

## MEMBERSHIP COORDINATOR ANNETTE LASKARIS EMBARKS ON HER NEXT CHAPTER

February 28, 2022



*Annette Laskaris, a Park Slope Food Coop employee since 2001, prepares for her retirement at the end of the month.*

*By Sara Ivry*

When Membership Coordinator Annette Laskaris, 64, first joined the Food Coop, she was a mother of three small children, ages eight, six, and one. It was 1990. Laskaris had moved to the United States at 24, nearly a decade earlier, from her native Germany after meeting and marrying her husband, an American. Now ensconced in domestic life in the county of Kings, she was wowed by tales of robust food offerings to be had on nearby Union Street. A friend convinced her to give the Coop a try.

"I was a little wary in the beginning," she said. "I knew I had to work and I had to work for my husband as well."

Still, Laskaris joined. She dutifully put in her hours in child care, bringing her own charges along as she looked after the offspring of fellow members. The rest of the time, she looked after her kids back at home, taking breaks intermittently for projects as a seamstress for hire. In 1991, she traded in child care for shifts in the office, and took a liking to it.

"I just didn't want to be with that many kids all the time," said Laskaris, reflecting recently on the arc of the three decades she wound up spending at the Coop. That journey is now drawing to a close, as Laskaris prepares to retire at the end of February.

"I was pretty good at the office work," she said. Other Coop members and staff took notice. In 2001, Laskaris started a staff position as a membership coordinator working limited hours so she could be home; one of her children has a disability and Laskaris needed to be available.

"September 11 was my second day of work. That was very dramatic," she said in her even-keeled delivery. "I had just dropped off two of my kids at school, and a few hours later the school called and I had to pick them up."

Yet as her children grew up, Laskaris's schedule freed up and she started fitting a 40-hour work week into four long days. Her vantage point has given her a front-row seat from which to watch and be part of the Coop's evolution, most of which she views as for the good.

"The space grew tremendously," she said, recalling that the Coop occupied a single building when she first joined and members had to put in a cheese order with a monger at the start of their shop and pick it up on their way out. "The shopping hours grew, which was really great, because in the beginning, I think, it was only on Friday that they were open during the day. With the increase of space there was an increase of product. We voted that we can sell meat and we can sell beer. For me, it became a one-stop shop."



Laskaris manually processing members' leave forms in 2008, before the Coop's transition to digital record keeping.

In the office, Laskaris was part of a team that oversaw epic change.

"From the beginning years, we had our little index cards and we'd write down every time someone did a shift and mark them present or absent," she said. It was arduous. "Then the conversion came and all the records went onto the computer. That saved us a lot of work."

Perhaps the biggest change for membership coordinators, she said, came during the pandemic when members gained the ability to coordinate their own shifts and fill them at irregular intervals.

Laskaris has also seen the Coop's ethos change over the course of her tenure.

"Not everybody knows everybody anymore, which was still alive until recently be-

cause you still had the squads where people would meet and you'd see the same people every four weeks," she said. "When the Coop was smaller, that was very important. Maybe the intimacy is gone, but you still have a lot of members who feel connected to the mission of the Coop—connected to the fact that they're working to help all members shop cheaper. We still have good prices. Even though we grew, that has not been lost."



We may not all know one another at the Coop these days, but we still try to help each other out.

Laskaris hopes that won't be lost in the future, either. There are things about the Coop she anticipates are permanently changed by the pandemic. She cannot imagine child care will return even in the event that the threat of Covid-19 is eradicated.

"Other grocery stores don't necessarily have child care and a lot of members that are now joining don't know about child care at the Coop so I'm not sure how necessary it is to bring it back," she said, while recognizing how useful she found it as a mother of

small children. “A lot of members are getting used to the fact that they can’t bring their kids so they’re finding ways around it.”

Laskaris’s retirement means the end of her partnership with the *Linewaiters’ Gazette* team. She took on that responsibility from a fellow membership coordinator who left the Coop eight years ago. At that time, *Gazette* production still took place on Coop computers.

“I used to come in on Sunday mornings, after a run around the park, which was fun because I got to know all the people who worked on the production teams,” she said. Helping on the *Gazette* wasn’t a natural fit for her. Laskaris doesn’t consider herself a particularly good writer or editor, but she is well versed in the Coop’s ins and outs, and therefore able to identify inaccuracies.

“We still print out the articles for the Coordinators to read, or let a staff person read the draft,” she said. “They give me their feedback and we relay the feedback to the editors . . . We still make sure the articles are factual. That hasn’t changed. I still go running on Sunday mornings, but I don’t stop by the Coop.”

With the imminent gift of free time, Laskaris plans on taking up sewing again, weaving, and spending time with her family. Her husband is retired and her grandchildren, a set of twins, are moving along with their parents back to the New York area from Ann Arbor.



Laskaris retires at the end of the month, but you might still find her on the shopping floor.

That doesn't mean she is taking a total break from the Coop, however.

"I'll miss the Coop if I can't work at all," she said, noting that she will do shifts for her eldest daughter, who is local. "I love the Coop, and I've loved my job as a membership coordinator. I really liked interacting with different sets of people every two hours and 45 minutes throughout the course of the day."

*Sara Ivry is a long-time Coop member. She is a writer, editor and podcaster who lives in Clinton Hill.*