

# THE OCTOBER GM: MASKING AT THE COOP, CHILDCARE AND A LOT MORE

November 27, 2023



*By Zach Schiffman*

The Coop's October General Meeting was well-attended, with more than 125 members in attendance at the Prospect Park Picnic House, many of them in costume, as it was Halloween. The bulk of the meeting was spent discussing and voting on a partial return to masking at the Coop. Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) was up first.



## BOYCOTTING AND DIVESTING

An open forum item was brought forward by floor monitor George Olken about resuming the discussion of a referendum for the Coop to join the BDS movement, which calls for boycott, divestment and sanctions of Israel. The resolution failed in 2012 and has not been discussed since.

The BDS comment was met with applause. General Manager Joe Holtz responded by recounting the aftermath of the 2012 meetings. Brooklyn Tech, which then hosted general meetings, told the Coop they were unwilling to host meetings that discussed boycotting and divesting.

While the item was put on the Coop's agenda through the "democratic pipeline," Holtz said that the Coop has since been unable to find a venue that will house this discussion, despite continued staff efforts to find a location. "It's everyone's right to put an agenda item in," Holtz said, "and the Coop administration will take it seriously... we also feel an obligation to tell the location we are renting from what it's about. It's a difficult conundrum."

Holtz concluded by saying, “We just want to fill you all in on the difficulty we have had since 2012. We’ve been thwarted when we’ve tried to do it again.” The open forum discussion was then closed after Holtz’s explanation, albeit a few minutes ahead of schedule. The early end of the open forum discussion was met with cries of “shame” from the crowd. The meeting chair defended the choice to end the discussion early because the agenda was jam-packed as is.

## POST-PANDEMIC FINANCES



Earlier this year, the General Meeting voted to maintain the Coop’s base markup at 25%. Members receiving income-based assistance can get an exemption, resulting in a 21% markup.

For Fiscal Year 2025, which begins at the end of January 2024, the base markup will go down to 24%. While there were some questions at the GM about keeping the markup that high, Holtz explained that the markup will remain at that level to keep the Coop’s reserve fund in the \$7.5 to \$10 million dollar range.

The gross margin for the year was 19.64%, which is above last year's, and is in line with the financial health of the Coop.

Between current sales, progress toward reaching a membership of 16,000, and the \$6.1 million dollars pandemic aid received from the government, the Coop is in a good position to maintain its level of savings. While the reserve fund target is notable, Holtz also stressed the importance of having savings in case there is another emergency like the COVID pandemic.

A new member asked how often the board projections are correct. Holtz shared that last year, when the Coop had lower membership, we did about \$20 million in sales during the last 20 weeks of the year. The Coop is on track to do 13% more than that during the last 20 weeks of this fiscal year.

Historically, the Coop leans toward making conservative projections, while assuming the actual finances will probably be better, in the interest of being "a robust, financially sustainable organization without a big bottom line."

Other new profit initiatives include plans for a robust home delivery service and the shift to electronic labels.

DESPITE A VOTE TO RESUME CHILDCARE AT THE COOP, IT WILL NOT BE POSSIBLE.

CHILDCARE IS STILL A NO GO

General Coordinator Lisa Moore told the crowd that, despite last year's vote to restart childcare in 2023, it will continue to be unavailable at the Coop. The facilities that previously housed the service do not meet the stringent requirements for New York State licensing, and the Coop's former insurer no longer offers policies to unlicensed facilities.

The General Coordinators worked with a broker and began a search in May to find an insurance provider willing to offer policies to providers that lack official licensing. However, as the September 30th deadline (set by the General Coordinators) came and went, the broker was unable to find a provider willing to carry the Coop. Holtz attempted to escalate the situation to a senior broker, but non-NYS carriers are not covering unlicensed childcare providers.

Moore said the broker had “essentially given up hope on securing insurance and does not believe the situation will change.”

**MASKING TO RETURN TWO DAYS PER WEEK**

IN CASE OF  
SHOPPING  
ON WEDNESDAY  
AND THURSDAY



BREAK  
GLASS

Donohue

ILLUSTRATION BY JOHN DONOHUE

Member Kristina Bassi brought forward a proposal to require masking for both workers and shoppers on the same two days each week to make the Coop accessible and safe for our medically vulnerable, immune compromised, and disabled member-owners. The idea behind masking two days a week came from the results of the survey sent out earlier this year to the membership, which showed 28% of members were in favor of masking.

A lot of the discussion was centered on how the vote should be carried out. John McNally, an IT coordinator, proposed an amendment that the vote be conducted as a referendum to include members at home, especially those who are immunocompromised and unable to attend a GM in person. Bassi, however, objected to the idea of a referendum instead of a GM vote. If the item were moved to a referendum, the membership as a whole would give it less thought, she suggested. In person, it was said that the present members could listen to one another and understand why they fought to bring this agenda item to the table. Bassi worried that “the process of doing an online system would delay and delay and delay it.” The amendment to make the vote into a referendum ultimately failed.

Many staff members at the Coop objected to the proposal. Kathy Hieatt, a bookkeeping coordinator, said if she were required to wear a mask all day two days a week, she “would consider working somewhere else.” Brian Robinson, a receiving coordinator, mentioned that the sixteen months of the pandemic without member labor were “the most challenging of his life. It was really hard to do all of this physical labor in a mask,” he said, adding that he “didn’t like the idea of making these shifts less appealing to sign up for.”

Kristina Bassi and Sophia Tu’s proposal also did not fully acknowledge who would be enforcing the two-day mandate. Membership Coordinator Anna Adelson reminded the audience that when masks were completely required, “people were jerks.” General Coordinator Ann Herpel added “It’s not just difficult for the staff. People were spit on, people were called names, people were kicked out of the Coop after how they acted

when they were asked to comply with the mask mandate.”

Another membership coordinator, Jason Weiner, who says he has voluntarily continued to mask himself in the Coop, added that he was against the item because he feared the Coop becoming an “arbiter of free will,” posing “how does this affect everything going forward.”

One concern during the meeting was the data used to come to the two-day-a-week proposal. The online poll was from earlier this year, and it’s unclear if that 28% would still be true today. Additionally, that poll was simply for or against masking writ large and included no language about partial masking. The “anti-democratic” nature of this in-person vote sparked emotive speeches. A retired coordinator Allen Zimmerman, who has been a part of the PSFC for 28 years and himself is “severely immunocompromised,” mentioned that over the years, he has voted against agenda items that he emotionally supported because he didn’t think they were best for the Coop. He said he feared that bringing back masking two days a week would harm the PSFC financially.

Shortly after, member George Olken brought forward the amendment to restrict masking to only the shopping floor, which no one objected to. After the robust discussion, the motion succeeded with an in-person vote of 72 yes to 50 no.

## AGENDA COMMITTEE RE-ELECTION

While none of the three members up for re-election for the Agenda Committee were present, as it was Halloween night, Allie Essinger, Dominique Bravo and Kate Spota were all re-elected for their positions on the Agenda Committee.

## COMMITTEE OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE’S SCOPE AND RESPONSIBILITIES

The final discussion item of the evening, brought forward by Member Coordinator Jana Cunningham, surrounded this nascent committee. She posed the following discussion items:

1. The Committee Oversight Committee (COC) was empowered to supervise committee reporting requirements, including scheduling updates and tracking work credit. Some of the Coop Initiative Committees are less transparent and may benefit from the assistance of the COC. However, there are many committees that are directly under the supervision of staff, who already account for members' attendance and work, and don't need additional oversight.
2. Is the COC empowered to investigate other committees? To what end? Or were they commissioned to assist new and current committees with structure and scheduling reports to the Membership?

Cunningham outlined the lengthy formation process that the COC underwent, during which the committee was repeatedly unable to clearly address its purpose, saying there was “endless resistance about clarifying what this committee was meant to do.” She added that in the midst of this confusion, the COC also does not save the PSFC staff time or money.

The discussion, which was left unresolved as the meeting was running long, sought to determine which committees need oversight from an additional committee. The Committee Oversight Committee has taken on the role of a policing system with ongoing investigations, which is not something clearly outlined in the committee's mandate. The current chair of the COC, Brian Shuman—the fourth chair this year—added that the investigations began after the suspension of Joe Holtz, and have grown from there. The discussion was left unresolved but will resume to sort out the actual powers of the COC and how to make it more “harmonious with the staff.”

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## USING TECHNOLOGY TO HELP WITH COOP INVENTORY

November 27, 2023



*By Walecia Konrad*

## THE PARK SLOPE FOOD COOP'S INVENTORY SYSTEM EXPLAINED

Coop shoppers may have noticed the new black-and-white electronic price tags hanging throughout the produce aisle. At first glance, they don't look all that different from the paper price tags they replaced, which are still in use on the rest of the Coop shelves. But these state-of-the-art mini-screens can be changed in an instant, reflecting a new price when, say, locally grown broccoli shows up in the summer, replacing the California crop, or Caraflex pointy cabbage hits the shelves.

Unit Price  
**\$2.98** LB  
0 670274 606767 1 Rows 16 OZ  
**Nixtamal White Corn Tortilla 5.5"**  
REGACC Prepared 1.0 05/06/23

PHOTO BY ZACH SCHULMAN

The old static labels are getting an update.

The unobtrusive tags may be the first sign visible to members of a years-long undertaking to update, digitize, share, streamline and consolidate the Coop's massive and unique inventory system.

"THE TECH PART IS EASY, BUT COMMUNICATING WITH PEOPLE AND FINDING OUT WHAT THEY REALLY NEED IS THE CHALLENGE."

— *COOP IT STAFF*

## INTRODUCING CLOVER

The new system, called Clover, was designed by the Coop's inventory development team, which includes Coop IT staffers Jonathan Miller and Ithran Einhorn, as well as Receiving Coordinator Ken Macdonald, all led by General Coordinator Joe Szladek. Clover isn't an acronym and doesn't stand for anything; it's just a pleasant name that's easy to remember, according to its inventors.



PHOTO BY ZACH SCHULMAN



Joe Szladek (top) & Ken Macdonald

The team set out to update the inventory system and achieve four important goals.

**Collect and report daily sales data.** Sales data is currently aggregated on a weekly basis. Staffers use that data to determine recent sales and how much more or less of a product should be ordered. It's a delicate science that relies on the price from the supplier, anticipated shopper demand and the Coop's limited storage space. Daily sales data reports help staffers make more accurate buying decisions, Macdonald explained.

**Update shelf prices.** The Coop is committed to passing any change in price to members immediately, even if it's during the middle of the day. Keep in mind, no other store does that: Most grocery stores keep prices for a set period of time, maybe a week or more. Immediate price changes add to the inventory-tracking challenges at the Coop. Members can see this pricing promise happen in real time with the electron-

ic price tags in produce. (By the way, the new tags use a minuscule amount of energy.)

**Streamline pricing information.** Traditionally, receivers are in charge of changing prices on the shelves when new stock arrives. But it's not enough to display the new price to shoppers—it has to show up at check out too. Those two data points have been on two different systems, which causes some headaches. Clover combines the two and closes that gap, explained Macdonald.

**Generate orders, invoices and supplier instructions.** Buyers can use Clover to generate orders and even indicate to suppliers how to load their trucks to help the Coop with delivery and storage. With this system, a full palette could be directed into the designated basement storage space, rather than needing to be unpacked and sorted, with items manually stored in different areas.

In addition, Clover allows receiving to communicate with the accounting department. Instead of entering an invoice two times into the two systems, it can be input once, cutting down on multiple layers of paperwork.

"I've been at the Coop for 20 years and spent a lot of time in the basement," Macdonald said. "It was frustrating to not get data on what we had on the shelves, what deliveries were coming in, etc. Now we have all that at our fingertips in real-time."



PHOTO BY ZACH SCHULMAN

The new electronic labels can change in real time.

## PRODUCE IS THE PLACE TO START

Because of its high turnover and constantly changing prices, the produce department had already followed a different inventory tracking system that allowed it to price items each day. After all, farmers may change their prices daily depending on the season, growing conditions and so on. Under the old system, produce buyers would be able to calculate new prices quickly—the cost of the most recent shipment plus the Coop’s markup—but would then have to change the paper price tags on the floor manually, which was a time-consuming process.

Now, the inventory system calculates the new prices and changes the electronic signs automatically. No running upstairs with new tags. Because the produce department moves fruit and vegetables so quickly, the inventory team figured that if the new system works there, it can work anywhere. Produce is the inventory system’s test kitchen.

## REINVENT THE WHEEL?

The inventory team set out to implement a new system in 2018, well before the pandemic. At first, staffers researched off-the-shelf inventory systems that could potentially be adapted to the Coop’s needs. Why reinvent the wheel?

But the Coop’s unique inventory challenges—high turnover, limited storage, a commitment to passing on price changes—soon made it clear that a custom-made system designed internally was the right way to go. So the team set out to create its own product.

That’s when Miller started talking to people. “The tech part is easy,” he said, “but communicating with people and finding out what they really need is the challenge.”

Miller wanted to dig deep and figure out what the system could streamline to make things easier for people to get their work done on a daily basis. That also meant ac-

commodating different vendors and suppliers and trying to work with their systems and comfort level. “One vendor might like to take orders over the phone, one might want an email. One likes to be paid by the case, another by the pound. All of this has to be taken into account,” he explained.

## A LITTLE HISTORY

Efficient inventory tracking has been the aim of the Coop from the very beginning, according to General Coordinator Joe Holtz. He and others were instrumental in devising the Coop’s original system, in which staffers used special cards to track what was bought and sold the week before and what price was paid for the inventory. The next team would use multiple weeks of information to make future buying decisions.

AT ITS FOUNDING, IT WAS OBVIOUS THAT THE COOP’S DEDICATION TO SELLING GOOD FOOD AT LOW COST MEANT THE STORE COULDN’T AFFORD TO BUY MORE THAN IT COULD SELL.

Like now, tracking inventory back then was both an art and a science. Buyers used the data on the cards to hit the sweet spot of meeting shoppers’ needs while dealing with limited storage space. (Back then, storage space was almost non-existent.)



PHOTO BY ZACH SCHULMAN

Joe Holtz looks through the Coop's old handwritten paper records.

At its founding, it was obvious that the Coop's dedication to selling good food at low cost meant the store couldn't afford to buy more than it could sell. That said, a good price on a product will often drive demand, so when suppliers offer lower prices, buyers are tempted to buy more than previous sales may justify. That doesn't always work out.

Holtz cited an incident involving honey when the Coop first started. At one point, a member-buyer was enticed by a great price on honey from a supplier, and they ordered far more honey than the Coop had actually been selling each week. When the shipment came in, there wasn't room for all that honey in the designated storage area, so the excess was put in a different corner.

The following week, the next person taking inventory didn't see the honey in its unusual storage place and figured it had all been sold. As a result, they ordered another ten cases of honey at a much higher price.

Holtz, of course, pointed to the honey as an aberration, and a great lesson in how buying and tracking inventory is so key to the Coop's success. For the most part, the custom-made card system took into account the unique challenges of the Coop and worked well. "The Coop couldn't have grown without a good inventory system from the beginning," Holtz remarked.

Eventually, the card system was computerized and buyers could more easily access sales data and price history to make accurate purchase decisions. Now, Clover will hopefully move the original thinking and systems even further into the future.



The new price tags might not look electronic, but they are.

#### WHAT'S NEXT?

When asked about next steps, Miller said they are looking to continue the new system roll out in other areas of the Coop where prices change quickly. Think meat and fish. Afterward, the inventory team hopes to roll out Clover gradually to any area that wants to use it in 2024. "It's not a gigantic cliff everyone has to fall off on a certain

date,” Miller said. “The two systems are working together right now, so we want people to move over to Clover when they want to.”

Shoppers, keep an eye out for the new electronic price tags. Now you know what’s going on behind the scenes when you drop each carefully tracked and priced item into your cart.

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## THE HOLIDAYS AT THE COOP

November 27, 2023

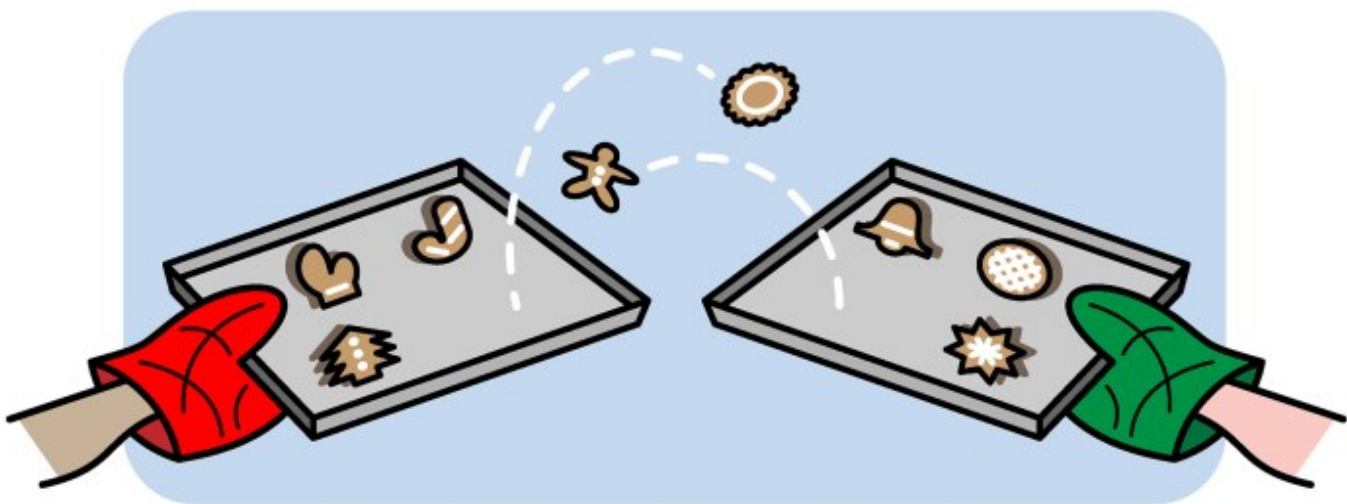


ILLUSTRATION BY STEPHEN SAVAGE

## A SWEET TRADITION: COOKIE SWAP PARTIES

*By Liora Fishman*

As the holiday season approaches, I find myself dreading the inevitable onslaught of Secret Santa events I’ll be asked to participate in. At the risk of being a Grinch, the

volume of gift-giving that comes with this time of year can feel overwhelming, expensive and even impersonal. Don't get me wrong—I love the holidays, and I appreciate my family, friends and colleagues who organize gift exchanges. But when tasked with finding an inexpensive gift for, say, a coworker I don't know particularly well, I often find myself coming up empty.

GUESTS TASTE ALL THE COOKIES, SWAP THEIRS FOR OTHERS, AND LEAVE WITH A VARIETY TO TAKE HOME.

Enter: the cookie swap party. It's a time-honored way to celebrate the joy of giving and sharing during the festive Christmas season. Each guest brings a batch of cookies, preferably of their own baking. The more unique the recipe, the better! Guests taste all the cookies, swap theirs for others, and leave with a variety to take home. That is, if they don't eat all of the cookies before they get there.

## THE ORIGINS OF COOKIE SWAPS

The concept of cookie exchanges, or cookie swaps, has roots that reach back to Europe in the Middle Ages. It was a time when communities came together to celebrate the holiday season, exchanging small gifts and homemade baked goods. This tradition eventually found its way to America, where it would evolve into the beloved cookie swap parties we know today. In the 1930s and 1940s, a significant shift occurred in American kitchens. The availability of ovens and the convenience of pre-packaged ingredients led to a surge in home baking. With more households now equipped for baking, cookie swap parties started to gain traction.

THE VOLUME OF GIFT-GIVING THAT COMES WITH THIS TIME OF YEAR CAN FEEL OVERWHELMING, EXPENSIVE AND EVEN IMPERSONAL.

Fast forward to the present day and cookie swap parties have become a cherished holiday tradition for many. “During the holiday season, it can be hard to know what to get your friends and family—and it’s overwhelming to pick out gifts for all your loved ones,” said Brett Krasner, who has been a Park Slope Food Coop member since 2021. “Cookie swap parties are a great way to bring a personal, home-baked touch to your holiday gifting without breaking the bank.”



## COOKIE SWAP PARTY DELIGHTS

Now that you’re familiar with the historical backdrop, let’s talk about the star of the show: the cookies themselves. Elevate your cookie game with these fancy and delectable ideas, starring ingredients from the Coop:

1. Lavender and Lemon Shortbread Cookies: These delicate shortbread cookies are in-

fused with the fragrant flavors of lavender and fresh lemon zest, providing a delightful twist on a classic favorite.

2. Raspberry Linzer Cookies: A personal favorite, these elegant, sandwich-style cookies feature a delicate almond dough filled with raspberry jam and dusted with powdered sugar.  
Pro-tip: If you're short on time, Bonne Maman makes a similar pre-packaged cookie available at the Coop (in the Express Line aisle).
3. Pistachio Cranberry Biscotti: For a sophisticated treat, bake up a batch of biscotti with pistachios, dried cranberries and a drizzle of white chocolate. There are few things more satisfying than dipping a biscotti into a cappuccino or a cup of tea on a chilly afternoon.
4. Matcha Green Tea Snowballs: For a unique twist, incorporate the trendy flavor of matcha into your powdered-sugar-dusted cookies, creating vibrant snowballs infused with green tea.
5. Salted Caramel Chocolate Thumbprint Cookies: These indulgent cookies feature a rich chocolate base with a gooey salted caramel center, garnished with a sprinkle of sea salt.

The pastry chef and former Brooklyn resident Jim Bohovic said making cookies based on your family traditions can be a great way to introduce family and friends to exciting new flavors and textures.

He added that he once saw guests at a New York City holiday party take his grandmother's cookies as if they were attending a cookie swap. Though they did not bring cookies to share, he said the guests filled their own plastic baggies with cookies. Bohovic called it a cookie "theft," à la Cookie Monster.



ILLUSTRATION BY STEPHEN SAVAGE

## FIVE PANTRY STAPLES FOR HOLIDAY BAKING

When it comes to holiday baking, a well-stocked pantry is your best friend. Here are five pantry staples—excluding sugar and flour, which go without saying—that you'll want to have on hand for your baking endeavors:

1. Spices: Cinnamon, nutmeg and cloves add warmth and depth to your holiday recipes, creating a cozy atmosphere during the winter season.
2. Vanilla extract: A dash of pure vanilla extract enhances the aroma and taste of your baked goods, giving them a touch of sophistication.
3. Nuts: Need an excuse to raid the bulk aisle? Almonds, pecans and walnuts are fantastic for adding texture and flavor to cookies, cakes and pies.
4. Cocoa powder: Quality cocoa powder is a must for rich chocolatey holiday treats like brownies and fudgy cookies, perfect for savoring during the winter months.
5. Extracts and flavorings: Beyond vanilla, extracts like almond, peppermint and orange can elevate the flavor profile of your baked goods, offering variety and a hint of luxury.

For those of us who have allergies or dietary restrictions that might preclude participation in cookie swaps, fear not. Gluten-free flour, nut-free recipes and vegan substitutions have never been better. In fact, some products are so good they can fool even the dairy fanatics in your life. “My partner’s family are Francophiles and obsessed with butter,” said Tamar Lindenbaum, who is vegan and has been a Coop member since 2022. “The only way they’ll eat a vegan dessert is if it tastes buttery. I’ve found that the best way to make a dessert that tastes authentically buttery is by using Miyoko’s vegan butter.”

With these pantry staples and fancy cookie ideas, you’ll be well-prepared to impress guests at your next cookie swap party. So, consider ditching Secret Santa this year and opting for a cookie swap: Gather your friends and family, whip up some extraordinary cookies, and share in the joy of this heartwarming holiday tradition.

The last word goes to the pastry chef we heard from earlier, Jim Bohovic, who said, “Holiday baking means fun, tradition, time with kiddos and sharing.”

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## PLOW TO PLATE FILM SERIES: STORM LAKE

November 27, 2023



*By Adam Rabiner*

The principal character of *Storm Lake*, Art Cullen, is the editor of the *Storm Lake Times*, a small-town newspaper in Iowa with a staff of ten, mostly family, and a circulation of around 3,000 readers. With his shaggy mustache and mop-top hair, he is a character, most likely intentionally casting himself as a latter-day Samuel Clemens. Cullen takes his editor's beat very seriously; he was awarded a Pulitzer Prize in journalism in 2017 for investigative articles challenging powerful corporate agricultural interests in the state. But he's also a folksy storyteller, in the vein of Garrison Keillor narrating the lives of those who inhabit his fictional Lake Wobegon.

The stories that Cullen tells—assisted by his wife, brother, son, sister-in-law and other relatives—are both broad and deep. Hyper-local news is covered: City Council meetings; the School Board of Supervisors; the Court House; the plight of local farmers con-

fronting odd weather and climate change; and who in the community had a baby, got married or died. But Cullen also covers nationally-oriented stories such as the 2020 presidential election; the disastrous Democratic Iowa Caucus meltdown; and the onset of COVID 19 that same year, with its impact on the paper and the town.

These stories are woven into the documentary, which also chronicles the struggles of the newspaper to stay afloat in the face of various financial challenges—competitors like Facebook, and the dearth of local businesses that can afford to buy advertisements. Cullen recognizes that he needs to increase his readership, but acknowledges as well that people now want to get news for free.



In the past fifteen years, as many as a quarter of the newspapers in the United States have shuttered. *Storm Lake Times* is one of the last of its kind, with its two--times-per-week circulation and \$1 per issue price. Founded in 1990, the paper often just breaks even, perhaps making a small profit one year, followed by a small loss the next. To survive, it must supplement advertising fees with support from its community of readers, which, with an influx of diverse immigrants, has become more diverse and Democratic over the years, though the population outside of town remains firmly Republican. For Cullen and his family, keeping the *Storm Lake Times* afloat is not primarily about achieving financial success. It is about providing good local journalism and news, which Cullen believes is the foundation of a successful democracy. Cullen feels that the 10,000 residents who form the community of Storm Lake represent a microcosm of the nation—which is only as strong as its newspaper and banks.

With the demise of many papers, such as Ohio's *Youngstown Vindicator* among others, Cullen estimates that there are around 300 "news deserts": medium-size towns of twenty to thirty thousand people without a local news source. The plight of these papers parallels that of small family farms, which are also endangered by economic forces and policies favoring agglomeration and huge corporate operations. The business models that once supported small farms, small papers and mom and pop stores have fallen apart, leaving rural communities weaker.

Storm Lake resembles a microcosm of parts of the United States as it grapples with common and widespread issues: warmer and wetter weather and its effect on crop yields and planting patterns, the rise of anti-immigrant sentiment, worsening political polarization, the plight of small family farms, and others. There are no easy answers to these problems. For example, if you repress large-scale agricultural production, where does that leave the workers who rely on it for employment?

Ultimately, this film's central theme is the role that a small-town newspaper plays in helping to shore up democracy. Cullen, who likes to quote Madison and Jefferson, and who proudly displays a poster of JFK on his office wall, may not be representative of his rural community. But in some ways his folksy Mark Twain demeanor and Midwest-

ern decency cast him as the quintessential American Everyman comfortably inhabiting a kind of mythic heartland made famous by *A Prairie Home Companion*, “where all the women are strong, all the men are good-looking, and all the children are above average.”

*Storm Lake*, Dec. 12, 2023 @ 7 p.m.

*Screening link:* <https://plowtoplatefilms.weebly.com/>

To be added to our mailing list for future screening announcements, please email a request to [plowtoplate@mail.com](mailto:plowtoplate@mail.com).

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## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

November 27, 2023



## DISCONTINUED PRODUCTS

To the Editor:

I am sometimes disappointed to find that a favored food has disappeared from our Coop shelves without explanation, never to reappear. Some time ago, for example, we lost Sesmark Sesame Thins crackers and, more recently, frozen orange juice con-

centrate of any kind. I think it would be helpful for our buyers to post a brief explanation, perhaps on the website, for each distinctive product discontinued; for example, poor sales, producer violation of labor standards, etc.

In cooperation,  
*Curtis Skinner*

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## EXTENDED SHOPPING HOURS, PLEASE

Dear *Linewaiters' Gazette*,

Can we get a Coordinators' Corner update from the General Coordinators about extending shopping hours? It looks like there are lots of people waiting to join and existing members clamoring for open work slots. What's the plan?

Thank you,  
*Lisa Guido*

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## PLURALISM IS A DEMOCRATIC VALUE

Dear Fellow Members:

During the Open Forum at the October General Meeting, a member suggested reconsidering the Coop's joining the Boycott, Divestments and Sanction movement. This suggestion was met with applause. When the Open Forum was closed to allow time for the business of the meeting to be addressed (note: the meeting still required a resolution to extend 15 minutes to accommodate all agenda items on the slate), several

attendees called out “Shame!” and “Undemocratic!”

As should be evident to anyone paying attention, a large number of our fellow members object strenuously to the Coop selling Israeli products. As should also be evident, both by expression of views and by sales volume, a large number of members support the sale of Israeli products.

If we truly aspire to democratic ideals, why is it so hard to allow members to make their own choices? BDS supporters should be welcome to exercise whatever commercial behavior comports with their moral cosmology, and fellow members who have different viewpoints should be able to do the same. Imposing one moral position on an issue that clearly holds a myriad of deeply considered perspectives strikes me as monolithic self-righteousness masquerading as “democratic.” Pluralism, no matter how offensive, is a democratic value. Tyranny, no matter how well-intentioned, is not.

*Brian Shuman*

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## BDS REDUX

Dear Members:

In years past, Coop members debated the advisability of joining the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions movement, a nonviolent campaign to secure justice for Palestine. Launched in 2005 at the behest of Palestinian civil society organizations, BDS has proven a powerful tool in the effort to end Israeli apartheid. The Coop as a whole never signed on to BDS, but individual members have long chosen to boycott items produced in Israel or made by companies supportive of the Israeli state (e.g., SodaStream).

As shown by the terrible events of Oct. 7 and later, the BDS campaign is more rele-

vant than ever. As I write, more than 10,000 Palestinians in Gaza have been killed by Israel's barbaric bombing campaign, combined with a blockade that deprives the civilian population of food, water and medical care. According to CNN, "Children are nearly half of all casualties." In my view, it's an ethical imperative to mourn all the victims, Jewish and Palestinian, while absolutely rejecting Israel's genocidal rampage. (Yes, what we are seeing meets "A Textbook Definition of Genocide" according to Holocaust scholar Raz Segal in an article published by *Jewish Currents* on Oct. 13.)

In keeping with our stated commitment to "avoid products that depend on the exploitation of others," I fervently hope that the Coop will now take steps to join the BDS movement. We stood up to help end South African apartheid. Palestine deserves no less.

*Jan Clausen*

Please note: the article by Raz Segal referred to in the letter can be accessed at *Jewish Currents*. Statistics from CNN are available at: "Civilian death toll: Israeli and Palestinian fatalities continue to rise amid the war with Hamas" | CNN

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## UNITY AT THE COOP

Dear Members:

Let's keep each other safe in light of recent events in the Middle East.

If we are to accept photographs and personal accounts of Palestinians on the ground, then we are also to accept photographs and personal accounts of Israelis on the ground. The massacre visited upon Israel on Oct. 7th is real. The destructive follow-up of the Israeli invasion is real. The follow up murder to that of a rabbi in Detroit is real. The continuous global threats against Jews and Muslims are real. Present horrors will

be replaced by fresh horrors.

Ongoing battles around who did what first are only fights about where it all started thousands of years ago. The only winners are the normalizers of hatred for Jews and Muslims. The latest headlines can't capture reality any more than they can about immigration. Therefore this is not a fight that the Coop should step into lest we are seen as supporting violence.

We need different dialogue here to discuss this. In our internet-influenced world of trolling, let's do better. Inside this organization, I invite us all to be Pro Coop. Let's take time to listen to each other, cooperate, even when we disagree. Listening is doing something productive. Blaming isn't. Unity for our membership remains the arc of our Coop's intent.

Concern for group B is not reduced by showing concern for group A. It's not pie.

*Jesse Rosenfeld*

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## COMMITTEE REPORT CONFUSION?

Dear Editor,

*The Linewaiters' Gazette*, like all elements of the "Fourth Estate," provides an important function in Coop governance by shedding light on and informing members about critical and overlooked issues at the Coop. This is why I've been dismayed to find in my brief experience trying to submit a committee report to the *Gazette* that it operates in complete darkness. There is no masthead. To contact the *Gazette*, there is only a single email address and it is anonymous. Questions sent to this email address go unanswered. There is no transparency and seemingly no accountability. It is completely unacceptable for our newspaper to operate as it does behind a veil of secrecy.

Sincerely,  
Avi Fisher

*Coordinator's Note: Committee Reports, like all submissions for Gazette publication or consideration for publication, are sent to a single email address. Content is then distributed to one of four editorial teams. Content that meets standards, which in the case of committee reports includes a limit of 750 words, will advance to publication. When reports require changes, editors generally send feedback to authors if their time permits. It is, however, incumbent upon the writer to adhere to guidelines. Regarding a Gazette masthead: its revival is in the works.*