

SECRET SHIFTS: INSIDE SOME OF THE COOP'S MOST ELUSIVE WORK SHIFTS

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By Nikia Dawkins

Ever wondered how to get a work shift credit without actually setting foot in the Coop? Or how to get on the beer shift? Or what kind of expertise is required for the repairs shift? And what about all those Coop committees? What are they *really* up to anyway? Me too! Turns out there are a lot of secret shifts at the Coop. Some are so secret, in fact, that the participants declined to be interviewed for this very article, but, thankfully, just as many welcomed the attention. Today, we'll shine a spotlight on the

unique joys and challenges of two shifts that are completely misunderstood: repairs and beer.

Jim Christensen, an expert handyman who manages the repairs squad, is entirely transparent: “The Coop is famous for not having enough room for things and being cobbled together over 53 years by an ever-changing cast of amateurs, which naturally produces some wonky results.” Despite that, the repairs squad has accomplished a lot so far this year, including an event that was the first of its kind—WeLDfeST ’25. “We had four guys—they happened to all be men—but they had welding experience and were good trainers. One of them had taught another repairs person how to weld, and he got excited about it. Our shopping carts are the main things that are always breaking down, so we’ve got some basic welding equipment, and we repair those in-house. But the expertise to do so was scattershot. We just didn’t know when people were going to come in and do it.” So on the evening of Sunday, May 4, the experienced welders held a training session and, well, sparks flew. “We had a nice mix of members and staff, men and women, and a lot of artists, and we got everybody up to speed. Now we have twice as many people to weld carts as we did before.”

Even though some professional architects, designers and electricians often sign up for the repairs shift, no prior skills or experience are actually required. “All we need is a basic willingness to problem-solve and learn and collaborate,” he said. “My predecessor Crystal Goldenstein had a knack for shooting videos to break down a task. She shot a great video for how to clean the grease trap and maintain it every week. So if I get two rank beginners and show them that video and where all the pieces are, they can do it. We’re really trying to get organized and make sure that we have teaching tools and sometimes physical tools that anyone can pick up and learn on short notice.” On a typical shift, Christensen might hand you a copy of an email he received that says something in the building is broken. “Something I haven’t even looked at, and I’ll send a pair of people down to scout it out and see what’s going on.” Recently, he noticed that the Coop’s soap dispensers were a bit too generous, so he asked a couple shift workers to take one apart and figure out how to make it dispense a little less soap. They solved the problem in no time. “They found a part that had a horse-

shoe plastic piece on it. It was 8 mm tall, and if we cut 4 mm off of it, we could cut the piston stroke in half and use half as much soap. So all of the dispensers have been hacked to save us money and still get the job done.”

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REPAIR SQUAD MANAGER, JIM CHRISTENSEN

At this point, the repairs shift is a chaotic but well-oiled machine. “Sometimes I have eight people coming in on a given night, and we all break off into four pairs. I hand out radios, and I give them assignments in the conference room. We’re all on channel 4 on the radios, and they just kind of come and go. I think we have it humming now. It’s been a lot of fun for me, and I think it’s been a lot of fun for them.”



PHOTO BY ROD MORRISON

Beer Squad member Ben Rojas seen stocking the low alcohol beer section.

According to Kusi Merello, who manages the beer squad, the best part about working the beer shift is “stocking what you want to purchase after your shift.” However, the most important thing to know is that it’s a physical job that requires excellent time management skills.

“When choosing what to stock from the backstock in the basement, you often need to go up and down the stairs a bit as you stock various sections of the floor,” she said. “It’s important that you’re able to lift and use the stairs frequently.”



PHOTO BY ROD MORRISON

The main beer shelf is to the right of the egg case, but there are so many other places where beer can be found on the shopping floor.

Depending on how depleted the shelves are, it can be challenging to prioritize your time and get all of the beer sections organized and stocked within the 2.45 hours, especially when you consider that there is beer nearly *everywhere* at the Coop. When I say “everywhere,” I mean places you’d never suspect, like the cubbies at checkouts #14 and #17 (across from the ice cream case). Inside those, you’ll find beer at heavily discounted prices due to distributor overstock. “Right now, we have a hard cider, Bold Rock, that is 26 cents a bottle,” she said. Hidden under the bread bins in aisle 3, you’ll find the hard kombucha, seltzers, and Makku, which is “Korean gluten-free beer brewed from rice that’s yummy and fun to drink.” The bottom two shelves of the seasonal end cap (across from the egg case) showcase seasonal beers, which are among Merello’s favorites, especially summer releases because they’re “lighter, with a crispness to them and often with a citrus kick.”



PHOTO BY ROD MORRISON

Max Steele stocking one of the cubbies across from the ice cream case.



Kusi Merello, long time Coop staffer, in charge of the Beer Squad.

On the bottom shelf of the seltzer end cap, you can find the Great Brewer's Mystery 12 Packs. "These are a special item we get from Union Beer Distributors," she said. "When they have a case with damaged cans or bottles, they can't sell the case. What they do is mix and match them into 12 packs that are sold as mystery packs. They're a super deal at under \$12 a box after deposit and tax. You can get some really expensive beers in these. It's a gamble—they're not for everyone—but they sure are fun to open and share if you're taking beer somewhere."

"I BECAME THE SUPERVISOR FOR BEER AFTER OUR FORMER BEER BUYER AND DEAR FRIEND AND COLLEAGUE MATTHEW MARVEL PASSED AWAY. I USED TO HELP HIM WITH THE BEER ON EVENINGS AND WEEKENDS."

BEER SQUAD MANAGER, KUSI MERELLO

There's also a wide selection of nonalcoholic beer, which started off as a shelf but is now an entire column in aisle 3. In addition to making sure that the shelves are well-stocked, beer shift workers should also be available to shoppers who are looking for something specific or who need a recommendation. As a result, prior knowledge about beer is extremely helpful, and Merello herself was a bartender before joining the staff at the Coop. "I became the supervisor for beer after our former beer buyer and dear friend and colleague Matthew Marvel passed away. I used to help him with the beer on evenings and weekends."

If you're interested in becoming part of the beer squad, the process is simple: Leave a note with your name and email address in Merello's mailbox on the second floor of the Coop. An office worker can point you in the right direction. She'll contact you to set up a training shift, for which you will receive credit. After that, you'll be given the official authorization to sign up for any available beer shifts in the future.



Ordering and stocking beer is a physical job that requires excellent time-management skills.

Stay tuned for a look behind-the-scenes of the vitamin shift and food class committee in my next report!

Nikia Dawkins is a creative writer and journalist who's currently trying to become a morning person.