

MEET THE STAFF: NEW FRIENDLY FACES AT THE COOP

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By Oluwakemi Aladesuyi

Below are excerpts of interviews with the Coop's newest staff members, lightly edited for brevity and clarity.

Andrew Young, Receiving Coordinator



PHOTO BY KATE PREVITE

Member since 2002, staff since August 2024

I was initially resistant when my wife suggested joining the Coop. I thought the whole thing was silly. It's a bit of a cliché but I thought that huge membership, trying to do things in a way that everybody had a voice, would be bureaucratic and slow. What I found once I was working here was that it was all charming. If you wanted to be more involved as a member you could. Over the years we've come here for films or a class. Then there are many other years where I've worked my shift and gotten cheap groceries. But that's the great thing about this place, it's a built-in community. It's there for you if you need it.

“THIS PLACE, IT'S A BUILT-IN COMMUNITY. IT'S THERE FOR YOU IF YOU NEED IT. “

ANDREW YOUNG

As a receiving coordinator I do a lot of things. One is what we call “writing the aisles,” sticking the shelves and making sure things are in place for people to shop. My favorite thing is being a monitor in the receiving room—checking people in for their shift, directing them where to go, working with a large group of people. I am a Shakespeare-obsessive person. Every character in Shakespeare comes into work a shift every month here. There's Falstaff, there's an Iago. They're all here, and that's incredibly vital and entertaining.

A Pitch to New Members: The Coop helps bind the community together. We're in this very unequal neighborhood, and people still come together here and mix together and hash things out. But please, don't put your headphones on during your shift. If I see two people working who've run into old friends they haven't seen, and they're talking for 10 minutes, I'm not going to break that up. That's what this place is about.

What You Might Not Know: Young instituted a special Sunday night deep-cleaning shift using power washers and industrial equipment after noticing that the Coop had lost its deep-cleaning crew during Covid. “People always say, ‘Gosh, you know, I worked really hard, but I felt like I did something and I had a good time.’ It’s kind of like you just feel like the Terminator on the sidewalk.”

Gabriel Concha, Receiving Coordinator



Member since 2007, staff since June 2025

My wife had long known about the Coop, but when she was single she wondered, ‘Does it make a difference to buy an apple for \$2.50 or an apple for \$1.80?’ Then we met, had kids and decided to join.”

My job description is Receiving Coordinator, but I believe there’s an underlined work description: creating community. The goal is for members to chat, to get to know

each other while they work. When people work for the Coop they also begin to realize that they are working for themselves too.

“YOU HAVE TWO HOURS AND 45 MINUTES WORKING WITH ONE PERSON, WHICH IS QUITE A BIT OF TIME FOR NEW YORKERS.”

GABRIEL CONCHA

The other day I saw two people finishing their shift. While they didn't know each other when they began, when the shift ended they hugged and said, 'It's so nice that I talked to you. I really liked talking to you.' This is what we're here for, to promote that cohesive community. It transcends the doors of the Coop.”



A Pitch to New Members: It's hard to take time to get to meet another person deep-

ly, but that is something that the Coop offers. You have two hours and 45 minutes working with one person, which is quite a bit of time for New Yorkers. You can build a relationship, someone you'll see in the street and say "hi" to. It's a great way to feel confident in your community, in how you navigate the planet.

What You Might Not Know: Concha spends his mornings working as a physiotherapist specializing in Body Mind Centering. He helps people with chronic pain through movement therapy. "I help people understand what they have inside their body and how to use it," he explained.

Jacob Slaton, Bookkeeping Coordinator



PHOTO BY JACQUELINE SCADUTO

Member since 2022, staff since August 2025

My wife was talking about this great place with great produce. But when I came, it was the cooperative aspect that drew me in. With a degree in accounting, I'd always thought I'd work for family businesses, mom-and-pops. The reality of modern capitalism is that accountants work with large companies, and that didn't really jibe with me. Working in a community that's based on helping the people around them resonated with my values. It's not profit over everything.

“INSTEAD OF RAISING PRICES LIKE TRADITIONAL STORES, THE COOP CAN FOCUS ON REDUCING EXPENSES ELSEWHERE.”

JACOB SLATON

There's an additional layer of glasses you have to wear when making financial decisions for a coop. We're not trying to make money; we're trying to break even. We don't mark up peaches 80% just because they sell fast when they are in season. The whole idea is to bring produce to consumers at the lowest possible price. That creates an extra wrinkle when you're looking at problems, but that's what regular businesses don't think about. We have benchmarks that allow us to say, “OK, we have a map of where we're going by end-of-year.” But instead of raising prices like traditional stores, the Coop can focus on reducing expenses elsewhere.

A Pitch to New Members: Covid ruined so much when it comes to sharing spaces in-person. It allowed us to stay home, shop online, get groceries delivered. Then you wonder: Why am I not seeing anybody? Why do I feel lonely? You don't build roots by staying in your room or shopping online. While it takes work to get your groceries in-person, you get the opportunity to be around 16,000 other people who have chosen to dedicate their time to creating this place.

What You Might Not Know: Slaton's favorite Coop product is Harry's Berries sourced from a third-generation Japanese American family in California using traditional Japanese agricultural techniques. "I will cut them up and put them in vanilla ice cream in the early part of summer." But they are hand-picked, air-flown strawberries. In other words, expensive. "I'm saving money all year round just for my strawberry fixation."

Oluwakemi Aladesuyi is a journalist, yoga teacher and creative strategist. She is looking forward to buying fresh dates at the Coop.