

# SUMMER HEAT TO AUTUMN'S TREATS: A FALL PRODUCE PREVIEW

September 5, 2023



*By Liora Fishman*

With the city sweltering under the blazing sun, I find myself eyeing the calendar, waiting for relief from this scorching summer. Luckily, fall is gently approaching, and with it comes a delightful bounty of seasonal produce. So, let's take a moment turn our at-

tention to the flavors of autumn that await us—a culinary oasis amidst this summer heat.



The produce aisle is vibrant in late summer and early fall.

## A COOP EXPERT LOOKS AT FALL

“Well, the highlights of the fall,” Cecelia Rembert, Produce Coordinator, explained, include “the winter squashes; local, dark, braising greens, such as tatsoi and baby bok choy.”

Additionally, Rembert says, “local apples are just starting with Paula Red and Ginger Gold, and more local apples will arrive as they are harvested... including Zestar, Cameo, Empire, Macoun, Jonagold, and Honeycrisp. Grapes are in season in the fall, with both California varieties and local varieties such as Concord.”

**FALL HIGHLIGHTS: THE WINTER SQUASHES; LOCAL, DARK, BRASISING GREENS, LIKE TATSOI AND BABY BOK CHOY.**

This year, the Coop is working with a new vendor. “In the produce department we have onboarded a new distributor this summer, Zone 7... which brings an array of New Jersey produce,” says Rembert. “We have also have begun working with Tivoli mushrooms, who grow and source specialty mushrooms out of Hudson, New York.”



PHOTO BY ZACHARY SCCHUMANN

Hardy acorn squashes shine next to tender delicatas.

## BREATH OF FRESH AIR: NYC'S FALL PRODUCE FEAST

As we seek solace in our daydreams of cooler temperatures and autumn foliage, we can anticipate the produce that will soon reach the Coop's aisles. Here are some New York City-centric seasonal produce items we can look forward to.

**Apples:** From Honeycrisp to Gala and Granny Smith, the apple harvest will grade our orchards soon. From homemade applesauce to divine caramel apple pies, the culinary options are endless.

**Pumpkins:** Pumpkins will soon be back, and so, too, will Pumpkin Spice—everything. Far more than decorative delights, use your pumpkin to make a comforting soup, roasted seeds, and the beloved pumpkin spice latte.

**Brussels Sprouts:** Overlooked during the heat, Brussels sprouts reach their true glory in the fall. Roast them with a balsamic glaze, and you'll never miss.

**Butternut Squash:** Creamy and decadent, butternut squash embodies the very essence of fall. Whether roasted with cinnamon and nutmeg or transformed into a velvety soup, it promises the warm and fuzzy feeling that comes with the season.

**Cranberries:** Don't let the powerful tang of cranberries deter you from cooking with these—cranberries make excellent additions to cocktails and delectable baked goods.



Butternut squash can go sweet or savory.

## COOKING UP FALL: DELICIOUS DISHES TO TRY

As we wait for the cooler weather, let's dream up some mouthwatering fall recipes.

**Autumnal Roasted Vegetables:** You can't get an easier, more satisfying dish than this. Mix butternut squash, Brussels sprouts, and sweet potatoes and roast them with

herbs and olive oil for a tasty side dish.

**Hearty Apple and Sausage Stuffing:** Though Thanksgiving looms in the distance, it's never too early to do some recipe testing in advance. Mix diced apples, savory sausage, and toasted breadcrumbs for a feast-worthy stuffing.

**Maple-Glazed Acorn Squash:** The variations of squash at our disposal each autumn is a personal favorite perk of Coop membership—and acorn squash is often at the top of my list. Glaze acorn squash rings with maple syrup, butter, and cinnamon; then roast them until they're tender and delicious.

**Cranberry-Pecan Salad:** Create a refreshing salad with mixed greens, dried (or fresh!) cranberries, candied pecans, and feta cheese. Drizzle with a tangy dressing.



Summer melons will give way to apples soon.

## BEYOND NYC: EXPLORING FALL PRODUCE ACROSS THE COUNTRY

While we relish the fall produce in NYC, there's more goodness to discover beyond our city limits. Sunny California, cozy Vermont, and the Texan heartland—each region has its own fall treats to savor.

### **California: Sweet and Flavorful Harvest**

California is a fall food paradise too! Pomegranates add a tangy-sweet kick to dishes, while persimmons offer a natural candy-like sweetness. Artichokes bring a nutty flavor, and roasted Brussels sprouts turn into tasty delights.

### **Vermont: Apples and Maple Goodness**

Up in Vermont, orchards are a sight to see! The apples are perfect for pies and ciders. And of course, there's the famous maple syrup—drizzle sweetness over everything!

### **Texas: Pecans and Sweet Potatoes**

In the Lone Star State, pecans shine with their buttery richness, elevating both sweet and savory dishes. Sweet potatoes add warmth and texture to fall recipes.



Braising greens like kale and tatsoi will join the cabbages.

## AUTUMN IS COMING

Fall in NYC means flavor-packed goodness. One highlight: comforting pumpkin dishes; also, embrace the season with roasted veggies, apple stuffing, and maple-glazed acorn squash.

SOME FALL FAVES: ROASTED SQUASHES, HEIRLOOM APPLES AND LOCAL LEAFY GREENS LIKE SPINACH, TATSOI AND MUSTARDS.

“Personally, I love roasted local cauliflower and shallots, tossed with greens,” said Rembert, when asked what her favorite fall produce is. “I love all the roasted squashes, the heirloom apples, and local leafy greens like spinach, tatsoi and mustards.”

Plus, Rembert disclosed an insider tip: “When we can get them, the fresh barhi dates are my personal favorite. Hopefully we will be able to get them this year!”

As we count down the days until cooler temperatures (some may savor the heat, for reasons beyond my understanding), make plans to enjoy the culinary fun with loved ones. Happy (almost) fall!

*Liora Fishman lives in Prospect Heights, and has a dog named Ollie.*

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MEMBER CONTRIBUTION: PLASTIC-FREE ALTERNATIVES SHOW PROMISE

September 5, 2023



COOP MEMBERS WEIGH IN ON PLASTIC-FREE HEALTH AND BEAUTY PRODUCTS



Garbage piled on the sidewalk.

*By Jasmine Chiu*

We've all heard that plastic has become one of the most pressing environmental issues of our lifetime. How pressing? Research has shown that we ingest about a credit card's worth of plastic every week! In addition, we are seeing massive garbage patches twice the size of Texas in the ocean. And although recycling can give the material a second life, the reality is almost none of the plastic that you put in the recycling bin gets recycled. A recent report from Bennington College puts the percentage of plastic waste that's actually reused at 5 to 6 percent. Addressing the plastic crisis starts by putting less plastic into the system.

For this year's Earth Day, the PSFC Health & Beauty Department launched an awareness campaign for plastic-free options in Aisle 5, encouraging members to make plastic-free swaps to their daily routines. In addition to a social media series and an in-store featured endcap, we reached out to member volunteers to sample select health

and beauty products and write about their experiences.

Below are some highlights of plastic-free products you will surely grow to love as environmentally-friendly additions to your day-to-day!

## HAIR



A shampoo bar is a plastic-free alternative to liquid shampoo.

**J.R. Liggett's Original Formula Shampoo Bar:** I chose this shampoo bar because it's completely sulfate-free with a very short ingredient list: saponified olive oil, coconut oil, castor oil, plus rose, lavender and spearmint essential oils. It builds a nice soapy lather that's slightly thinner than that of a traditional shampoo. One of the great things about this shampoo is that I've found I don't need conditioner (I have straight hair that's on the thin and fine side) and I can go longer between washes (with this shampoo bar, I wash 1-2 times per week). It does take your scalp some time to get used to it; I'd estimate a few weeks. —*Hannah Bae, Coop member*

## FACE

**Attitude Natural Care Sensitive Skin Mineral Sunscreen Face Stick:** I was pleased to find that this zinc oxide sunscreen stick did not leave a chalky white cast behind on the skin. It blends easily and smoothly into the skin and wasn't irritating to me at all. It is a pretty heavy moisturizer that leaves a tactile residue on the face, so if you can't stand that, it's not the sunscreen for you. But I didn't mind, and I plan to use up this entire 1 oz. sunscreen stick. So far, I haven't experienced the bar melting, so this feels like a stable formula, but probably not one you want to accidentally leave in a car. —*HB*

**Take Haven Rosehip Face Oil:** This facial oil feels so nice on the skin. I use it after a shower, so the oil can reach the depths of my skin. It's a thicker liquid but it goes on easily, and I let it soak in overnight; when I wake up, my skin looks super refreshed and clear! —*JC*

## BODY



These deodorant sticks come wrapped in cardboard rather than plastic.

**Attitude Leave Bar Paper Packaged Deodorant Stick, Herbal Musk Scent:** The earthy and fresh scent smells great and lasts all day long. Also, the packaging is beautiful and a durable cardboard material that can handle a lot of shuffling. My only warning: it's a little flaky when you first start, so you really want to let it warm up on your skin, and then it'll apply more easily. —JC

BAR SOAP



PHOTO BY JOHN MIDGLEY

Body wash bars can replace liquid body wash.

**Brixly Solid Body Wash, Mint Eucalyptus:** The Brixly solid body wash foams nicely and has a great and mild fragrance. My bar lasted me about a month with regular showering. I think it was a very good deal. I was a little skeptical of labeling of bar soap as solid body wash, but overall really enjoyed the bar. —*Alex Walsh, Coop member*

ORAL CARE



PHOTO BY JOHN MIDGLEY

Toothpaste tablets offer an alternative to toothpaste in a tube.

**Hello Toothpaste Tablet:** Loved this toothpaste! It foams just like conventional toothpaste and gives your mouth a nice minty flavor. The supply does run out faster, and they don't have refill packs, so you would accumulate a lot of metal tins. If you want a toothpaste tablet alternative, I'd recommend Huppy toothpaste—it's my favorite, and their refills come in compostable packs! —JC

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COOP COMEDIANS LET LOOSE

September 5, 2023

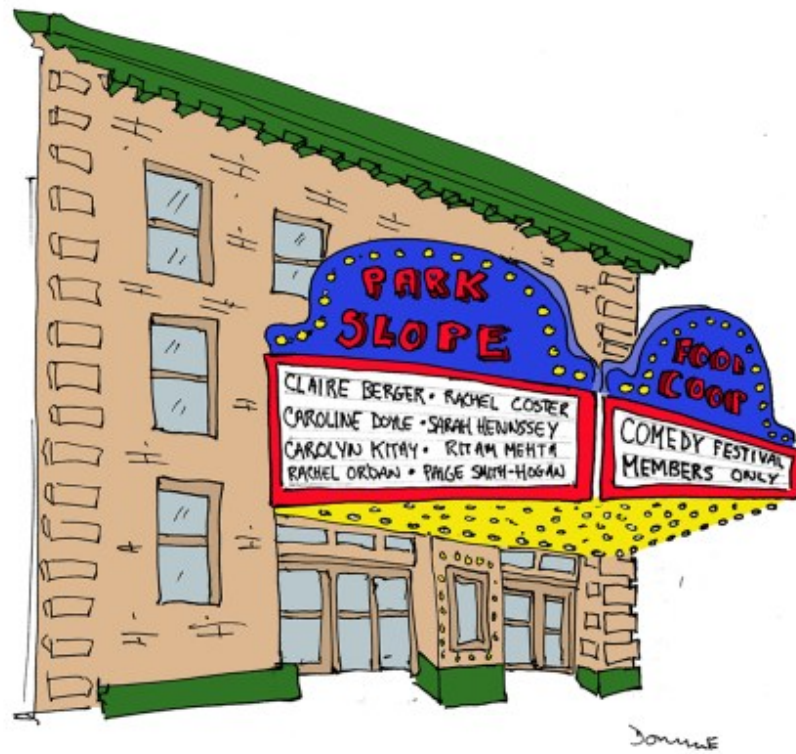


ILLUSTRATION BY JOHN DONOHUE

By Zach Schiffman

“Is anyone a member at the Park Slope Food Coop? I am. It’s like larping a grocery store.” That’s how comedian Paige Smith-Hogan’s stand-up bit about the Coop starts, referring to Live Action Role Playing. Normally people cheer when she asks. Coop members are proud, and Smith-Hogan, host of the long-running show “Sounds Great,” says most members will even come up to her after the show to chat. “The Coop has a really wide reach. It’s normally at least one person per audience,” she says. Maybe that’s also why there are so many Coop members who are comedians, as well.

#### COOP ANNOUNCEMENTS—INSTANT LAUGHS

“The way you communicate at the Coop is over intercoms. If you want to talk on an intercom, it should immediately disqualify you from talking on an intercom,” Smith-Hogan’s joke continues. “So I ask you. Could you get that at Safeway?” Smith-Hogan’s matter-of-fact rhetorical delivery crushes every time. “It really gets people animated. I think the Coop has a lot of mystique around it,” she says. All members have heard Coop announcements that range from obscure, to totally OCD, to almost as ridiculous

as slapstick.



The Coop’s intercom is ripe for comedy. It is a microphone, after all. Performer Carolyn Kitay, who premiered her new show, “Fuck the Minutae,” at Don’t Tell Mama this summer, buys a specific kind of probiotic—but asking if it’s out of stock over the intercom gives her pause. “I am kind of gutsy, but I thought, maybe no one wants to hear about my vaginal care probiotic over the speakers.” Kitay does feel the urge at times to say something hilarious over the loudspeakers—for example, “I’d like a lobotomy in stock”—but she holds back.

COOP ANNOUNCEMENTS ARE RIPE WITH COMEDY. IT’S A MICROPHONE, AFTER ALL.

Comedian Caroline Doyle, who co-hosts the popular dating podcast, “Ok, Stupid,” and “Walker Upper,” a home-improvement mockumentary, recalls that early in the pandemic, she saw a member pull down their mask and lick their fingers to get a plastic

bag in the produce section.

“There was a rush to the front desk to complain, but no one talked to the guy directly,” Doyle says. Instead, she remembers a page over the loudspeakers, telling people not to remove their masks to lick their fingers. “I thought it was funny, how indirect people were, in communication with each other.”

## CBD COMEDY

The intimacy of the Coop lends itself to funny interactions wherever you go. “I think the CBD lockup is pretty comical,” says Claire Berger, a former warm-up comic for shows like *Seinfeld* and *Friends*, “Because the minute that unlocks, every head in the Coop swivels in the direction of that case, to see.”

## COMICS COMMENTING

A handful of comedians I spoke with found themselves almost immediately suspended from the Coop. Sara Hennessey—whose third comedy album, *Huge Bitch*, is available on all streaming platforms—says joining earlier this year made her feel like an “upstanding member of society,” but that she was served an “overnight reality check,” when she was suspended, less than a month into her membership. For Rachel Ordan, writer of a satirical newsletter, *Pillowtown*, joining the Coop was like “unlocking the keys to a new level of the Park Slope video game.”

ONE COMIC SAID SHE HAS LIVED IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD FOR THIRTY YEARS, BUT RESISTED JOINING FOR TWENTY YEARS BECAUSE SHE THOUGHT “IT WAS A CULT.”

Carolyn Kitay has lived in the neighborhood for thirty years, but resisted joining the Coop for most of that time, because she thought “it was a cult.” Since non-members can’t go inside, even for a tour, she says she assumed members were doing some sort of strange ritual. Eventually, she came around—“I was just being judgmental and

immature”—and is now “obsessed with the Coop.” Doyle is similarly obsessed, but she hasn’t evangelized about the Coop as much. “I actually feel pretty protective of having my privacy at the Coop, because it’s such a peaceful place to me,” she says. “I try to avoid letting other people know I’m a member.”

The Coop’s proximity to some of Brooklyn’s premier comedy venues—Union Hall, Littlefield, and The Bell House—can give comedians an attractive reason for joining. Stand-up comedian Rachel Coster says, “I love being able to run in and get my freaky gluten-free crackers, before a show.”

But for others, proximity to the workplace might be a deterrent for joining. Tessa Belle is not a member of the Coop, but she does live directly between the Coop and Union Hall. “I feel like I can’t take my trash out, because if I look to my left, I will run into a comedian leaving the Coop, and if I look to my right, I’ll run into someone going to Union Hall.”

While some members might shy away from the public-facing shifts, comedians are drawn to them. Berger is a regular face at the entrance desk and loves to haze new members. “I’ll say things like, ‘Don’t forget to enjoy the live band at the end of the cheese section,’ or I’ll look at someone I’ve never met and go, ‘Thank god, you’re finally here!’” She also offers members “seven-minute therapy sessions,” when she does cart return shifts. “I know a lot about a lot of our members now.” She reassures reluctant participants that it’s just “comedy therapy”—and she won’t “solve any of your problems.” But if you ever have Berger—whose interactive memoir titled, *How Much Is Enough?*, comes out next year—pushing your cart as a walker, “you’re going to do some self-examining.”

THE COOP IS INDEED A GREAT PLACE FOR COMIC INSPIRATION.

Ritam Mehta, a writer and improv comedian, takes a different approach. A regular ear-

ly morning stocker, he says, “No one wants to be the funny guy on the 7a.m. stocking shift.” He keeps a low profile, and while he has run into many comedians (including many interviewed for this story), he likes to keep quiet while shopping. This is a good time to insert my disclaimer—I am also a local comedian—and getting recognized at the Coop can be a harrowing experience. It’s happened a few times at check-out, and I’ve felt the most vulnerable I have ever felt about my comedy. But, like Paige, I find that the Coop is indeed a great place for comic inspiration.

Mehta, who co-writes the newsletter *Low Lift Ask*, says he finds some of the “crunchy” products funny, “The labels can just be so overt, with how ethically they are made.” Ordan wryly told me that the funniest product she’s seen at the Coop is “a Court Street Grocers sandwich for under \$10”—but admits that the pre-made sandwiches are the perfect snack before a show at a nearby venue.

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

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## JULY GENERAL MEETING: THE COOP’S FINANCES ARE LOOKING “ENCOURAGING” AND IN-PERSON GM’S ARE COMING BACK

September 5, 2023



ILLUSTRATION BY STEPHEN SAVAGE

*By Walecia Konrad*

At July's General Meeting, roughly eighty members of the Park Slope Food Coop voted to limit the number of work slots given for attendance at in-person General Meetings, which will start in September. In addition, the latest financial report is looking good. Members also discussed the idea of a DJ work slot, to play a variety of music during various shifts.

**BULK ITEMS**



ILLUSTRATION BY STEPHEN SAVAGE

The meeting started with the open forum, the time allotted for meeting attendees to bring up questions or concerns not specifically noted on the agenda. Lois Wilcken asked the only open forum question for the evening. It concerned bulk items. “Where are we on beans and other things that you have to take home in plastic?” she asked. “I used to put them in cloth bags,” she said.

General Coordinator Joe Szladek explained that packaging bulk items in plastic bags was instituted during the pandemic, using a bulk package machine now housed in the childcare room. The change was made to streamline shopping in the bulk aisle, to reduce congestion and possible COVID transmission. “We plan on keeping that process,” said Szladek. “As the Coop gets busier, we want to keep congestion down in

that aisle,” he added, explaining that even before the pandemic, the bulk aisle could get incredibly congested. “While nothing is set in stone,” he added, “we are set up to keep that process for a while.”

## COOP FINANCES



ILLUSTRATION BY STEPHEN SAVAGE

Next up was the Coop’s financial report, which General Coordinator Joe Holtz presented. He reported that Coop sales for the 20-week period ending June 18, 2023, were \$21 million, a \$3 million increase over the same time period last year.

The Coop also reported having over \$7 million in cash and cash equivalents. “That’s very encouraging,” said Holtz. “That puts us in a better position, should the second pandemic start.”

“SALES FOR THE 20-WEEK PERIOD ENDING IN MID-JUNE OF THIS YEAR WERE \$21 MILLION. THAT’S A \$3 MILLION INCREASE OVER THE SAME TIME LAST YEAR.”

—GENERAL COORDINATOR JOE HOLTZ

Holtz then took a few minutes to point out a special section of this month’s financial report, focused on payroll. The section looks back four years, and shows how many staff hours are worked, and how much is paid. It also looks at the percentage that sales personnel costs account for each year. Holtz and other coordinators generated the report in response to members who had voiced concern about payroll at previous GMs, and who had said there should be more information on this subject, Holtz explained.

Over the four-year period, staff hours have decreased about 4%, but the dollar amount paid has increased a little more than 12%, largely due to cost-of-living increases. For the 20-week period ended June 18 of this year, personnel costs accounted for about 15% of sales, compared to almost 13% during the same period four years ago. Holtz then pointed out that overall expenses account for almost a fifth of sales, and personnel costs are a growing part of overall expenses.

GENERAL COORDINATOR REPORTS



ILLUSTRATION BY STEPHEN SAVAGE

Joe Szladek discussed the state of member labor during the summer months. He explained that members may have had trouble finding open work slot shifts during the summer months, and are having to look several weeks ahead.

WANT TO GET CREDIT FOR GOING TO A GM? THE COOP WILL ISSUE UP TO 75 WORK SLOT CREDITS A MONTH.

The reason? Demand for shifts goes up in the summer when many people have vacation days and are trying to get their shifts in. At the same time, shopping slows during the summer, so not as many shifts are needed. Szladek reminded members that demand increases substantially in late August and September, when shopping returns to normal and many holidays are around the corner, so shifts will open up again. “We’ll need as much help as we can get,” he said.

GENERAL MEETING WORK SLOT PROPOSAL



ILLUSTRATION BY STEPHEN SAVAGE

The meeting then moved to the first agenda item. General Coordinator Ann Herpel presented the following proposal, concerning General Meeting work credit, for questions, discussion and ultimately a vote. The following General Meeting work credit policy for in-person meetings will replace all prior decisions. The policy will be in effect when the next in-person meeting convenes. This policy does not apply to members whose work shifts occur at the General Meeting—including, but not limited to the Board, Chair Committee, Agenda Committee, and the Corporate Secretary.

## General Meeting work credit policy:

1. The Coop will issue up to 75 work slot credits per General Meeting.
2. Advance sign-up is required, and is on a first-come, first-served basis.
3. Members can earn only one credit per calendar year.
4. Sign-up for GM work slot credit will be available in Member Services, on the Wednesday after the General Meeting.
5. Members will be allowed to cancel according to regular cancelation policies.
6. The General Coordinators (GCs) will have the authority to increase the number of work credits issued, if operationally feasible.

In presenting the proposal, Herpel pointed out that the item was presented earlier in the year, but the discussion veered into a discussion about hybrid meetings.

This time, explained Herpel, the proposal is focused only on work slot credit when the PSFC returns to in-person General Meetings. She announced that the Coop will start in-person meetings in September at the Prospect Park Picnic House. She then discussed some history behind GM work slot credits. The policy that was in effect before the pandemic allowed an unlimited amount of members to sign up for meeting credit, two times a year. “We had over 17,000 members, and that was when we didn’t have the nimbleness to tailor the size of our shifts to our needs. Consequently, there were a lot of makeups and the GM was a way to earn a makeup or FTOP,” Herpel said.

Now, however, with the new shift sign-up process, the Coop has fine-tuned shifts to better match Coop operation needs according to the days of the week, times of day, and seasons of the year. That means the Coop “doesn’t have excess labor built into every day,” said Herpel.

If the Coop were to go back to granting GM work slot credits to an unlimited number of members (as opposed to the proposed 75-member limit) the coordinators feel

strongly that other shifts might not be filled as much as needed, and operations would suffer, Herpel explained.

“In general,” Herpel concluded, “this is so we can bring back in-person meetings, and have a reasonable work slot credit, so members can earn credit and not have a negative impact on Coop operations.”

Questions and debate followed. Coop member Amita Rodman asked about testing a no-limit policy—then instituting a limit if the coordinators find too many members are signing up for the GM, and possibly cannibalizing other shifts.

Another member, Mehdi Heris, wondered if signing up counts as one of the two shifts that members are allowed to sign up for at one time. Under the new work slot sign-up system, members may only sign up for two shifts at a time. Herpel answered that the GM slot would be outside the two allowed.

Many attendees voiced concerns about doing anything that discourages attendance at GMs. They worried that major decisions are being voted on by only a small percentage of members and believe everything should be done to encourage GM attendance. Suggestions included a range of incentives, ranging from allowing more work credit than proposed, to offering walker services after in-person meetings, to help members who live across the park get home safely.

Members also wondered if there was a way to ensure that the policy would be adjusted, if it becomes clear that more credits wouldn't necessarily hurt operations.

Joe Holtz answered the latter concern by pointing out that item number 6 in the proposal says, “The General Coordinators (GCs) will have the authority to increase the number of work credits issued, if operationally feasible,” and thus allows for any future adjustments. “This is a starting point, so we can start transitioning back to in-person meetings,” he explained.

The debate period also included much discussion about when, and how, a hybrid meeting might take place, and how that would affect work slot credit. Herpel strongly encouraged members to submit a separate proposal, concerning hybrid meetings, to the Agenda Committee, for discussion at a future GM.

The proposal was put to an electronic vote and passed with 65 in favor, 5 opposed.

DJ WORK SLOT



ILLUSTRATION BY STEPHEN SAVAGE

Coop member Paul Blachar then presented the next agenda item, the discussion of a new DJ shift that would allow a member to curate and play music. This item was for discussion only, no vote would be taken.

Blachar explained that he envisions a work slot—possibly combined with an existing slot—that puts a person in charge of the music played at the Coop. “I love music, and I love sharing that music with people in my life. At the Coop we’re blessed with hav-

ing a great community. I'm always looking for ways to strengthen community in my life."

The proposal was met with lots of suggestions on the best, most accessible, and most inclusive ways to curate playlists and take music suggestions from member shoppers. Ideas included creating a small committee to curate playlists that include a variety of music genres, and setting up a QR code, or iPads and other electronic devices, on the shopping floor, to take member suggestions for playlists.

Some members expressed skepticism that this would be a meaningful shift or wondered what problem this new work slot would solve. Other members suggested making the DJ position volunteer only, with no work credit given.

Herpel described that currently the Coop uses about 120 playlists from Spotify, including all types of genres, which are cycled through the day. She also cautioned that music of a certain volume impedes members with hearing issues from checking out or doing their shifts.

Member Steven Rosen agreed with Herpel and described how, as a member with age-related hearing loss, music makes it harder to do his job.

Blachar thanked attendees for all of the input and the discussion period ended.

The Board of Directors then voted to accept the advice of membership in reference to the GM work credit proposal vote, and the meeting was adjourned.

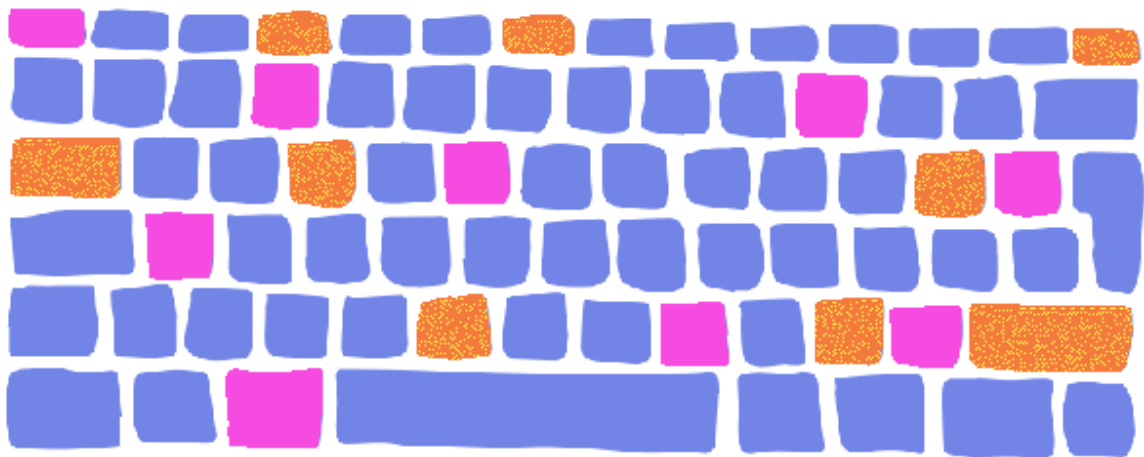
*Walecia Konrad is a freelance writer, editor and content producer specializing in personal finance. She has been a PSFC member since 2001 and on-and-off contributor to the Gazette for almost as long.*

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LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

September 5, 2023

# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



## CLIMATE ACTION

Dear Editor,

Climate change is hitting us hard; as Kate McKinnon says, “We know ‘dis.” I’ve been craving an easy and effective way to act, knowing there are smarter people out there who have a better grasp on what to do.

I luckily stumbled upon this great non-profit, Climate Changemakers, geared precisely toward my engaged and overcommitted self. Through their connections in DC, they curate topical campaigns with bite-sized easy actions that we tackle each week (rarely requiring phone banking!!). Think: getting our council members to rally around LL97, the NYC emissions-reduction law, or reaching out to public-school transportation directors in low-income school districts across the country and encouraging them to apply for free electric school buses.

In a fit of inspiration and motivation, I started a weekly hour of action at Threes Brewing in Gowanus at 8 p.m. on Wednesdays. Coincidentally, a solid contingent of the regulars (Christine, Alec, and Kevin, just to name a few) are also PSFC members—it’s great to know that we belong to a community of people who care about the planet.

If you’re interested or want to reach out and collaborate, I’d love to continue pushing politicians to prioritize climate. Sign up here: <https://lu.ma/iinvvcls>

—*Danny DeBare*

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## RESPONSE TO PHELONISE WILLIE

Dear Phelonise Willie,

I attended that meeting. I was inclined to vote YES. Two or three well-informed atten-

dees raised questions about oversight and process for the oversight. The estimated budget of \$20 million will be controlled by unelected members. The questions raised did not get good answers. In my opinion, many people probably changed their minds after that. The vote failed due to a lack of clearly defined process and not an opposition to the idea of a second Coop. This part is not included in the report.

—Amol Kaikini

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## PLOW TO PLATE FILM SERIES

September 5, 2023



### *LE CIRQUE: A TABLE IN HEAVEN*

*By Adam Rabiner*

“It’s a family affair,” sing Sly and the Family Stone. That sums up this documentary about Sirio Maccioni, the founder and genial host of Le Cirque, the famed Manhattan restaurant known for its celebrity clientele. Sirio is front and central, and deservedly so—as he is simultaneously funny, charming, and loving. But supporting roles are played by his three adult sons: the oldest, Mario; middle Marco; and youngest Mauro; as well as his long-time wife, Egidiana. They would add the following words to describe Sirio: “Stubborn, old-fashioned, critical, and infuriating.”

Sirio has an interesting backstory. Working in the belly of a cruise ship in 1956, he was too busy waiting tables to witness the Statue of Liberty, as the *SS Atlantic* sailed into New York harbor. But he fell in love with Manhattan—“jumped ship”—then worked as a waiter at Delmonico’s. By the early 1960s, he had become the maitre d’hotel of the Colony restaurant. He opened Le Cirque in 1974 to immediate success.

Sirio makes a point of showing that he “hates” the restaurant business. According to his autobiography, his father, who died when he was twelve, “swore that I was never, ever to go into restaurants, or hotels, unless it was with a beautiful woman, and I was staying there as a guest.” Yet he disregarded this advice, and enrolled at the hotel school in his hometown of Montecatini, Italy, and trained as a waiter. He once said, “I saw opening a restaurant as serious business—a profession that is respectable, if you are stupid enough to do it.” He claims he’s worn down from the years of responsibility and worry. But the audience can see that despite his protests to the contrary, Egidiana is right when she states, “He likes to do it, he complains if he’s not doing it.” Though they both would have liked their three sons to have been “professionals,” with weekends off, all three chose to follow in their father’s footsteps, despite Mauro’s protest that he is little more than a “glorified waiter.”

SIRIO, THE TRADITIONALIST, PREFERS AN ELEGANT RESTAURANT OF WELL--  
DRESSED PEOPLE OFFERING CLASSICAL MENU ITEMS.

The differing styles, educations, and business practices between father and sons make up much of the drama of *Le Cirque*, which revolves around the planned opening of a new iteration of the restaurant in 2006, in the Bloomberg Building. His children, armed with college and business degrees from NYU, Columbia, and Cornell, focus on profitability and fret over Sirio’s tendency to “give things away all the time,” to his favored clientele—which have included such luminaries as the Reagans, Trump, Kissinger, Giuliani, Joan Collins, and Martha Stewart. Wielding a spreadsheet (which they cannot get Sirio to look at, let alone take seriously), they want him to reduce his

comps to less than 2%.

They also argue about an array of other matters, as they compete to define the vision and business strategy of this new version of the fabled Le Cirque. What type of food should it be serving, how should it be presented, should there be a single establishment—or two dining options, one formal and one a more casual bar, should there be a dress code, etc.? Sirio, the traditionalist, prefers an elegant restaurant of well-dressed people, offering classical menu items that people will recognize, such as prosciutto with asparagus and melon. There is a generation gap between Sirio and the younger, more innovative members of his family, who find many of his ideas passé.

As they hash out the details, tempers often flare, insults are flung, feelings are hurt, and sometimes his children are brought almost to tears. Egidiana balances everyone out, pouring water on the fire when necessary, and mediating between father and sons, by reinforcing the message that the world has changed since 1974. The stakes are high for the family, who are the sole investors, unlike many new restaurants that are backed by large corporations.

Though charismatic Sirio is clearly the star of this film, it is the family dynamics which bring energy and pathos. The family struggles to bring this collective enterprise to a mutually satisfactory conclusion. But even as they fight fiercely (and Sirio can be quite mean), it's obvious that they have intensely strong bonds tying their love-hate relationships together. And whether they like it or not, with restaurants in far-flung locations like Las Vegas, New Delhi, Mumbai, Bangalore, Abu Dhabi, and Dallas, the younger generation is carrying on the family business with panache.

*Le Cirque*, September 12, 2023 @ 7:00 p.m.

*Screening link for Zoom info:* <http://www.plowtoplatefilms.com/events/>

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