

MEMBER-SUBMITTED ARTICLE: IN GRATITUDE

July 28, 2026



Illustration by Olexa Hewryk

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By Jason Weiner, Membership Coordinator

Six years ago, in March of 2020, we Coop members and employees were presented with one of the greatest challenges of our existence. We made the extraordinary decision to shut down the member labor system to protect members from the pandemic as best as we could. The Coop then had to figure out the sudden worker gap. The paid staff were not going to be able to respond to the many needs of Coop members alone—members who still required access to our food—so we put out a call for members who were willing to join the full-time staff on a part-time basis.

These temporary workers filled in all the traditional roles of member labor: unloading trucks, stocking shelves, working in food processing, running checkouts and cashiering. They joined the Coop staff at time of absolute uncertainty.

THAT TIME FEELS LIKE A THOUSAND YEARS AGO, BUT IT IS ONLY THE FIFTH ANNIVERSARY SINCE WE SAID GOODBYE TO THE TEAM OF TEMPORARY WORKERS WHO HELPED US KEEP THIS PLACE ALIVE.

There were no vaccines. We had limited access to PPE and other supplies. We were building social-distancing spaces out of cobbled-together plexiglass and shower curtains. We rotated out and separated workers to create as much safety as possible. We limited entry to the Coop way more than the carrot tags we've become accustomed to. We ate lunches quickly to limit moments our mouths and noses were exposed. We sanitized every surface hundreds of times a week. But through it all, we built connection. We shared our laughter and trauma. We developed friendships and foundations for what would come after.

Those additional workers allowed the full-time staff the breathing room we needed to think. The room to envision and create new systems that allowed member labor to reset and restart into a more equitable and user-friendly way for all.

That time feels like a thousand years ago, but it is only the fifth anniversary (July 2021) since we said goodbye to the team of temporary workers who helped us keep this place alive. Some of those workers found a calling to stay on staff and are now part of the crew you see here on a regular basis during your shifts. Some returned to working shifts when we restarted our vital member-labor system. Some went on to other adventures far from the Coop in the new world, post-shutdown.

I wanted to take a moment to once again thank all those that responded to the call during one of the most difficult times in the Coop's history. We've had over 10,000

new members join the Coop since then, and every one of us owes the present opportunities we have to cooperate to that temporary team that became essential to our survival.