

SALUTING JOE HOLTZ, AN ICONIC FIGURE IN THE COOP’S HISTORY

July 15, 2025



PHOTO BY STEFAN RUIZ

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By Zach Schiffman

How do you honor the 50-year legacy of the Coop's longtime General Coordinator, Joe Holtz? On June 1 at the Prospect Park Picnic House, the Coop community saluted Holtz, an iconic figure in the Coop's history, with three waves of guests, over multiple snack stations, musical performances, interactive exhibits, pre-recorded tributes and painted portraits.



The event was organized by three Coop staff members, with food and drinks almost exclusively sourced from the Coop. Catering support was provided by Winner, which was founded by a former Coop member.

The celebration was structured into three sections, each lasting around 90 minutes. The first 50 minutes allowed attendees to mingle, enjoy snacks and refreshments, explore a multimedia showcase and photo archive, sign Holtz's guestbook and have portraits taken.

Each wave then concluded with a speaker, a video featuring Holtz's pre-recorded speech touching on his history at the Coop and a personal appearance and remarks from Holtz himself, most of which involved anecdotes about scrubbing the Coop floors and stocking the milk fridge. The finale was a group portrait on the lawn orchestrated by a documentary team that captured the event.



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A celebration of
JOSEPH HOLTZ
JUNE 1ST, 2025



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The first wave featured Gillian Chi, a longtime staff member who served as the event's MC despite initial nervousness. "I've never emceed anything before, maybe spoken into a microphone twice in my life," she confessed.

Chi, like everyone at the event, said, "It's hard to imagine the Coop without him." Musical entertainment during this wave was provided by the James Shipp Band, which is made of entirely of Coop members. Member John Webber presented a portrait of Holtz made with MetroCards by artist Juan Carlos Pinto, along with a painting of the iconic PSFC Neon sign by member Erik Schurink.

The second wave featured Jess Robinson, a member and former staffer, as the speaker. Musical entertainment was provided by Coop member band Krissie & the Kranks. Staff member Yuri Weber performed "Hey Mr. Tangerine Man," an adaptation by

former staffer Allen Zimmerman, adding a playful, nostalgic element.

The final wave featured staff member Jana Cunningham as the speaker. “The On-Alert String Band,” also composed of Coop members, provided entertainment. A highlight of this wave was the presentation of a custom event T-shirt to Holtz—an original design reading “Holtz 73”—which staff and members proudly wore throughout the event.

Throughout the day, attendees shared heartfelt reflections.





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Sherry Showell and John Decker, members since 1996, described Holtz’s support for the compost squad. Showell noted Holtz’s unwavering support helped their group grow significantly.

Reflecting on his retirement, Sherry admitted feeling overwhelmed, asking, “Who do I go to now?” Newer members Meredith and Lucy, who assisted with food and drinks, shared their impressions. Lucy remarked, “It’s amazing to see all the history—different generations coming together to celebrate.”

Meredith, reflecting on the Coop’s enduring values, added, “So many of the themes that spurred them to start it are the same things that we’re experiencing today. It’s a really kind of reassuring feeling in this time, just to know that we have an institution that has lasted longer than me.”

Kathy, Holtz's wife, sat quietly off to the side and described the celebration as "very moving," expressing how great it was to see how much people love him and respect him. She warmly shared her belief that Holtz, being "a gregarious person," was truly enjoying the recognition and interaction, adding, "I think he's really liking it a lot."

Longtime member Scott Klein characterized the moment as "the end of an era," while emphasizing the Coop's enduring strength. He said he enjoyed reconnecting with other members, noting simply that "just seeing people" was his favorite aspect.



PHOTO BY STEFAN RUIZ



Coop Exterior Through the Decades



Park Slope Food Coop 1990's



Coop's Rug Cleaners prior to the Coop's expansion in 2002



Delivery of rooftop equipment in 1990's



2001 January-June Removal of floor in 1994 to create an open space with other buildings



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Abigail Dunn, who received work credit to staff the event, described it as “vintage Coop,” and appreciated the chance to meet both new and longtime members. She complimented organizer Silvia Ennes Cabrera for the event logistics.

Cabrera brought her 15 years of event-planning experience prior to working full-time at the Coop to the celebration.

“My mind always goes to food,” she said. “What is the Coop known for? What do you think about when you think of the Coop? And I think about the cheese, bulk, produce and bagels.”

Each table had creative combinations of cheese, dried fruit and crudité. Ultimately, she had to skip the bagels—“We eighty-sixed the bagels because it was just too

hard.” Not only were the snacks a hit, but they were elegantly displayed. “I had a lot of fun getting together stuff to build a little display in the center of each of the tables.” Her earliest memory of Holtz? “He had a belly and a red beard, if you can believe that.”

Elly Dittmar, one of the membership coordinators who helped organize the event, took on the task of curating the photo archive.

“I basically just combed through our archival folders, which, none of them are named—just a massive file of all these random photos,” she said. “Surprisingly enough, it’s extremely hard to find pictures of Joe. In all of these 50 years of archives, there were very few pictures of Joe.”

She eventually had Holtz look through the selections and add his own blurbs. What stood out most to her about the event was how many members were involved: “All the band members, all of the people working today are members. One of the people who helped us prep the food is a member, and the person who owns [the restaurant] is actually a former Coop member. It just feels really nice to be able to pull this all off entirely with people that are part of the Coop.”

Staff member Jason Weiner, handling multimedia presentations, which were displayed on iPads hung in the back of the Picnic House, found joy assembling tributes from international coops, especially from France. “It was really, really endearing,” he said, emphasizing Holtz’s global impact. “The evolution of this place...couldn’t have happened without the work of Joe and other people. It’s nice to celebrate that.”

When the guest of honor was asked how he felt at the expansive event, Holtz told me, “I’m feeling great.”

Zach Schiffman is a social editor and writer at New York magazine, comedian, and Park Slope local.