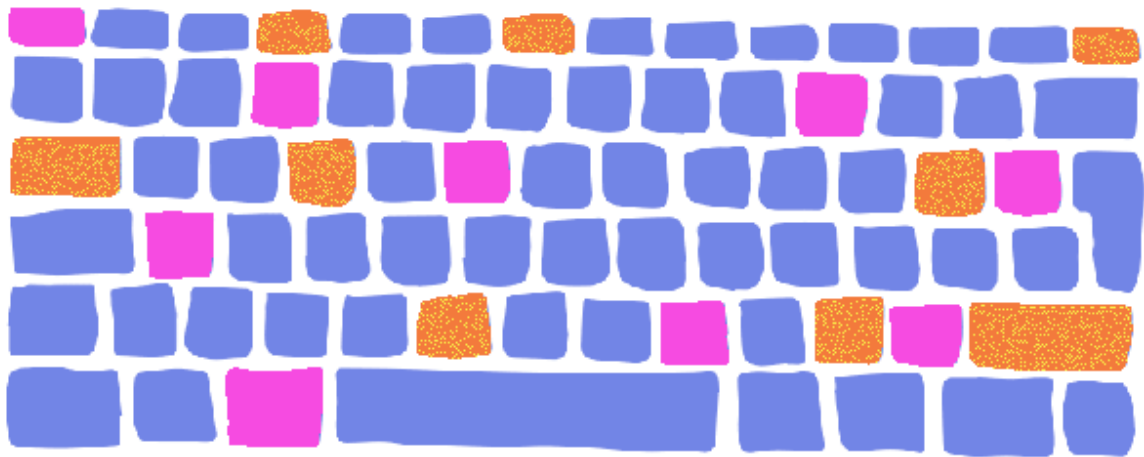


LETTERS 12/27/2022

December 26, 2022

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



THE NEW NEW-MEMBER ORIENTATION: SOMETHING LOST, SOMETHING GAINED

To the Editor:

During my time as a Coop member, I have been called upon a number of times while working a shift to give tours to visitors—back when we used to have visitors. I always enjoyed meeting people who were interested in how the shopping floor is organized and how the place works. It was a pleasure to introduce folks to the culture, community, and bounty of the Coop.

While we wait for the return of more personal orientations, I hope we can consider sending newly oriented members downstairs to the shopping floor for a personalized tour by a member working a shift.

The tours would be welcoming and a great introduction to a place where someone will hold your baby by the ice-cream freezer if you have to use the bathroom. A little break from walking carts or stocking vitamins would be a nice perk for a working member. We could restore a little of what we've lost.

Respectfully,

Lynn Yellen, Coop enthusiast

JOE HOLTZ'S SUSPENSION

To the Editor:

Thank you to all whose letters expressed what is in so many Coop members' hearts over the suspension (and without pay?!!!) of Joe Holtz. I sincerely hope this mistake is rectified and an overdue apology made to the man who has held the Park Slope Food Coop together for decades and helped insure the safety of us all during the COVID years. There was no safer place to be than the Coop. We owe him. If something isn't done soon, let's all like-minded Coopsters get together and make sure our voices are heard in support of this superior leader that we might give him his due.

Peace & love,

Heidi Oleszczuk

JOE HOLTZ'S SUSPENSION LACKED DUE PROCESS OR PROPORTION

Dear Editor,

I want to echo others' disappointment at the treatment of Joe Holtz, a Coop co-founder, which appears to have lacked proportion and reasonableness from my (admittedly limited) vantage point and seems like a smokescreen for larger behind-the-scenes issues. I love how the Coop protects its own through protocols in the age of COVID; but it's one thing to censure someone for breaching fast-changing COVID protocols and another to cut off email (remote work risks no exposure) or dock 1/12th of annual pay. The optics are of a masked vaccinated employee with unclear symptoms who followed good faith protocols and avoided putting others at real risk, and was penalized in part for candor (when my work colleague did something similar, she received more compassionate treatment, with concern for her speedy recovery and no punitive consequences for good faith yet flawed behavior under still-extraordinary circumstances).

This smacks of a marital dispute where one party says something innocuous and the other party loses their cool; in those cases it's about more than the situation at hand—the original transgression is bigger than it seemed from the outside, but a disproportionate or punitive reaction isn't helpful either. To persons who accuse Joe of receiving special treatment: I agree, he seems to have been singled out for disproportionately poor treatment in this case and hopefully he'll have his pay reinstated at minimum. This doesn't seem to be about the "crime" of coming masked and vaccinated to work and finding out about a diagnosis, but about something else; hopefully the persons involved will find some transcendent, kind and empathetic solution going for-

ward.

Wishing grace to all in the situation. It's been an exhausting 2+ years, let's be kind to each other as much as possible.

Jeanne Solomon

UNSAFE?

To the Gazette:

I don't want to comment on the whole Joe Holtz brouhaha, although I do have some strong feelings about it and how it is a reflection of the censorious zeitgeist that seems to have taken hold of many of our institutions. But I really have to say something about defenders of the Personnel Committee saying they felt "unsafe." For some years now I have heard the use of that word, primarily on college campuses, by young people who feel threatened by a right-wing personality being given a speaking platform, or who espouses an opinion that they strongly disagree with, or even someone who defends the free-speech rights of such a person. Maybe I am not keeping up with contemporary changes in language usage, but "upset" or "turned off" or "angry" or "annoyed" are not synonyms for "unsafe." What would make *me* feel unsafe at the Coop? If a big hole suddenly opened in the floor and I could fall through and break my neck. Or if someone came in with a weapon and threatened people with it.

Could consciousness of exposure to someone with Covid make somebody feel unsafe? Maybe for someone with underlying conditions that make it potentially quite dangerous. But if you only learn of the exposure after the incident is over, and especially if several days have passed since then without symptoms, you may have a reason to be upset, but how is "unsafe" an apt term to use? Progressives and Gen-Z'ers are often typecast by conservatives as being whiny, and maybe it is the misuse of

fraught exaggerated language like that that gives cause to hang that label on them.

Michael Esterowitz

WE'RE WRITING A TV SHOW & WE WANT YOUR HELP!

Dear Coop:

The Coop is, objectively speaking, hilarious. The rotating cast of characters, the hapless members trying to learn and execute a job on the spot, the constantly evolving structure, the Drama. Have you ever worked a shift and found yourself thinking, "This could be on TV!"? Well, so have we. We have an idea and absolutely nothing else. A member-run food coop is a fantastic setting for a sitcom.

Tentatively called "COOPERATE," this (web series, probably) follows a fictionalized full-time staff working at a member-run food cooperative. From pre-shopping hours, to coordinating the chaos in the receiving room, staff parties, organics scandals, and all the other chaos this iconic cooperative sees, this single-camera sitcom highlights (and amplifies) the behind-the-scenes shenanigans that we all merely get a glimpse of when we work our shifts.

This is certainly not an entirely original idea, and other people have done things like this before (shout out "Food Coop" and "Murder at the Food Coop"!). But we have jokes and we have fresh takes, and we would love to work with anyone else who wants to give this a try with us!

Right now, we just want to write some episodes, have a laugh, and see where the concept goes. We want to hear from you all and write with whoever is interested in getting involved. We have no funding, concrete concepts, experience writing for TV, or pretty much anything else. We're just two best friends who can't stop thinking about

the Coop as a sitcom.

Reach out to us! Let us know what you think, if you want to be involved or share any funny stories you've collected in your time at the Coop. At the very least it'll be a fun time.

You can reach us at asiyaherrero@gmail.com.

With love,

Asiyah Herrero and Sydnie Rathe

REVIEW THE PERSONNEL COMMITTEE STRUCTURE

December 26, 2022

Letters to the Editor



ILLUSTRATION BY GABRIEL WILLOW

Dear PSFC members,

It is time to rethink the structure of the Personnel Committee: Five members who were elected by uncontested vote are clearly not qualified to wield this much power. Perhaps a professional moderator or two could be added. An overarching perspective was absent in the brutal punishment delivered to Joe Holtz for his error in judgment. The disciplinary measures enacted were heavy-handed and did not benefit the PS-

FC or its members.

Withholding Holtz's salary was unjust and requires full review; it is hard to imagine that any member of PSFC would fail to recognize the generosity and forgiveness he has embodied for decades while leading the Coop to success. PSFC's leaders give incalculable hours of extra effort from their hearts; this is what has made the Coop great! A one-week suspension with pay would have been sufficient to alert everyone to the risks to others in guessing if we have COVID-19 or not. The decision was painfully unfair to a man who has given his all.

During the last General Meeting, the Personnel Committee directive was described as "to hire, fire and discipline top staff, in consultation with the general coordinators." I would like to know which General Coordinators were consulted before this too-harsh penalty was finalized. Amends must be made where harm has been done: I support a full disclosure of the Disciplinary Committee's process and reasoning, a review of the structure and function of this committee, and immediate actions to restore Holtz's salary.

Please be kind,
Claudia Joseph

JOE HOLTZ'S SUSPENSION

December 26, 2022

Letters to the Editor



ILLUSTRATION BY GABRIEL WILLOW

Dear Editors,

I missed the issue of the *Gazette* in which Joe Holtz's suspension was reported.

I'm appalled at the severity of the punishment. I share shops and mass transit with unmasked people whose vaccination status and exposure to the virus I don't know. One COVID-exposed person wearing an N95 doesn't even register on my radar, especially since, as I hope we all know, mask-wearing people are protecting others more than

they're protecting themselves.

As well, I might point out that we're all taking the vaccination and exposure status of our fellow shoppers on trust. A month's suspension without pay or the ability to shop is a Twitter-mob-worthy response to Mr. Holtz's infraction.

Sincerely,

Jolanta Benal

PAY JOE HOLTZ

December 26, 2022

Letters to the Editor



ILLUSTRATION BY GABRIEL WILLOW

Dear Editors,

I have been a member of the PSFC since the 1970s. I was dismayed to learn that General Manager Joe Holtz was punished with a month's suspension without pay because he came to work, wearing an N95 mask, while awaiting a PCR test result, a test result that came back positive. What he did was a mistake. The severity of the punishment the Personnel Committee meted out was also a mistake.

Joe, a co-founder of the PSFC, has served and continues to serve the Coop very well. A reprimand is deserved. But taking away a month's pay from a highly effective manager is too much.

I recommend that he be refunded his month's pay. A reprimand? YES. Losing a month's pay? NO.

Sincerely,
Irvin Schonfeld

AUGUST GENERAL MEETING: DISAPPOINTMENT ABOUT BIKE RACKS AND
CHILDCARE, BUT FINANCES LOOKING UP

December 26, 2022



ILLUSTRATION BY JOHN DONOHUE

By Jess Powers

Roughly 122 people attended the end-of-August Coop General Meeting on Zoom. The meeting covered Joe Holtz's suspension, Coop finances, the removal of bike racks, a call for the return of childcare, labor issues at Amy's Kitchen and other topics.

During the Open Forum, Coop members expressed appreciation for General Coordinator Joe Holtz and dismay with his recent 30-day suspension without pay. Staffer Gillian Chi shared that she and a member submitted a proposal for back pay and an apology. Later, Brian Shuman of the Oversight Committee shared that they received complaints about the suspension and expect a report on the Personnel Committee, which levied the penalty, from the Oversight Committee. Other members asked whether the *Linewalters' Gazette* will concurrently publish in print and whether members can be emailed upon publication. General Coordinator Ann Herpel said it wasn't possible to

produce a web and a print version without a lot more work. She also recommended signing up for *Gazette* email notifications [scroll to the bottom of this page to do so].

THE COOP HAS AROUND 13,500 ACTIVE MEMBERS, WITH JUST OVER 10,000 WORKING MEMBERS. THE REMAINING 3,000 ARE ON WORK EXEMPTIONS.

TREASURER'S REPORT

Holtz updated members on the financial health of the Coop and shared five points that also appear in the summary of the financial statement.

First, the Coop is losing less money overall due to the return of member labor; second, the 4 percent increase in the markup, which went from 21 to 25 percent, contributed to an increase in income; third, projections show an average of 10 percent more sales than the previous year; fourth, there is a good financial cushion and the Coop is owed \$1.5 million by the IRS. Another issue: the Coop needs to eventually pay into the pension plan. He also said there are pending questions about whether or not to lower prices, increase the number of checkouts, expand hours and up the number of people allowed in the Coop at the same time. A pilot of a home delivery system is also is being planned.

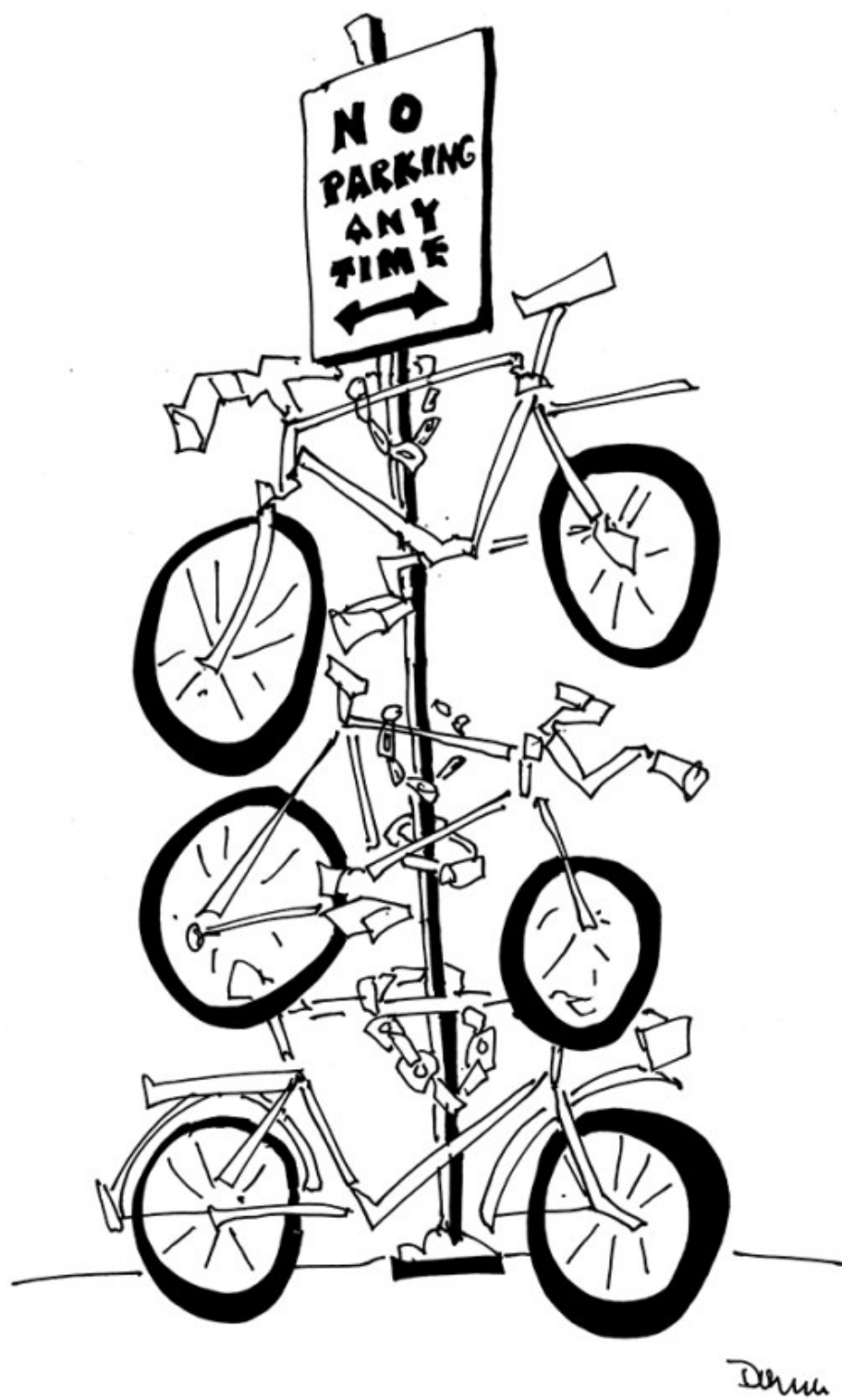


ILLUSTRATION BY JOHN DONOHUE

REMOVAL OF BIKE RACKS AND OTHER UPDATES

In the General Coordinator report, Ann Herpel acknowledged two new part-time membership coordinators to work on weekends: Karina Gee, who was previously a shopping squad leader, and Elly Dittmar, who floated in a variety of shifts.

Herpel noted that construction work is occurring next to the Coop at the former St. Francis Xavier School, now leased to the Department of Education. The Coop was informed by the contractor that during the next phase of construction a dumpster will be partially placed in our loading zone and that sometime in the fall the bike racks closest to the mural will be removed. They were installed by the Department of Transportation and approved by the former principal of St. Francis. She continued that the Coop will also likely lose the bike racks closest to the street and that the news was “disappointing.” The Coop and its members can make an appeal to city agencies for other bike racks to be placed on Union St.

There was no food report this meeting.

MEMBERS AND WORKERS

As of the date of the meeting, there were around 13,500 active members of the Coop, with just over 10,000 working members. The remaining 3,000 are on work exemptions. The new member orientations fill up every week with an average of 81 new members assigned to work shifts. This growth, she stated, will “strengthen and fortify the bottom line.” Attrition is seasonal, at about 17 percent, similar to pre-pandemic numbers.

Bookkeeping Coordinator Kathy Hieatt, who writes the member investment refund checks, added that she completes roughly 30 per week, fewer than the number of new members. John Tucker, a member recently eligible to retire, inquired whether his member labor—and that of other retirees—was needed. Herpel said that if an open shift appears on the calendar, it reflects the operational needs at that time.

LABOR CONCERNS AT AMY'S KITCHEN

Eric Frumin of the Labor Committee presented a report on Amy's Kitchen, a family-owned company that manufactures prepared frozen foods carried by the Coop. The Labor Committee was created in 2017 at a GM and reports on workers in the food chain, engages with suppliers and works to be a constructive force within that space. The labor story broke on NBC News and pieces followed on KQED and Eater.

In May, the Committee sent a series of investigatory questions regarding labor conditions to the company. After not receiving a response, they sent them again. At the last GM, the Committee asked the Coop to contact Amy's Kitchen, with the intention that, as the Coop is a significant customer, the company would take the obligation seriously. In turn, the GCs decided to ask the National Co+op Grocers (NCG), which serves as an intermediary between coops and producers to get better deals. Their spokesperson was already aware of the issues and agreed to send a letter to Amy's "at a high level" to press for an answer. Frumin believes that the questions had gaps but would enable us to get a more accurate picture of labor conditions.

Research by Labor Committee members was "distressing," according to Frumin. There are repeated injury rates and the company has failed to act. At four major facilities in California, Oregon and Idaho, reports on injuries from one plant are more than triple those of their peers in the frozen processing business. He compared the situation to Amazon's poor reputation among its peers in the warehousing industry. Amy's Kitchen is not reporting injuries and is having a "safety meltdown," he continued. The Committee is following their process to continue investigating and make a recommendation to membership.

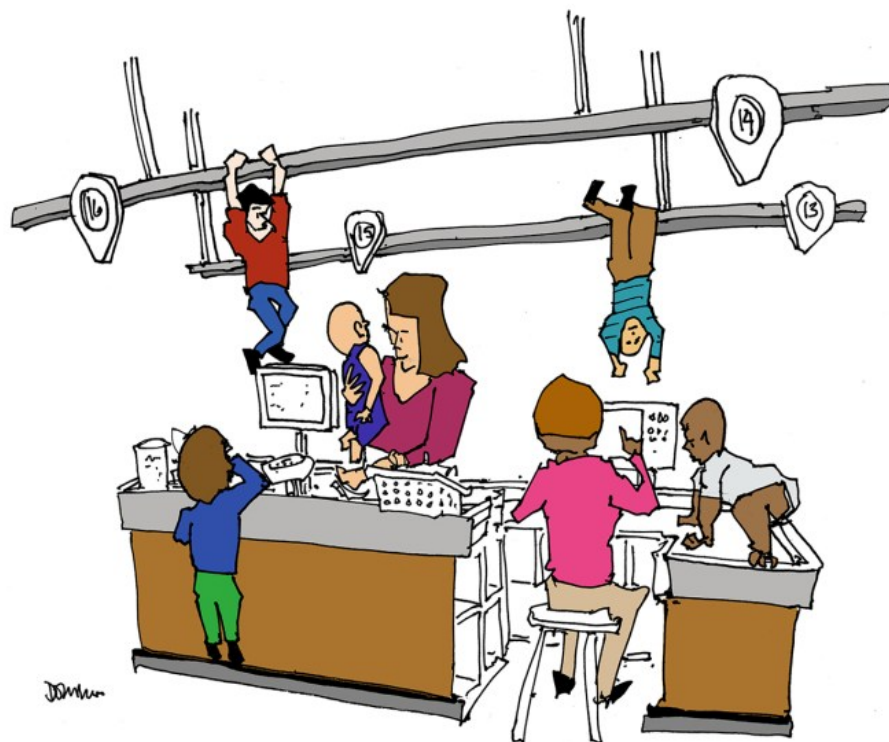
CALL TO IMPROVE THE GM AGENDA

Beth Ruck and George Sarah Olken presented a discussion item on how members can help shape the GM agenda. With enthusiasm, Olken shared that they "love going to the GM for the promise of connecting. And while it isn't perfect, that means we can make it better, more vibrant and participatory." The pair were not advocating for a

specific proposal, but sought ideas and promised to return with ideas.

In a brief PowerPoint presentation, they explained the current process, by which any member-owner can propose an item. These are selected in order of submission, but some are prioritized due to urgency. One concern named was that the queue is not public, so members don't know if their proposal is already being addressed by someone else or if they can collaborate. The process can take a while, so one suggestion was a "vote-a-rama" for appointments to committees, for example. Another suggestion was to alternate the GM format to allow for more discussion time.

A lively discussion ensued with members suggesting chat rooms, utilizing Pol.is to create consensus, affirming the necessity of writing articles in the *Gazette* to publicize agenda items and emphasizing the need to be mindful of minority opinions as well. Coop member Bhakti Sondra Shaye also agreed that separating a discussion and a vote at two different meetings "doesn't seem logical" because the same people won't necessarily attend and it "detracts from democracy." Please email beruck@hotmail.com or georgeolken@gmail.com with suggestions.



CHILDCARE UPDATE

Lauren Belski, a PSFC member for 15 years, and her husband, Brian Russ, brought forth a discussion about the current status of childcare at the Coop. She shared that her first shift was in childcare, at a time when she never thought she'd be a mother herself. Years later, she brought her children, connected with other parents and observed her kids making friends at childcare. "It was a special place and I really missed it," she said.

In a nod to the previous topic about agenda items at the GM, Lauren shared that they used the options available to them to lift up this issue: Brian published a letter to the editor in the Gazette, they repeatedly spoke with other parents, they waited for the return of childcare, and, finally, added it to the GM for discussion. Lauren lamented that during the "last six months especially, there are certain elements of procedures that exist and a lack of transparency about why they exist." She observed that member labor returned and childcare didn't, that masks aren't required in public places and that day cares are back open. She also experienced frustration with the response to their letter as well as with paying for a babysitter in order to do her work shift. Other families are experiencing the same hardships and falling behind on shifts, she shared, and the Coop should "stand up and welcome families back. Profits will go up. [Parents] buy for more than themselves; they're spending lots of money."

Lauren observed that the main thing holding the return of childcare back is the new bulk item machine currently housed in the former childcare space. She said, "they allocated a space that should be used to help working families for single use plastic bags."

Members responded to the presentation as "heartfelt and sensible." Another parent, David, stated that "parents are ready to leave the Coop if things don't change" and it's a "much less joyful place." He urged the Coop to "reassess where we are now." Nicholas, a member without children, was mindful of groups at the Coop that "may not have sway" and was in support. Beth Ruck thought that the childcare issue tied to-

gether many of the themes from the night's meeting, from financial health and stability to the "things that distinguish our institution from the myriad ways people have to shop and . . . centering community." While George agreed, they also raised the concerns of immune compromised members and eldercare.

General Coordinator Ann Herpel, in response to questions about how many children were accommodated at a time in childcare, explained that up to three childcare workers could be in attendance at a given time, caring for up to 12 children. Each childcare worker could bring up to two children of their own, limiting the number of available slots. Priority was given to working members over shopping members and there were times when childcare was closed because "no one showed up to work." GC Joe Holtz shared that childcare evolved around 1980 and, while he is committed personally to its return, there is a need to balance fears, public health considerations and to find a place for the bulk item machine.

The minutes for the previous meeting were approved and the meeting was adjourned.

Jess Powers works in emergency management and enjoys adventures in nature and eating. IG: @foodandfury

FLOORED BY JOE HOLTZ'S SUSPENSION

December 26, 2022

Dear Coop,

As a PSFC member for the last 34 years, I'm floored by the Personnel Committee's punitive measures against Joe Holtz for wearing an N-95 mask and coming in to work without knowing he would test positive for Covid that day. The man might have improved your quality of life for decades and withstood any number of uncalled for in-

sults, but he is *not* a fortune teller.

Hayley Gorenberg's detailed reporting in the *Linewaiters' Gazette* presents the facts, and I concur completely with the letter written by Cynthia Blyer that outlines the Personnel Committee's unprecedented, uncalled for, unjust and downright bizarre punishment. I add my voice to those who demand, as Cynthia did, that the committee:

1. Reimburse Joe for the month of July.
2. Keep in mind that we are running a cooperative, not a gulag.

Cynthia stressed that Joe would be the first one to speak up if another staff member were treated like this, or about any kind of unfairness in our community and in the world.

I will be attending the upcoming General Meeting on September 27 to speak to this agenda item. If Joe is not reimbursed and all punitive measures rescinded at that meeting, I urge Coop members to protest the abhorrent and extremist actions of the Personnel Committee with an emergency referendum.

Jessica Greenbaum