THE PUSH BEHIND THE COOP’S SWANKY NEW STREET CARTS

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By Anita Bushell

Got a lot of groceries to cart home? You're in luck: The Coop has a fleet of bigger, shinier grey beasts to aid the journey back to your doorstep. The new models have a smoother glide and don't make as much noise on the sidewalk as the older street carts, but they have their downsides. Coop member Tom Paul, who does the walker shift, observes: "They aren't deep enough to carry heavier loads of grocery bags but they are lighter and have less rattle than the older, heavier carts."

We spoke with General Manager Joe Holtz, who oversees the cart supply at the Coop, about the need for new models, the replacement process and his favorite features of the new fleet. We also got to the bottom of a rumored "national cart shortage."

Let's start with terminology. What are the outdoor carts called?

The carts you are referring to are what we call street carts or walker carts or simply outdoor carts. The manufacturer of the old carts called them "Carry Out Carts." The company we're using now calls them "Grocery Bagger Carts."

How would you describe your role in overseeing our cart supply?

I have been ordering outdoor carts since we started using them in the early 2000's. Before I order new carts, I consult with other staff, in particular membership coordinators, as to whether the number of carts that we have are insufficient for the Coop's needs.

> THEY HANDLE GREAT. THEY OPERATE MORE LIKE A SPORTS CAR. I HAVE NEVER DRIVEN A SPORTS CAR.

What was the problem with the old carts?

There was no problem with the old carts. The old carts were made by Technibilt, which was bought by the German company, Wanzl, in 2012. I believe we started buying them around the time we expanded into our third building in 2001 (the third building is where aisles four, five, six, and seven are, as well as all the checkouts). Then Wanzl/Technibilt decided to stop making them.

How long did we have the old carts?

The first carts we bought from Technibilt were around 2001. The first model we bought had wheels that were inset, meaning that the wheels did not add width to the cart. The problem was that many times people found that the wheels interfered with where one needs to place one's feet while walking behind the cart. Then a new model came out with the wheels on the outside and that problem was solved.

What are the features of the new street carts at the Coop?

They are a little wider. It's a little harder to hang bags from them due to shortness of the upper extension of the verticals. They handle great. They operate more like a sports car. I have never driven a sports car.

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New cart on the left; old cart on the right.

Why did we need new carts?

Over the years, the main reason we need new carts is that they go missing. Occasionally a cart gets so old and so beat up that it can longer be repaired. But that is rare compared to carts going missing.

We heard there is a "national shopping cart shortage." Have you heard of this shortage as well? *[Editor's note: the "national cart shortage" was mentioned on a loudspeaker announcement this winter urging members to be prompt about returning their shopping carts to the parking area when they were no longer needed.]*

Not a "shortage" but rather a lag. It took about 18 weeks for the new carts to arrive after we placed an order. They arrived in October after having been ordered in June.

How many outdoor carts does the Coop own, and how many new ones did you order?

Based on input from other staff, we determined that we should have a minimum of eight carts. I was pleasantly surprised that we still had six old carts when the [six] new ones arrived. I expected that the old carts could have been as low as four based on historical attrition rates. As of last week, two of the new carts were missing, one was out service as it was in need of repairs, and three were in service. There were still six old carts last week. Sometimes missing carts come back.

How much do the new carts cost?

The price for each cart, including the cost of delivery, was about $450.

What has feedback on the new carts been like?

I have not heard much from anyone except that it is nice to not have a cart shortage—but that is temporary. We may have to order more soon. The new carts are not as rugged as the old carts, in regard to the back wheels system. Our Facilities Coordinator, Crystal Goldenstein, is looking into improving the wheel system on the new carts so that they are more durable.

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