

LOUDSPEAKER LORE

July 7, 2026



PHOTO BY JENNIFER MACFARLANE

EVERYTHING YOU EVER WANTED TO KNOW ABOUT THE COOP'S PAGING SYSTEM

July 7, 2026

By Susannah Jacob

Every member has a story about the Park Slope Food Coop's intercom. "One time an elder came on the loudspeaker referencing a *New York Times* story about bioluminescent mushrooms and asked if we had any. Apparently, we did at one point," said member Ari Fishman. Another time, Fishman remembers, a small child came on screaming "WHERE IS THE COCONUT FLOUR!" No one responded. Then they did again, and again, and again, Finally the parent got involved [and stopped the child]." Kate Redburn, a member since 2011, whose favorite shift is cheese, had "a multi-year run where every single time I shopped, someone asked for basil on the loudspeaker."

The Coop's public paging system provokes strong reactions: dread, relish, parody, commotion, devotion. Today, its primary purpose is to help members find whatever they are looking for—to ask if there are still fresh fava beans in stock, or if anybody has lost a single maroon leather glove.

Originally, the paging system had a different purpose—it was introduced in early 1990s, as the only way for staff members to communicate throughout the Coop. Jason Weiner, a Membership Coordinator since 2009, maintains the paging system today. "Before the receiving staff had radios, the only way to communicate was paging," Weiner said. In its first incarnation, the paging was nonstop. "There was so much cacophony," Weiner said. "People used it for everything, the move to radios [in 2004] helped with the level of noise."

When Weiner joined the staff, he inherited the loudspeaker oversight charge from

Debbie Parker, a longtime coordinator. Weiner soon learned of the system's tendencies and challenges. The Coop is made of three buildings cobbled together, all divided into three horizontal spaces: basement, shop floor and the office upstairs. Wiring the system across three buildings "involved a huge amount of member labor," Weiner said. The right volume and frequency for one part of the store was too high elsewhere. "People with hearing impairments had different needs, the system couldn't be too high or too low, it would cause sensory overload. Dealing with all those nuances was a huge undertaking."

A pro team of members including a Broadway sound engineer have historically helped calibrate and maintain the system. They upgraded to a new microphone system that measures overall sound levels and calibrates the speaker volume accordingly. When someone makes an announcement, the overhead music fades. "It's all built into a sensitive system that's both audible and not overly loud," said Weiner. Sometimes regular Coop members decide to take engineering issues into their own hands. "People love to tinker with things," said Weiner. "If someone gets annoyed with a speaker they will disconnect a speaker, which they shouldn't be doing." Weiner is right now working to assemble a new team of member experts to upgrade the system, which is now twenty years old. He hopes to expand the reach of the music to more remote corners of the Coop so that workers can hear it.

During the pandemic, when shoppers started forgetting their wallets, the speakers served a new purpose. Coop staffers started paging the shopping floor to ask if any members would cover the bill in exchange for a Venmo transfer. A new policy requires that the member needing a debit card page the shopping floor. It made more sense for staffers to keep out of it, said Weiner. "Members who didn't receive compensation from the other member would try to pin it on the Coop."

Member requests often go unheard on the busy shopping floor, yet Weiner can hear them clearly on the second floor, and regularly gets on the horn. "For staff it is really a tool—if I am managing a group of workers, I use it to send support and thank them—positive messages are important," Weiner said.



PHOTO BY JENNIFER MACFARLANE

A Park Slope Food Coop member using the intercom to ask about the basil.

From many members' perspectives, the paging system is a source of entertainment—and dread. “My own relationship is that I am pretty much too scared to use it. I’d sooner go to a different store if I can’t find what I’m looking for—or else I will look around forever. My own voice on the speaker is pretty freaky, and if I do it wrong, it’s a public mistake,” said member Alexis Nowicki.

Speaking audibly is a common problem. Member Maddy Bruster only learned to use the paging system successfully with practice. “The coordinator will stand there with me and say ‘push, wait, pick-up, talk.’ And then I have to stand there and wait until I hear my voice ringing out.”

She says the intercom is “the spirit of the Coop.” Yet she will “search the store item by item rather than page out.”

In 2019, Nowicki started a Twitter account, @coop_intercom, where she documents the best pages she overheard at the Coop. “I was working a stocking shift and if I heard interesting conversations on the intercom I would write them down and put them on this Twitter account, which amassed twelve followers.” Nowicki uses it less, but misses those days. “I used to have fun with it. I think the intercom has gotten less funny.”

Hey member, the cheese cloth is hanging above the chicken. It's hanging above the chicken.
11:20 AM · Jan 4, 2019

We have a spill. I forgot what it is. Can people who know about the spill please let me know about the spill.
3:46 PM · Jan 8, 2019

We've got a macro-vegetarian on line five. A macro-vegetarian on line five.
6:33 PM · Jan 14, 2019

About that spaghetti spill in aisle five—it's actually linguini.
6:35 PM · Jan 14, 2019

Our preserved lemon is held up in Morocco
1:52 PM · Jan 19, 2019

Hi, is the owner of the really beautiful dog named Hannah still in the co-op?
2:15 PM · Jan 19, 2019

Does anyone have experience with cat litter? I don't really know what I'm doing . . . I'm cat sitting. If anyone wants to meet me in the cat litter aisle, I'd appreciate it.
7:10 PM · Feb 7, 2019

I'm afraid we only have candied peel around the holiday time—oh, no, I'm being told I am wrong. We do. Where is it, Jessica?
1:55 PM · Feb 23, 2019

Hey, do we still sell the wipes with the green lid?
5:12 PM · Mar 10, 2019

When you page for something, you have to imagine a person stopping what they're doing and going to check for you. That's what I just did. They're on the front lift.
6:17 PM · Oct 11, 2019

Jennifer Brown, you have a vital phone call.
10:07 PM · Nov 7, 2019

The women's coffee is coming up, for the member looking for the women's coffee.
12:31 PM · Nov 24, 2019

Hey, I'm the guy who paged about the beef a while ago. Should I stand by the meat case?
4:02 PM · Dec 8, 2019

Did someone leave their bow and arrow in the stairwell? If this is your bow and arrow—or if you know the owner of the bow and arrow—please retrieve it.
5:40 PM · Jan 26, 2020

To the person who wants the oatmeal bath for the rash, we don't have what you're looking for, but come meet by the ice cream and I can give you something
5:43 PM · Apr 4, 2021

Does the coop have baby back ribs?
9:05 AM · Jun 18, 2022

Do any shopping members speak Russian? We need a translator for a Russian shopping member.
6:22 PM · Jul 26, 2022



ill, Nowicki relishes the free entertainment. Someone will ask for oat milk, for example, and someone else will get on and respond with a recipe for homemade oat milk. “The Coop’s loudspeaker is a safe space. You can say whatever you want, you just may get made fun of.”

Susannah Jacob is a native Texan and PhD student of US history. She takes pride in her proficient operation of the slotted, plastic bag-taper machine in the Coop’s bulk department.