and Joe Holtz to serve as treasurer.



A member stocks produce.

JULY:

Coop General Manager and Treasurer Joe Holtz, who helped found the Coop in 1973, is suspended for 30 days without pay and barred from the Coop premises until July 31 for breaching COVID protocols by returning to work while awaiting test results.

AUGUST:

The Consumer Price Index Report put out by the U.S. Department of Labor records a 10.4 percent increase in overall food costs between June 2021 and June 2022, with more dramatic hikes in specific categories of food.

OCTOBER:

Two incidences of theft from the summer are reported at the Coop, one occurring in the stairwell that leads to the basement, the other occurring in staff lockers on the second floor. Signage warning members not to leave their valuables are posted in the stairwell and general coordinators discuss installation of locks on several doors to prevent access to staff spaces by potential bad actors.

ON THE MASKS FRONT, THE GENERAL COORDINATORS DECIDED IT WAS IN THE BEST INTEREST OF THE COOP TO KEEP THEM MANDATORY FOR THE TIME BEING.

NOVEMBER:

On November 1, the Coop complies with Mayor Eric Adams' new rules regarding COVID protocols at work. Members will no longer be required to show proof of vaccination to work a shift and unvaccinated workers may return to working their shifts.



A masked member peruses a cookbook.

WHAT MEMBERS ARE LOOKING FORWARD TO IN 2023:

Ally Levine, who has been a member for a couple years, visited the Coop several times before becoming a member and would really like to bring some of her friends to see the magic of the Coop. “I hope they bring back the visitor passes. But I also hope they leave the limit on how many people can be in the store,” she said, commenting on the weekend crowds that used to flood the aisles.

Ariel Schwartz is really looking forward to enjoying more produce and summer fruit. After only being a member for around a year, “I can’t really complain too much,” she said of the Coop’s current state. “It gets really busy sometimes but you can’t really change that.”

Phyllis Trout, who has been a Coop member for decades, is happy to experience the

camaraderie of working on a squad again. “Working with people and getting to know people, it’s always a joy!” she said.

ONE MEMBER SAYS SHE HOPES THEY BRING BACK THE VISITOR PASSES.

Trout’s friend Lisa Wilde, who has been with the Coop for almost 20 years, is hoping that the Coop will be able to bring back more slots for compost shifts in 2023. She said that during the pandemic the amount of food waste the Coop has been able to compost was reduced for various reasons. “The hope is for more external sites to become available and more member work slots for composting. It saves the Coop money, because we have to pay for the compost to be taken away. Food waste is a huge issue!”

Jeffery Birnbaum has one thought for what the Coop should do in 2023: “Get rid of the masks,” he said. “For the most part the Coop is full of amazing compassion in general and the more I work the more I realize the camaraderie and support of the staff.” But he feels like the masking policy is not effective. “Wearing two masks maybe, but one is not that useful.”

The Coop took a member poll in November of 2022 to assess the overall interest in the mask policy, and while a very slight majority favored removing the mandatory wearing of masks, the general coordinators decided it was in the best interest of the member population to keep the policy in place for the time being.

Travis Hartman has been a Coop member for over 10 years and likes looking for the why behind the who, what, when and where.

PHOTO BY ZACHARY SCHULMAN

A member stocks beer.