

A BELOVED MEMBER'S PASSING, LOVE FOR THE LOUDSPEAKER & THE AMY'S KITCHEN SITUATION: NOTES FROM THE FEBRUARY 28 GENERAL MEETING

April 12, 2023



By Sara Ivry

More than 100 Coop members gathered on Zoom for the February 28 General Meeting, which focused on two issues: the tragic loss of long-time member Rachel Porter and how to boost member involvement in General Meetings.

Porter, who died earlier this year from cancer (see related article), was a vocal and impassioned participant in the Coop since joining in the 1990s. As the meeting kicked off, Chair Committee Member Josef Szende invited participants to share their

thoughts on her passing, while noting that in her spirit the meeting should also be productive.

Joe Holtz, the Coop's general manager, treasurer and a general coordinator, praised Porter's commitment to the Coop and to its ideals, noting that she founded the Committee Oversight Committee, now getting off the ground. She also co-founded and chaired the Revolving Loan Committee, a fund meant to help launch coops elsewhere.

This year is the Coop's 50th birthday. "In 2013, the only reason we had a fortieth birthday party was because Rachel Porter made it happen," Holtz said. "She was a person who loved the Coop, loved the model of the Coop, talked about how important our Coop model was all the time and what she meant by that was member involvement. She just cared so deeply about the Coop, and she will be extremely missed. I will miss her deeply."

Other Coop members and staff echoed Holtz's sentiments. General Coordinator Elinor Astrinsky remembered Porter making a presentation on how the Coop operates at an event on ways of tackling hunger in New York City presented by Congresswoman Nydia Velazquez.

"IN 2013, THE ONLY REASON WE HAD A FORTIETH BIRTHDAY PARTY WAS BECAUSE RACHEL PORTER MADE IT HAPPEN."

GENERAL MANAGER JOE HOLTZ

"She was very well spoken and very passionate about the Coop. I too will miss her," Astrinsky said, also recalling Porter's thoughtfulness and culinary talents. "She was the best baker around. She made the staff Christmas cookies just of her own volition."

Member Mitzie Rothzeit pointed out that members who run the *Linewaiters' Gazette* had recently refused to publish a submission about matters including member-staff relations by Porter, alleging it was too long and too negative. The *Gazette*, Rothzeit said, owes it to Porter given her passing to publish it in full after all. (Editors' Note: Porter's letter did not comply with the guidelines for publishing letters in the *Gazette*; these guidelines are available in the newsletter's About section.)

Pivoting to a discussion of Coop finances, Holtz presented preliminary data comparing gains and losses in the year that just ended at the close of January 2023 with those at the end of the close of January 2022. The data are preliminary as the Coop is currently undergoing an audit. That said, total expenses for the year just ended were about \$1.7m less than they were the year before. Holtz explained that at the height of the pandemic, the Coop employed more staff than it did in the past year. He also observed that the operating income loss was less in the past year than the year prior, and that cash flow was now up more than \$2 million thanks to government assistance in the form of employee retention credits. In addition, the temporary price mark-up from 21 to 25 percent—imposed to offset pandemic-related losses—is still in place.

Several members wondered whether the mark-up should become permanent to guard against unexpected economic downturns or other challenges in the future. Holtz countered that “low prices are part of our strength, so I would like us to keep recovering from Covid, keep our sales higher and controlling our expenses and hopefully we could lower the mark-up over time and get back to where we used to be, or as close as possible, while being financially prudent.”

In her report from the general coordinators, Astrinsky observed there has been a shortage of people signing up for cleaning slots at the end of the day and truck unloading first thing in the morning, and encouraged members to take these shifts if they are able. She noted the hiring of Receiving Coordinator Miles Golightly and reported that Coop leadership sent out a survey regarding member preferences over whether to continue a mask requirement.

(Since the survey went out and the February General Meeting took place, the Coop lifted its mask mandate.)

Member Rachel Bergstein took issue with the survey, objecting to the lack of opportunity to add notes and its limited range of questions. “The survey now,” she said, has “no way to bring in a disability justice point of view and center the voices of people who have the most need [for masks].”

JD Davids seconded this opinion, noting that the point of the survey should not hinge on member preference but on need. If there’s even one member who needs others to be masked because they are medically vulnerable, then the spirit of the Coop and co-operation demands that we keep them.

But member Daniella Liebling said that since both the Centers for Disease Control and the city had lifted mask mandates, so too the Coop should lift it post-haste.

The Labor Committee’s Erica Smith reported on the Coop’s stance regarding Amy’s Organics, which has laid off some workers after they tried to form a union. Smith said that Amy’s is in the process of building a facility in the New York area. Given the amount of business the Coop does with Amy’s, perhaps it can play an influential role in encouraging the company to condone and respect unionizing efforts.

“THE MISSION OF THE MEMBER INVOLVEMENT COMMITTEE WOULD BE TO INCREASE A CULTURE OF INFORMED SELF-GOVERNANCE BY CREATING NEW WAYS FOR MEMBERS TO COMMUNICATE WITH EACH OTHER AND TO PARTICIPATE IN CO-OPERATION.”

GEORGE SARAH OLKEN, MEMBER

Members introduced two proposals in the General Meeting’s agenda portion. The first

was presented by Beth Ruck and George Sarah Olken, who picked up a discussion they first introduced last summer: the creation of the Member Involvement Committee (MIC), which aims to create new channels of communication between and among members.

According to Olken and Ruck, there is a need for a body or vehicle for members to communicate with one another and share ideas outside of the General Meeting, which a small minority of members attend.

“We all love the paging system at the Coop,” Olken said. Along those lines, then the “mission of the Member Involvement Committee would be to increase a culture of informed self-governance by creating new ways for members to communicate with each other and to participate in cooperation.”

Among Ruck and Olken’s suggestions are signs posted alerting members to the big issues at future General Meetings near check-out; a table set-up outside the front door where a broad swath of members might be solicited to answer surveys; open mic events; a bulletin board where news might be posted.

“This committee will be a resource for membership,” Olken said. “Outreach and education is core to its mission. We need to understand what we want, who we are, and so we’re going to create more spaces for members to weigh in and more spaces to communicate.”

He suggested that the work of the proposed MIC would lessen the burden on Coop staff who field questions from members.

Ruck added that the committee would strive to get involvement from diverse members, and would have a multi-tiered management structure and offer members work-slot credits.

“I FIND IT NOURISHING TO SEE THIS FORUM AND THIS EXCHANGE OF VIEWS AND SO MANY OTHER PEOPLE WITH DIFFERENT EXPERIENCES WHO BRING IT ALL TO BEAR AND SPEAK.”

BRIAN SHUMAN, MEMBER

While some members at the General Meeting praised the idea of seeking out more member input into the all decisions at the Coop—noting that out of a membership of thousands, there were just over one hundred attending at the meeting—others took issue with the need for creating another committee, and one that seems inessential and redundant given that channels of communication already exist, including the *Line-waiters’ Gazette* and social media accounts.

General Coordinator Ann Herpel questioned the assumption that low attendance at General Meetings indicates membership disengagement with the Coop. “In fact, 12,000 people are engaged on a regular basis through their work slot,” she said. “We don’t know what happens on their work slot where they’re engaged with other members, and they’re engaged with staff. That might be the level of participation they want in the Coop and there’s nothing wrong with that.”

She furthermore noted that asking for work slots to incentivize participation in such a committee takes away from more urgent work needs, referring to the shortages Astrinsky reported. In addition, she said the Coop is a complex organization and many member queries are in fact ones only staff can answer. Olken’s suggestion, therefore, that this proposed committee would ease staff workloads is misguided.

Wally Wentworth suggested one way to increase attendance at General Meetings is to offer work credit for attendance, as was the case before the pandemic. His comment foreshadowed a proposal presented at the meeting—the last of the evening—by Daniella Liebling designed to encourage greater membership attendance and partici-

pation at General Meetings. Her idea is that meetings be simultaneously in person and remote for those who cannot physically attend. She also proposes restoring work credit for attending, and that remote attendees be required to keep their cameras on for the duration of the meeting to receive credit.

Holtz objected to the idea of giving remote attendees credit. He also said that to assume greater attendance at meetings means necessarily greater engagement is false, as January General Meetings used to have very high attendance rates owing to the fact that people were making up shifts they had missed over the holidays, and not because they suddenly were proof of a desire to participate in democratic processes.

For his part, member Brian Shuman finds attending General Meetings is its own reward.

“I find it nourishing to see this forum and this exchange of views and so many other people with different experiences who bring it all to bear and speak,” Shuman said. “I don’t always agree with what everybody says, but I think it’s a wonderful forum and that in and of itself makes meetings worth attending whether in person or remotely.”

Sara Ivry is a long-time member of the Park Slope Food Coop. She lives in Clinton Hill with her son and her dog.

HUDSON VALLEY FARM COOP COMMITTEE REPORT

April 12, 2023



By Jonathan Farber

The Park Slope Food Coop (PSFC) voted at the April 2021 General Meeting to become the original sponsor of a new and separate cooperative business, the Hudson Valley Farm Coop (HVFC). The website is under development at <https://www.hvfarmcoop.com/>.

The Hudson Valley Farm Coop is a proposed enterprise that will acquire, improve, and operate fifteen farms in the Hudson Valley for the benefit of its shareholders and the wider community. The start-up budget for the project is \$30 million. The HVFC will raise funds through a unique financial mechanism called a Direct Public Offering, and will provide its members the rare opportunity to own a stake in socially progressive and ecologically regenerative farms. Investments will help to recreate, sustain, and protect this wonderful corner of our threatened and critical agricultural region.

Since our last update, published in the July 2022 edition of the *Linewaiters' Gazette*, the Park Slope Food Coop Hudson Valley Farm Coop Committee (HV FCC) has reached full operating capacity with nine active Coop members and General Manager Joe

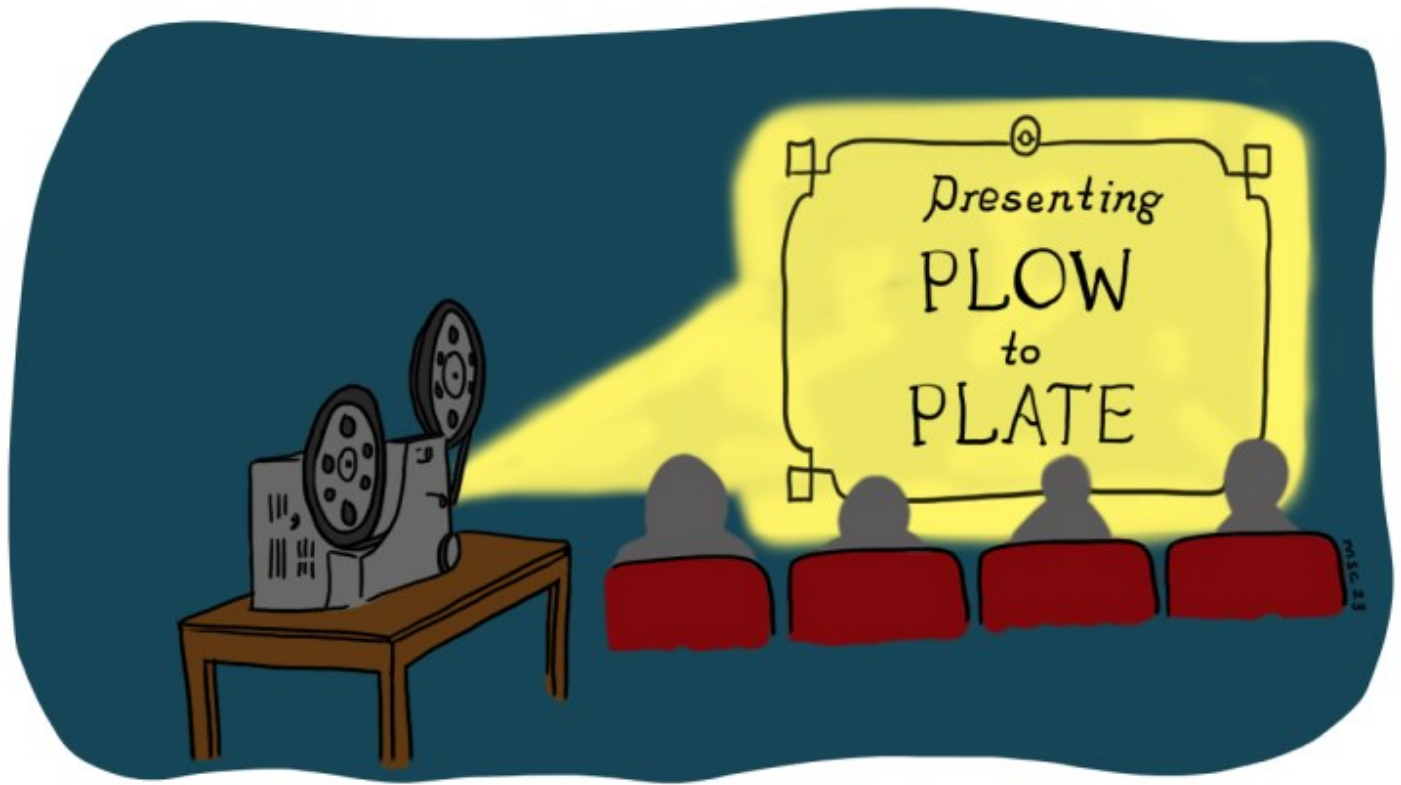
Holtz. We have formed three working groups focused on writing the business plan, preparing the financial model and developing an outreach and marketing strategy. The full committee meets monthly in-person and we anticipate opening a portion of our monthly meetings for PSFC members to attend when the Coop is able to provide in-store meeting space for larger groups.

The HVFCC is recruiting for pro bono legal assistance from one or more Coop members. The proposed HVFC will be a not-for-profit Cooperative Corporation licensed in New York and legal consultation provided may fulfill pro bono service requirements. This is an opportunity to work with a diverse team creating positive change in our food and farming systems.

The most immediate need is for attorneys to assist with filing a Certificate of Incorporation; preparing bylaws, structuring and administering a Direct Public Offering and promoting a farm worker, and more. Interested PSFC members may reach out to: info@hvfarmcoop.com.

PLOW TO PLATE FILM SERIES

April 12, 2023



Sweet Dreams

By Adam Rabiner

The 2012 documentary *Sweet Dreams* is about the people of Rwanda who in 1994 experienced a genocide in which over 500,000 Tutsi were killed and the country severely traumatized, including members of the first and only female drumming troupe, Ingoma Nshya, which means “new drum” or “new kingdom.” Ingoma Nshya’s founder, theater director Odile “Kike” Katese, intended the troupe to usher in a new chapter of support, healing, and reconciliation. Traditionally, women were not allowed to touch drums, an instrument performed by men for kings, not for any sacred reason but because they were deemed to be “too heavy.”

Ingoma Nshya’s members are both Hutus and Tutsis. Some are widows whose husbands have been murdered; others are wives of husbands who have been imprisoned. There are rape victims, children of imprisoned parents and orphans who are the sole surviving members of their family. But these differences are secondary to each musician’s insistence on commitment, such as showing up on time for rehearsals. All

find drumming healing and cathartic.

More broadly, Kike feels her countrymen and women are broken, empty bodies moving in space, but dead inside. They need to re-learn life, re-experience joy, smile, cry and feel again, create new memories and traditions. When, in 2009 Kike meets the two proprietors of Brooklyn's Blue Marble Ice Cream, Jennie Dundas and Alexis Gallivan, it occurs to her that this delicious, fun and joyous dessert could help Rwandans discover how to live happily again. She asks if they can help her open Rwanda's first local ice cream shop, to be named *Inzoni Nziza*—Sweet Dreams—a cooperative to be founded by the drummers.

THE WOMEN HAVE A LOT RIDING ON THIS VENTURE, A MEANS OF FINANCIAL SECURITY HARD TO COME BY IN RURAL RWANDA.

You share the troupe's enthusiasm as they excitedly set out to visit a neighboring bee-keeping collective in the Nyungwe Forest, inspect a dairy cooperative, locate a retail space (where they post a handmade cotton sign proclaiming, "coming soon, ice cream, coffee, and dreams"), form committees and start taking English lessons and basic business classes.

Yet inevitably various dramas and obstacles ensue, such as which ten lucky women will be selected for the coveted positions of store employees. Can the women afford the monthly dues required of them, and will the essential ice-cream maker, donated by South Africa, be fixed in time for the grand opening? The suspense, tension, pain and hope in that final one week countdown to opening day is palpable. The women have a lot riding on this venture, a means of financial security hard to come by in rural Rwanda.

The women show they learn a lot from their marketing lessons. At the grand opening they rent a truck and drive it through town shouting slogans worthy of a professional

PR firm:

“Ice cream is here! It’s the New Thing.”

“It’s hot, it’s very cold, it’s good.”

“If you’re old, it’ll make you young again.”

At the ribbon cutting ceremony they give out free samples, pound on their drums all day and are deliriously happy. Their sweet dreams are coming true.

The story of Ingoma Nshya shows how friendships can thrive even among those who have every reason to fear or hate one another. It demonstrates that we have more in common with one another, in this case artistic freedom and expression, passion for music, dance and song, and liberation from sexist taboos, than artificially constructed reasons that divide us.

The engaging business tale chronicling the creation of Inzoni Nziza is also one of persistence in the face of adversity, of cooperation and compromise, of taking classroom learning and applying it with concrete planning and action and ultimately, the reason Plow to Plate has chosen to present this film, the power of ice cream to transform a nation.

THEIR SWEET DREAMS ARE COMING TRUE.

Together these organizations give the women so much confidence and empowerment that they later partner with male drummers from Rwanda and their brother country, Burundi, to put on a joint collaborative celebration of festive drumming, dancing, singing and joy making.

When they board a plane for an international tour in Holland—many for the first time—they are not intimidated at all but rather excited for what the future holds. They have come a long way in putting their past traumas behind them as they move towards a more optimistic and peaceful future.

SWEET DREAMS

A FILM BY ROB AND LISA FRUCHTMAN



Sweet Dreams, April 18, 2023 @ 7:00 p.m.

Screening link: <http://www.plowtoplatefilms.com/events/>

Adam Rabiner lives in Ditmas Park with his wife, Dina, and two children, Elan and Ana.

IN MEMORY OF RACHEL PORTER

April 12, 2023



By Thomas Rayfiel

During the pandemic, Rachel Porter began hearing store-wide announcements referring to “shoppers” and “customers.” Dedicated not just to the efficient functioning of the Coop but to the concepts behind its creation, she immediately wrote, in the *Line-waiters’ Gazette*:

“The Coop has never referred to members as shoppers or customers, because those phrases suggest competing interests between store owners (or staff) and those who shop. Our Coop is practically unique in rejecting that division, which is why members can trust the Coop to provide the groceries we want without advertising or deceptive practices.”

Rachel, who died recently at the age of fifty-three, joined the Coop in 1995. She was, as her friend Sara Ivry recalls, “a principled, strong-minded brilliant individual who lived her ideals in a way that few others I know do. She was fiercely committed to the mission of the Coop and was a great champion of it.” A squad leader for ten years, she then worked on both the Revolving Loan and Committee Oversight committees.

“Rachel was the driving force behind the Coop having a 40th birthday celebration in 2013,” General Coordinator Joe Holtz remembers. “About a year before that, Rachel co-founded the Revolving Loan Committee whose purpose is to financially support start-up coops that use our member labor required model. Rachel loved our Coop and was always working to encourage us to build on our foundational strengths and not take continued success for granted.”

“SHE VALUED THE STRUCTURE OF INDIVIDUALS ORGANIZING THEMSELVES FOR THE COMMON GOOD. FOR HER, I THINK, IT WAS THAT VERY RARE AND TREASURED EXAMPLE OF THE WORLD ACTUALLY WORKING AS IT SHOULD.”

DAVID TEPPER

At Edward R. Murrow High School, where she was a special education teacher, Rachel initiated and led a Restorative Justice Initiative, “striving to establish an effective, evidence-based alternative to retributive criminal justice policies and punitive school discipline, capable of reducing violence and fostering public safety.” She was also, for many years, a social justice researcher volunteering for organizations involved in pro-

gressive causes.

But Rachel's engagement with the Coop extended well beyond serving on committees and monitoring store-wide pages. Almost everyone who remembered her raves about her phenomenal skills as both a baker and warm-hearted host.

"I have images of her cart overflowing with enormous amounts of produce, always the most straight-from-the-earth variety in terms of no extra packaging or pre-washing, of her leaving the Coop on her bike with a Garden of Eden bursting from her bags and basket, ready to be orchestrated into splendid food," says Lara Tabac.

"As a very skilled baker," David Tepper notes, "a voracious reader of recipes and all kinds of food writing, and an incredibly generous host who always had a crowd at her table. Rachel loved the Coop for its food and culture. (She was very upset when we stopped carrying yeast in bulk.) Moreover, she valued the structure of individuals organizing themselves for the common good. For her, I think, it was that very rare and treasured example of the world actually working as it should."

Rachel is survived by her two sons, Ulisse and Sasha Narici-Porter, her former husband Manlio Narici, her mother Joan, and her brother Josh.

IN MEMORY OF HELEN HOLTZ

April 12, 2023



By Thomas Rayfiel

Helen Holtz, a longtime Coop member and organizer of many memorable celebrations at the Coop, died recently. She was 74. Helen joined the Coop in 1979. In the early 1980's, she chaired many General Meetings and was later Recording Secretary, but it is for her pioneering work on the Fundraising Committee that she will be most fondly remembered.

"She was creative and dedicated to making every event work well," Sarah Zahnstecher recalls. "She made it fun to paint signs announcing the latest event and even kept one of mine after it was over. Importantly, she was a fighter for gender equality and social justice before many people understood the divisive society we live in. What else would you expect from someone who spent so much time making the Coop thrive and the world a better place by her presence in it? Helen was the kind of person I thought would always be here with us."

Martha Siegel, who succeeded Helen on the Fundraising Committee, points in particular to her organizing of huge parties for the Coop's fifth, tenth, fifteenth, and twentieth birthdays as well as the Food Coop Music Festivals from 1983-1987, which took place at PS 321. "Helen probably organized the food. Steve Browman and I ran the music," Siegel says. "They were very successful events and definitely increased the feeling of community."

Daniel Brooks, also a member of the committee, notes: "Helen led a dedicated team of 'Funsters' who organized dances, auctions, performances and other festival opportunities. We would meet in her apartment and discuss and argue over themes and events and the kind of flowers that would decorate the tables. She let no detail slip through the cracks and kept us all thinking of new ways to socially engage the Coop members."

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NEW WAYS TO SOCIALLY ENGAGE THE COOP MEMBERS.”

DANIEL BROOKS, FUNDRAISING COMMITTEE MEMBER

In her professional career, Helen liked to say she worked first as a “stripper,” a job that involved removing a photographic emulsion with its image from an individual negative and combining it with others in position on a glass plate. When that skill became obsolete, she retrained to become a diagnostic medical sonographer, a health care professional trained to use imaging technology to help physicians diagnose heart problems.

“She made a tremendous effort in going back to school in order to make a living for the purpose of helping people,” Zahnstecher adds. “It was very hard and she kept at it.”

Helen is survived by her husband, David Chorlian, her brother, Coop General Coordinator Joe Holtz, her sister-in-law, Kathy Blyn, her niece Sarah, and her nephew David.

Member Thomas Rayfiel is the author of eight novels. He has also written “living obituaries” for VICE TV.

SKYHILL: A LOVE STORY

April 12, 2023



Member Submission By Louise Johnson

My love affair with laying hens began after I retired from teaching in Brooklyn and purchased 15 acres on a hilltop plateau an hour east of Albany. I lived alone, surrounded only by sky and distant trees. My goal was to model food as a key solution to pollution, chronic disease and climate change. And to model this by holding events and inviting PSFC members, etc., to visit this piece of nature I quickly named Skyhill. This was 2004.

I was a member of PSFC's Environmental Committee and became its upstate organizer, forming a loose coalition of upstate food coops around lobbying (we called it "informing") about problems with GM/GE/GMO food. PSFC joined with Albany's Honest Weight Coop to create NYSAGE (New York State Against Genetic Engineering), and for almost three years we worked with farmers, statewide coop members and some scientists, to repeatedly inform in every office in the state legislature about our three bills. Members of PSFC trekked to Albany for two lobby days and other events. The six public events and resulting newspaper articles added to our outreach about GMOs. Three bills were passed in the assembly only. The Senate was a piece of work.

Our expectation was to inform, which we achieved. I learned enough about the corrupt and dysfunctional New York legislature and about the art of lobbying to realize why folks speak of the need for revolutions. That was 2007.

THIS IS AN APPEAL: URBAN RETURN-MIGRATION TO RURAL FARMLAND, THE ROOTS OF ALL AMERICANS, IS NEEDED TO PROTECT OUR WATER, SOIL, AIR, AND FOOD.

I built a barn and bought 25 laying hens which became over 300 hens in a few years. Hatching eggs led to 26 roosters in one season, and to 14 years of unique descendants of inter-bred heritage breeds. I continue to be stunned daily by the diverse beauty and “chickenalities” I live among.

I want to relate stories of chicken prowess, intelligence, problem-solving, social organization, playfulness, sharing and caring. My very out-of-date website still has a few photos. I also want to stay at Skyhill forever. But, as I approach 80 years, I have run out of stamina and am no longer able to lift and haul and run eggs to the Albany coop. I plan to take only a few hens and some fertile eggs to Maine where my daughter has moved and awaits me.



IMAGE COURTESY OF LOUISE JOHNSON



IMAGE COURTESY OF LOUISE JOHNSON



IMAGE COURTESY OF LOUISE JOHNSON



IMAGE COURTESY OF LOUISE JOHNSON



IMAGE COURTESY OF LOUISE JOHNSON



I leave behind a legacy of two separate egg farms, with five new, unique and spacious chicken abodes (one, is also a greenhouse), a lovely stream and waterfall, more than a hundred new fruit and nut trees and shrubs, a large raised-bed garden, acres of woodland, solar panels, two passive solar homes and perhaps lots of hens in need of someone who will also love chickens.

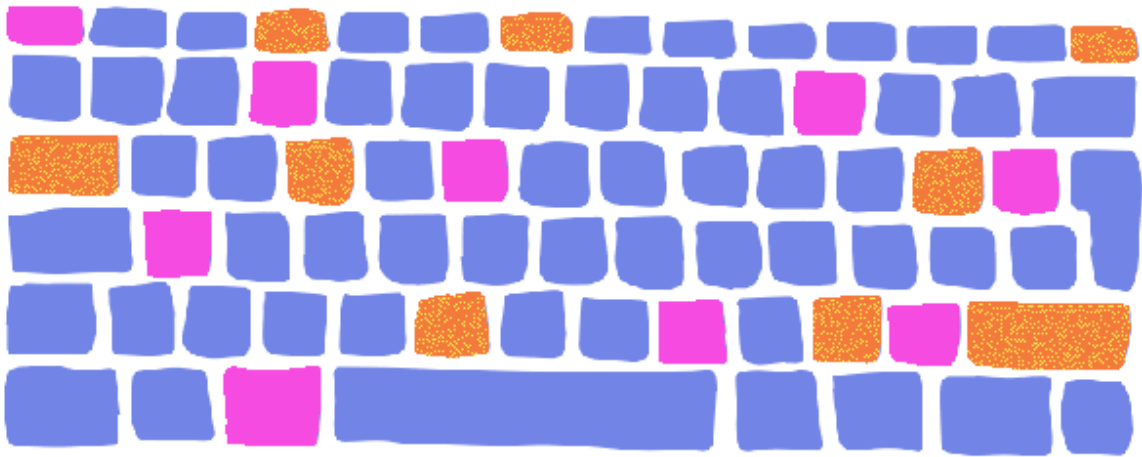
Both rural properties were transformed from wannabe suburban houses with ridicu-

lously huge lawns to model communities of chickens moving freely among extensive climate victory gardens. This is an appeal: urban return-migration to rural farmland, the roots of all Americans, is needed to protect our water, soil, air, and food. Meaningful and fun work for retirees, and all others.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

April 12, 2023

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



INVITATION TO JOIN "CIVIC SWEEP" ON EARTH DAY, APRIL 22

Dear Coop members:

Ever wish you could do something about unsightly graffiti on lampposts, stop lights and mailboxes? Well, now you can actually paint out the offending graffiti by joining

the Park Slope Civic Council's "Civic Sweep," to be held on Earth Day, April 22. Join us any time between 10:00 and 2:00 pm on the sidewalk on Fifth Avenue between Third and Fourth Streets (near the Old Stone House), and you'll be provided with cans, brushes, rags, and latex paint in appropriate colors to fan out across Park Slope to beautify the neighborhood. You can also pick up and bag litter out of tree beds and other spots the city doesn't clean. For more info on the Sweep and other sustainability initiatives (including how to join Park Slope's oldest and most prominent civic association for only \$40 a year!), google "Park Slope Civic Council" or go to www.parkslopeciviccouncil.org.

Hope to see you there!

*Timothy Gilles, President
Park Slope Civic Council*

MARIJUANA AT THE COOP

To the Editor:

Years ago, there was a big debate in the Coop: Do we want to carry beer? The members voted and now the Coop carries a truly amazing variety of beer, from crisp IPAs to malty stouts. The time has now come for another vote: Do we want to carry marijuana?

A walk down almost any street in Brooklyn now has stores that sell marijuana. The corner bodega sells it under the counter, and new places in Park Slope (like The Smokey Joint and Nice Guys DC), sell it in splashier digs. At the current time, the Coop does carry CBD products, so this is not a move that is totally off-base.

One of the Coop's suppliers of apples and other produce is Hepworth Farms. Last

week there was an article in the *New York Times* about how they are now cultivating marijuana as one of their products. I believe we should continue to support our local farmers—and to make Hepworth Farms Weed available to our members. We can even get them to specifically name strains: Cooperation Indica, Work Shift Sativa, or maybe a nice Joe Holtz Hybrid.

As the market for legal weed expands, it would be good to know that the Park Slope Food Coop's selection is organically grown and locally sourced. What do you think?

David Meltzer

MASKING OPTIONAL

To the Editor:

I was dismayed to receive notice that masking will be optional [at the Coop] as of March 20, with no consideration for those impacted. There are Coop members who have pre-existing conditions and/or who are vulnerable, and while they represent the minority of members, we are obligated to look out for their safety first, despite the vote. One reasonable solution is to set aside two or three weekday shopping/workshift slots that are fully masked. The Coop rose to the occasion when Covid hit, and I urge leadership to keep in mind that many members with limited income and resources rely on the Coop, and we should be able to make the small effort to wear a mask so that they may continue to shop and work without fear of being harmed.

Thank you.

Gary Winter

THE PUSH BEHIND THE COOP'S SWANKY NEW STREET CARTS

April 12, 2023



By Anita Bushell

Got a lot of groceries to cart home? You're in luck: The Coop has a fleet of bigger, shinier grey beasts to aid the journey back to your doorstep. The new models have a smoother glide and don't make as much noise on the sidewalk as the older street carts, but they have their downsides. Coop member Tom Paul, who does the walker shift, observes: "They aren't deep enough to carry heavier loads of grocery bags but they are lighter and have less rattle than the older, heavier carts."

We spoke with General Manager Joe Holtz, who oversees the cart supply at the Coop, about the need for new models, the replacement process and his favorite features of the new fleet. We also got to the bottom of a rumored "national cart shortage."

Let's start with terminology. What are the outdoor carts called?

The carts you are referring to are what we call street carts or walker carts or simply outdoor carts. The manufacturer of the old carts called them "Carry Out Carts." The company we're using now calls them "Grocery Bagger Carts."

How would you describe your role in overseeing our cart supply?

I have been ordering outdoor carts since we started using them in the early 2000's. Before I order new carts, I consult with other staff, in particular membership coordinators, as to whether the number of carts that we have are insufficient for the Coop's needs.

THEY HANDLE GREAT. THEY OPERATE MORE LIKE A SPORTS CAR. I HAVE NEVER DRIVEN A SPORTS CAR.

What was the problem with the old carts?

There was no problem with the old carts. The old carts were made by Technibilt, which was bought by the German company, Wanzl, in 2012. I believe we started buying them around the time we expanded into our third building in 2001 (the third building is where aisles four, five, six, and seven are, as well as all the checkouts). Then Wanzl/Technibilt decided to stop making them.

How long did we have the old carts?

The first carts we bought from Technibilt were around 2001. The first model we bought had wheels that were inset, meaning that the wheels did not add width to the cart. The problem was that many times people found that the wheels interfered with where one needs to place one's feet while walking behind the cart. Then a new model came out with the wheels on the outside and that problem was solved.

What are the features of the new street carts at the Coop?

They are a little wider. It's a little harder to hang bags from them due to shortness of the upper extension of the verticals. They handle great. They operate more like a sports car. I have never driven a sports car.

THE "NATIONAL CART SHORTAGE" WAS MENTIONED ON A LOUDSPEAKER ANNOUNCEMENT THIS WINTER URGING SHOPPERS TO BE PROMPT ABOUT RETURNING THEIR SHOPPING CARTS TO THE PARKING AREA WHEN THEY WERE NO LONGER NEEDED.



New cart on the left; old cart on the right.

Why did we need new carts?

Over the years, the main reason we need new carts is that they go missing. Occasionally a cart gets so old and so beat up that it can longer be repaired. But that is rare compared to carts going missing.

We heard there is a “national shopping cart shortage.” Have you heard of this shortage as well? *[Editor’s note: the “national cart shortage” was mentioned on a loudspeaker announcement this winter urging members to be prompt about returning their shopping carts to the parking area when they were no longer needed.]*

Not a “shortage” but rather a lag. It took about 18 weeks for the new carts to arrive after we placed an order. They arrived in October after having been ordered in June.

How many outdoor carts does the Coop own, and how many new ones did you order?

Based on input from other staff, we determined that we should have a minimum of eight carts. I was pleasantly surprised that we still had six old carts when the [six] new ones arrived. I expected that the old carts could have been as low as four based on historical attrition rates. As of last week, two of the new carts were missing, one was out service as it was in need of repairs, and three were in service. There were still six old carts last week. Sometimes missing carts come back.

How much do the new carts cost?

The price for each cart, including the cost of delivery, was about \$450.

What has feedback on the new carts been like?

I have not heard much from anyone except that it is nice to not have a cart shortage—but that is temporary. We may have to order more soon. The new carts are not as rugged as the old carts, in regard to the back wheels system. Our Facilities Coordinator, Crystal Goldenstein, is looking into improving the wheel system on the new carts so that they are more durable.

Anita Bushell is a freelance writer and native New Yorker who just released Object Essays. Her work has been published in Friends Journal, Motherwell Magazine, and Grande Dame Literary.