# COORDINATORS' CORNER: A MESSAGE FROM JOE HOLTZ

October 15, 2024




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Dear Members,

In 1972, I was part of the small original founding/planning group that worked on launching the Coop during the latter part of that year, and then managed the official opening in February 1973. In early June 1975, at the age of 25, I became the first Coop employee. In late June 2025, after 50 years on the job as a General Coordinator, I will retire.

The recognition of the Coop's 50th anniversary, in 2023, helped me conclude that my 50th anniversary of becoming our first employee was a fitting time for this difficult decision. I stayed all these years because of how special the Coop is and because of the

difference the Coop makes in so many people's lives. I have stayed because of the overwhelmingly positive energy and thoughts so many of our members have about the Coop. I have stayed because of how much our members care for the Coop and feel connected to their Coop.

And I have stayed because of the Coop's great staff. Over the years, I have been, and continue to be, fortunate to have wonderful, dedicated, hard-working, thoughtful and caring employee-colleagues. They understand how special the Coop is, and it has been an honor to have worked side-by-side with each of them in this interesting, challenging and exciting endeavor of serving the membership and making the Coop strong.

I also stayed because every year I could answer the following question with a "Yes": Is the job still interesting and challenging? To this day my answer remains: Yes.  Nevertheless, it is time for the Coop to forge into the future without me as an employee. I feel that responsible planning includes retiring while I can still walk, talk, think and be available to the Coop.

I've been privileged to have had the opportunity to help both members and staff build a democratic institution that welcomes people from all walks of life into the community and practices cooperation through genuine participation in running our communally owned store. I have loved helping to build a community success in a society that is so focused on individual success.

My sister and I grew up in a three-generation household of seven. My home had nearly constant visits by a ton of relatives and family friends. There was always conversation and interaction. As a kid, I asked questions about how businesses worked, partly due to an instinctive love of numbers. The Coop job included both elements: lots of interactions with people and lots of numbers. As an adult I never saw myself working for a profit-making business. However, a member/owner cooperative business was the right fit for me. People who want to cooperate are precious to me.

My dad told me time and again that people “should not rest on their laurels” and not base their actions on past successes and not rest because of any positive “newspaper clippings.” I incorporated those lessons into my life at the Coop. I came to understand that a killer of businesses was overconfidence. I came to understand that we must always carve a path toward success and avoid the paths that could put us into a downward spiral. This was integral to my approach to good stewardship of our Coop.

I am grateful for having the opportunity to do this job for this community, this “local society,” for what will soon be 50 years. I’m confident that the staff and you—the thousands of members who make up this local society—will continue caring for the Coop, ensuring that it continues for generations. Thank you all for caring.

*Joe Holtz*
*General Coordinator, General Manager and Co-Founder*

PS: I hope to write more articles for the *Gazette* in the coming months about the parts of the Coop that most resonate with me and that have contributed to building this vibrant and vital cooperative of ours.