

IT'S ALWAYS ICE CREAM SEASON AT THE COOP

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ILLUSTRATION BY ERIK SCHURINK

By Sara Ivry

Ice cream has been a favorite treat since as far back as any of us can remember. I grew up in Massachusetts in the 80s, where my fellow New Englanders and I hoovered nearly 23 quarts of ice cream per person annually, far outpacing the rest of

the country, where, according to data from the International Ice Cream Association, the average hovered closer to 15. In the decades since, the national average has ticked up; the International Dairy Foods Association estimates that Americans now eat about 16 quarts per person per year. In the early part of the pandemic, I satisfied my hankering for ice cream care of Arethusa Farm, a Litchfield County, Connecticut purveyor whose work is, in a word, sublime. I was, at the time, staying with my parents in Northwest Connecticut, near the creamery's headquarters. But once back in Brooklyn, the only place I could find Arethusa was at a specialty grocer where the mark-up from what I paid per pint in Connecticut was nearly 100%. I mostly went without it.



Then, earlier this year, to my great delight pints of Arethusa appeared at the Food Coop. There was chocolate! Vanilla! Toasted almond and coconut! When I realized my all-time favorite flavor—coffee—was missing, however, I submitted a member request that the Coop carry it, too. Soon thereafter, it materialized in the shelves. That's

thanks to Kimberly Curran, one of the Coop's frozen foods buyers, who pays close attention to members' tastes and recommendations in the eternal and noble pursuit of deliciousness. Curran started shopping at the Coop as a kid with her parents some 30 years ago. Now a parent herself to a 13-year-old, Curran took the position of frozen buyer six years ago. She spoke about about her work stocking one of the Coop's most popular destinations.

Sara Ivry:

First, I'm so grateful that you brought in that Arethusa coffee flavor.

Kimberly Curran:

I'm so glad. That's what I strive for. Customer service runs in my blood. My grandfather was a grocer on Lenox Avenue in Harlem. I relish buying the ice cream because people really respond to affirmation like, "Hey, I want this pint in the Coop." And then you get it and they buy it. It's a great ecosystem.

Ivry:

What factors must you consider in buying ice cream for the Coop?

Curran:

Procurement. You have to be mindful of a heavily perishable item. There are cold chain supplies to be mindful of, like, you know, keeping things that come off a truck. You want it back in this cold storage as fast as possible. Consideration for what will sell. People love a classic vanilla or chocolate or, in your case, coffee. And we make room for epic stuff as well. We have a lot of everything-but-the-kitchen-sink kind of pints.



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Ivry:

What's the weirdest request that you've fielded?

Curran:

When someone first said "the Aresthusa toasted almond and coconut needs to happen" I had to look it up. They have a huge following for just that flavor specifically. I went through three vendors—emailed them—they're like, 'No, I don't have this.' Then I found one, and I was like, 'Send me three cases.' It's always a nuanced conversation to bring a new item into the Coop.

Ivry:

How so?

Curran:

You have to be mindful of bringing items in that will sell that meet the Coop standards for dairy or the ingredients list. And that people will enjoy buying and are reasonably priced. We have expensive ice creams, but we also have reasonably priced pints. We need that middle ground. I personally always strive to have small businesses if I can, local businesses, if I can, you know, being a Coop kid.

The Coop's mission really does stick in my head. As a full-time employee, I've taken that to heart. In recent years—2020 was a reckoning for everyone, retailers included—I took it upon myself to research more POC companies. More small companies, more local companies to encourage more of them in the ice cream case. That I could do my part as far as creating or continuing to create an inclusive environment that is cost effective as well.

That we can bring in people of color and women-owned businesses and that my supervisors allow the space for that—I really do appreciate that. I want that case to feel like it's got something for everyone. I want it to be inclusive. If somebody comes to me with, 'We don't have something,' I'll try and bring it in. I always strive to do that, and that's the messaging I give to any member who reaches out. Including you.

Ivry:

Are there many ice cream companies that are owned by women or by people of color?

Curran:

Luckily, I got a lot of really great leads on quite a few. Noona's, Korean-inspired pints, was in before I had ice cream as a category for buying. It's amazing; they have yuzu blossom flavor, they have a dairy-free green tea ice cream. They have a black sesame that everyone goes crazy for. And the founder's husband owns Brooklyn Cured.

It's a New York story where there are two vendors that provide to the Coop. It's a fairy tale, very romantic.

Throughout the years I've brought in epically strange pints by Oddfellows. They're owned by people of color. How they started their company is adorable; it was a trio, a wife and husband and their friend, who's a chef. The wife was pregnant with twins and she couldn't quell her cravings for a strange sweet pint, and the chef made something pretzel, something chocolatey, something peanut buttery, something miso. And then they started a company based on a really satisfying ice cream. There are so many stories like this in Brooklyn.

We have Caribbean-inspired Island Pops, they're on Nostrand Avenue; I have Del's and Adirondack, who are local. They feel it's important to be part of the Park Slope Food Coop, it's worth their time and energy. When I bring them in, it's supporting the local businesses of Brooklyn and New York. That's super vital to having small shops survive in this economy. I want to keep a good cycle of purchasing and providing going.

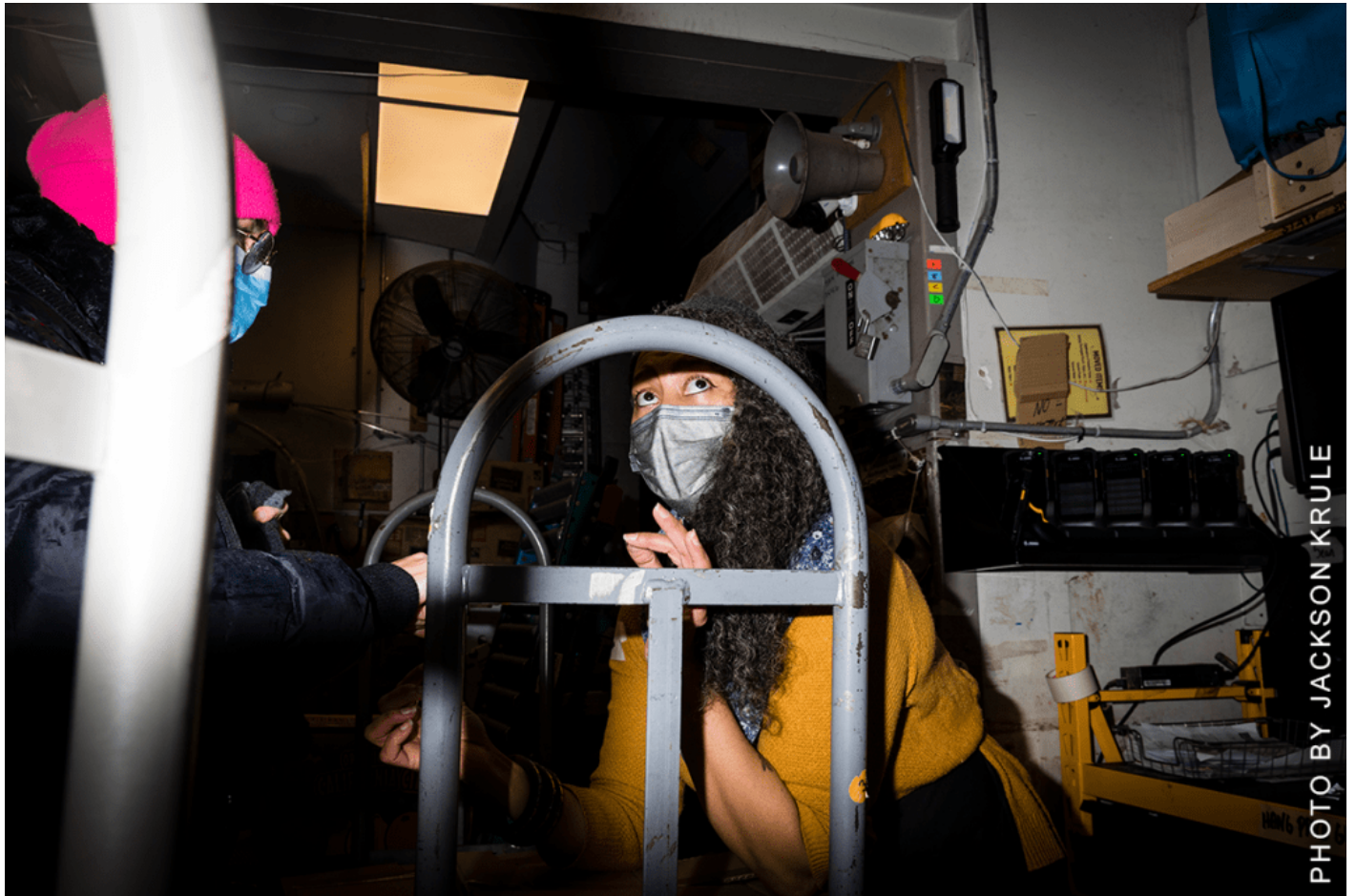
IT'S YEAR ROUND. IT DOES NOT SLOW DURING THE WINTER. THE FLAVORS JUST SHIFT.

Ivry:

Do the ice cream sellers come to you or you go to them to find new flavors and makers?

Curran:

It's a combination. Before the pandemic, makers would call the membership office, create a vendor date, tour the Coop, and chat with the buyer. Post Covid, there's no demonstrations of food, and no real schedule for vendors to come in, so it's been kind of a challenge.



A lot of member suggestions. Word of mouth. It could be the buyer's research. You have to follow trends, watch stats. Look at trends from years past. Historically, vanilla has always been popular at the holidays—'We need vanilla for pies!' But other people have holidays, and interesting flavors are really welcome. Malai has these wonderful seasonal spiced chocolate pints. I ordered a bunch of roses and cinnamon. I have at least five new SKUs apart from the chai and the Turkish coffee pints we always carry. I have some holiday favorites that I try and bring in every year that I highlight. And then *New York Times* highlighted Malai like last week so that we'll see a surge by word of mouth.

Ivry:

How much ice cream does the Coop sell per week?

Curran:

Cases upon cases. If we had to put a price tag on it, it would be innumerable. It's year round. It does not slow during the winter. The flavors just shift. In the summertime it's

sorbet and then sorbet slows down. And then the shift goes back to like 'lighter' flavors in the summertime.

Ivry:

Are there other notable trends?

Curran:

People have a vast palette. I have people who absolutely love the holiday movie-inspired ice creams. I just brought an Oddfellows capsule, which is a small run, in for the holidays. We have Banoffee Pie from *Love, Actually*. They had *Elf*'s Buddi Spaghetti Sundae; it doesn't have spaghetti in the pint, but it's everything he threw on his morning spaghetti. We have Razzleberry Dressing, which is one of my dad's favorites from *Mr. Magoo's Christmas Carol*.

Ivry:

But it's not all small, indie ice cream purveyors.

Curran:

We have Aldens. We have Haagen Dazs, and it sells. If I took it out of the roster, I would get a lot of push back from membership. Why get rid of Ben and Jerry's? Why get rid of Haagen Dazs? You cannot get radical; you can't just tell people they can't eat the ice cream they're requesting.

Ivry:

What's your personal favorite?

Curran:

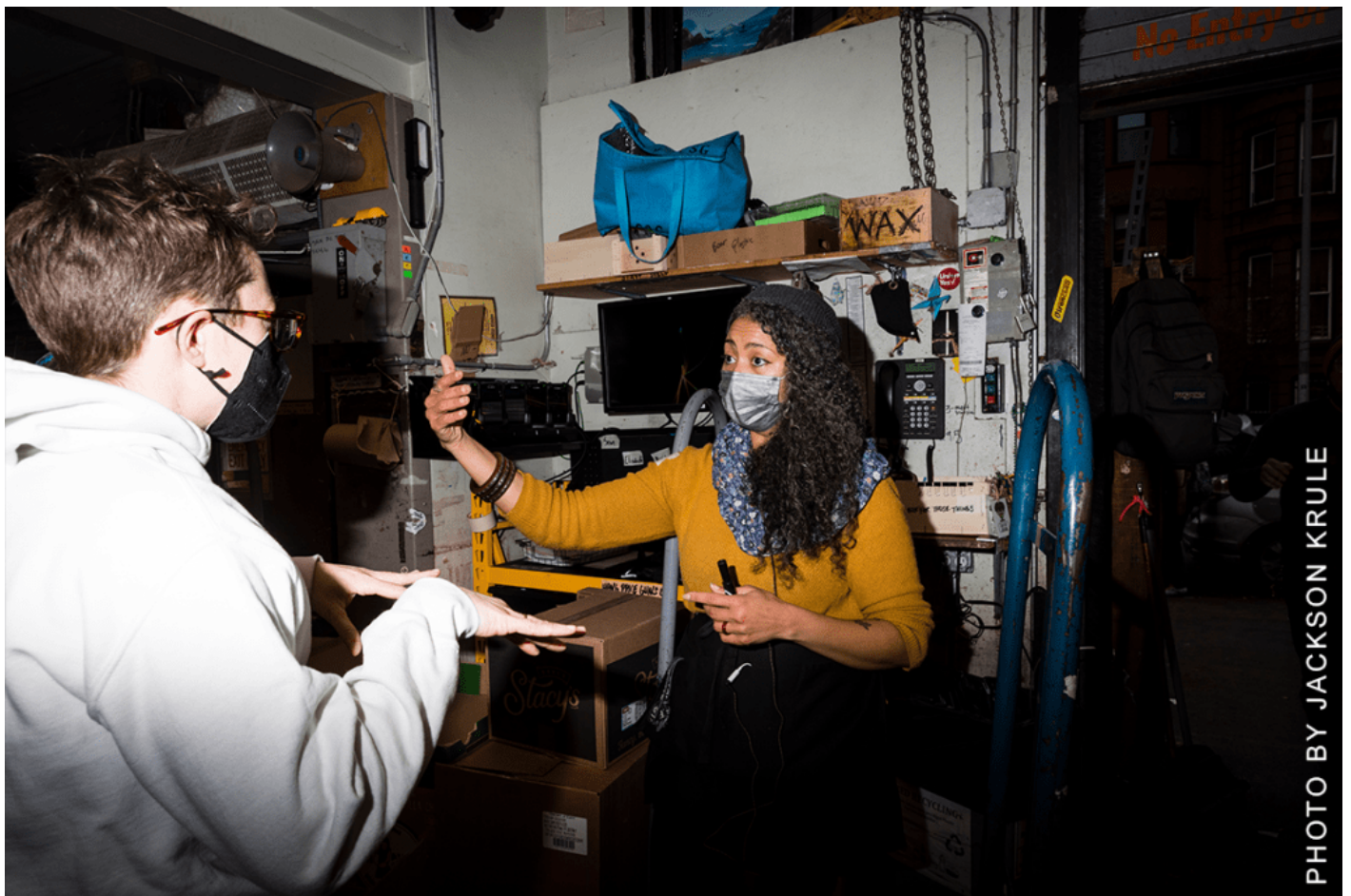
If I had to choose—the Dolcezza marscapone and berries. It has a tartness and a beautiful swirl of seasonal fruit. That's the first one that comes to mind. I love the yuzu by Noona's. If I had to pick a third, it would probably be the Malai rose with cinnamon. It's so unctuous and delightful as far as the floral palate.

Ivry:

When you do get a new flavor in how much of it you buy?

Curran:

It depends. Sometimes I'll ask colleagues, "What do you think about this pint?" while we're ordering? You know, and I kind of take the temperature. If I ask our social media person to post it, I don't want to run out. Sometimes people will see something on the Coop's Instagram account as a story and they'll run to it. A new item brings excitement.



I had a coworker who really had her hand on the pulse of like, you know, arts and culture. She would go, "Hey, you know, this was in the *Times* article last weekend," Or my sister who's much younger will be like, "Hey, Del's got a spot in this local article," and then you should probably bring more in.

Ivry:

I once produced a radio interview about an ice cream shop on Cape Cod that was selling lobster ice cream. Vanilla with lobster bits in it.

Curran:

Amazing. People will try crazy flavors. We had bacon, egg, and cheese. It has a swirl of custardy Velveeta, which I'm not crazy for. I thought people would like it. It also had soy bacon pieces in it. And, I think it might've had lard. Then we had a cornbread ice cream that people would buy cases of; it did have lard and I had to put it on the label, so people knew even if they were vegetarian and they ate honey and ate dairy, that it had lard.

Ivry:

Do you taste every ice cream that you bring in?

Curran:

I get a little taste. And I encourage staff to give feedback. If a vendor has given me a sample, I'm like, "Hey, it's in the fridge. Let me know what you think. Here's the details on it."

There was a particular pint that was not for the faint of heart. Not for the food unadventurous. It had granulated garlic and onion on like a sesame stick or something. I was like, "Please be mindful that there are aromatics in there and please also be mindful that everywhere else in the world with exception for America has savory puddings and desserts and ice cream." Like, "Don't get it twisted just because we're sort of middle of the road in our palate and adventures in America, this is not unusual and you should research it before you say anything out of bounds." People did enjoy it. But ice cream shouldn't have a disclaimer. You should be brave or you shouldn't try it.

A long-time Food Coop member, Sara Ivry lives in Clinton Hill with her son, who is partial to Blue Marble's strawberry ice cream.