

COORDINATORS' CORNER: A MESSAGE FROM JOE HOLTZ

October 15, 2024



October 15, 2024

Dear Members,

In 1972, I was part of the small original founding/planning group that worked on launching the Coop during the latter part of that year, and then managed the official opening in February 1973. In early June 1975, at the age of 25, I became the first Coop employee. In late June 2025, after 50 years on the job as a General Coordinator, I will retire.

The recognition of the Coop's 50th anniversary, in 2023, helped me conclude that my 50th anniversary of becoming our first employee was a fitting time for this difficult decision. I stayed all these years because of how special the Coop is and because of the

difference the Coop makes in so many people's lives. I have stayed because of the overwhelmingly positive energy and thoughts so many of our members have about the Coop. I have stayed because of how much our members care for the Coop and feel connected to their Coop.

And I have stayed because of the Coop's great staff. Over the years, I have been, and continue to be, fortunate to have wonderful, dedicated, hard-working, thoughtful and caring employee-colleagues. They understand how special the Coop is, and it has been an honor to have worked side-by-side with each of them in this interesting, challenging and exciting endeavor of serving the membership and making the Coop strong.

I also stayed because every year I could answer the following question with a "Yes": Is the job still interesting and challenging? To this day my answer remains: Yes. Nevertheless, it is time for the Coop to forge into the future without me as an employee. I feel that responsible planning includes retiring while I can still walk, talk, think and be available to the Coop.

I've been privileged to have had the opportunity to help both members and staff build a democratic institution that welcomes people from all walks of life into the community and practices cooperation through genuine participation in running our communally owned store. I have loved helping to build a community success in a society that is so focused on individual success.

My sister and I grew up in a three-generation household of seven. My home had nearly constant visits by a ton of relatives and family friends. There was always conversation and interaction. As a kid, I asked questions about how businesses worked, partly due to an instinctive love of numbers. The Coop job included both elements: lots of interactions with people and lots of numbers. As an adult I never saw myself working for a profit-making business. However, a member/owner cooperative business was the right fit for me. People who want to cooperate are precious to me.

My dad told me time and again that people “should not rest on their laurels” and not base their actions on past successes and not rest because of any positive “newspaper clippings.” I incorporated those lessons into my life at the Coop. I came to understand that a killer of businesses was overconfidence. I came to understand that we must always carve a path toward success and avoid the paths that could put us into a downward spiral. This was integral to my approach to good stewardship of our Coop.

I am grateful for having the opportunity to do this job for this community, this “local society,” for what will soon be 50 years. I’m confident that the staff and you—the thousands of members who make up this local society—will continue caring for the Coop, ensuring that it continues for generations. Thank you all for caring.

Joe Holtz

General Coordinator, General Manager and Co-Founder

PS: I hope to write more articles for the *Gazette* in the coming months about the parts of the Coop that most resonate with me and that have contributed to building this vibrant and vital cooperative of ours.

FLOORED BY JOE HOLTZ’S SUSPENSION

October 15, 2024

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 insults, 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

DEARTH OF SHIFTS

October 15, 2024

Letters to the Editor



ILLUSTRATION BY GABRIEL WILLOW

Dear Editors,

I would like to open by saluting the tremendous amount of work and consideration that have gone into the evolution of shift assignments. This is no mean feat. The introduction of recurring shifts, however, has upset what to me felt like a nicely poised system that offered maximum variety to all working members. Having not signed up for a recurring shift (it's untenable for my schedule), I now realize the folly of my inac-

tion—gone is the variation of available shifts. I realize I will garner little sympathy; I too must adapt to the cold, hard truths of this new order. Still, I cannot help but feel something is lost now that member labor is much less fluid than it had been all these months since its return. I'd love for blocks of recurring shifts across the board to return to the open labor market for anyone who simply cannot commit to a recurring shift. Selfishly, I still think this would do wonders for the rest of us.

Damien Neva

FTOP RULES TOO RESTRICTIVE

October 15, 2024

Dear Coop,

With the recent return to recurring shifts, I find the Future Time Off Program (FTOP) policy that states you can only schedule two shifts at a time too rigid and not well publicized.

First, it does not appear anywhere in the Workslot Policy Agreement. Second, the two places it does appear—on the “Shift Calendar” web page and Section III, paragraph 7 of the Membership Manual—it is buried in the text and not easy to notice.

More importantly, the PSFC seems to encourage members to add credits to their shift bank credit but then limits members' ability to build up credit by limiting them to two scheduled shifts at a time.

In the Membership Manual, for instance, it states, “You need to work at least one shift per cycle but you are welcome to work extra shifts. Those additional shifts will add credits to your bank. There is no limit to the number of credits you can have in your

bank.” And then adds a little later, “You may have up to two scheduled shifts at one time, with no more than 2 shifts on the same date.” These two statements seem to be at odds with one another.

Moreover, when we accept the Workslot Policy Agreement, we agree that “Whenever possible I will cancel farther in advance, so other members have the opportunity to claim the shift(s).” Here, too, the FTOP policy makes it difficult to do so. For example, I will be traveling in November but cannot cancel my November shift and choose an alternate slot until I work my next shift in September. By that time, I fear the slots that are most convenient for me will be taken.

The system needs to be more flexible. Let’s increase the number of shifts that can be scheduled at one time.

William Yotive

JOE HOLTZ SUSPENSION

October 15, 2024

Dear Editors,

I want to add my voice to those who have called for transparency from the Personnel Committee regarding the Joe Holtz suspension. The committee said the *Linewaiters’ Gazette’s* article about the suspension was inaccurate but did not indicate why. They claim privacy issues preclude them from being transparent. I understand wanting to protect Joe’s privacy, but he has been open about the situation. Has the committee asked Joe if he would waive his right to privacy in this case? If it’s the privacy of committee members they want to protect, that concerns me. Shouldn’t the membership know how the personnel committee makes decisions? Don’t they act on behalf of the

membership?

A 30-day suspension without pay is a harsh penalty for what seems to have been an inadvertent violation of rules that don't appear to have been clearly disseminated. Let's have the Personnel Committee admit to a mistake here and restore Joe's lost wages.

In cooperation,

John Wilson

GUN IMAGERY IN THE PRODUCE AISLE

October 15, 2024

Letters to the Editor



ILLUSTRATION BY GABRIEL WILLOW

Dear Coop Community,

We were shocked and appalled to find, when trying to buy blueberries for our toddler, that we are stocking blueberries called “Bangin’ Blues” featuring a prominent label of two giant rifles over an American flag. The extreme gun violence in our country is unconscionable. We do not need to further promote this toxic culture with guns on blueberries, of all things. We implore the Coop to cease buying this product immediately

and redirect our purchasing power to farms that do not promote gun culture as part of their product.

With concern,

Brit and Jon Schoepp-Wong

COVID-19 ATTACKED AND UNDERMINED THE COOP

October 15, 2024

We can't fit working and shopping members and maintain safe social distancing. The results are financial and social. We are losing money and members.

Coop finances depend on required member labor—whose value in dollars is never counted in the budgets—to sell elite health-food store products for commercial super-market prices. We're built on equity and solidarity of member/owner/worker/shopper; the same privileges and same responsibilities for each member.

Our traditional squad system fell apart as about 4,000 of 17,000 members (18%) left. Under emergency conditions, the management collective (General Coordinators) hired members to run the store for minimum wage. More expenses; less income.

In mid-July, the GCs instituted a new system of member labor. Members sign up for shifts doing different tasks on different days under the supervision of a different paid staff person who is under the supervision of the GCs. Less social cohesion.

Many of us want to restore the traditional system of squads with member leaders. We created a process to identify, recruit and prepare member leaders (over several months) to step into place and then to organize members into squads if/when it is

safe and feasible. The item was discussed at July General Meeting. The vote will be at the October 26 GM.

A QR Code to the complete text will soon be available.

Those registered will receive the document in an email.

Please study the plan, comment and vote at the Oct GM.

Susan Metz

Editor's note: Please see "The Coop Making It Through COVID" for Gazette reporter-researched information on the percentage of members who departed the Coop during the pandemic.

INEDIBLE ORANGES

October 15, 2024

TO THE *LINEWAITERS' GAZETTE*:

This letter is not about politics, veganism vs. animal consumption, genetic modification vs. anti GMO, Palestine, etc. It is actually about a particular food we sell! I have often bought organic Valencia oranges at the Coop. They were always juicy, very flavorful, the right balance of acidic and sweet, and generally small-to-medium sized. At my most recent visit I bought what were purported to be Valencias. They were enormous (the size of a typical grapefruit), with absolutely no flavor, no sweetness nor acidity, and were completely dried out. In short, they were literally inedible and had to be thrown out. Are these the same Valencias? Do we not have discretion when there is a truly awful batch of fruit to refuse the purchase? I am quite certain that the ones I

purchased were not “bad apples” (i.e., bad oranges), since I have noticed for years that very large oranges tend to lack in flavor and juiciness. Admittedly that should have given me sufficient warning (*caveat emptor!*), but I didn’t see any navels or other oranges for sale. I understand that produce, especially organic, can vary considerably in taste quality, and I expect and accept that occasionally I might end up eating something that is not great. But when something is so bad that it literally cannot be swallowed, and there is a full tray of them for sale to other Coop members, it seems to me that some protocol should have prevented that.

Michael Esterowitz

TEMP WORKERS WERE MEMBERS

October 15, 2024

LET’S JUST START HERE:

All Temp workers were members. Not everyone knew this information. A lot of Coop members would come in to shop during the height of the pandemic and complain about “us.” As if we were outsiders, who somehow infiltrated the Coop, and changed it into something else, something different. In actuality, we were the members who lost our jobs, lost our source of income, lost our benefits (if we had any); who reached out in an uncertain time during the bleakest time in our immediate history—a world-wide pandemic—and helped the Coop to survive. We came in and worked eight-hour shifts, killing our bodies, but also happy to have the work so we could pay some bills and put food on our tables. We bonded with each other, laughed, shared our struggles, and shared our love for food, music, art—whatever we were interested in—with each other. The Coop was quieter than before the pandemic, the world was quieter. That meant that we could see each other in a new and different way. We met people that we didn’t meet when the world was busy with its business. I will always look back

at this time, and think about the people I met and worked with, with the utmost respect and fondness, as we all move into the future. I know some I will see again and some I probably won't. It's just the way the world works. I think some of my lasting thoughts are these: Is a community built on great food at cheap prices enough? Or do we need and want something more than that? The Coop brings us together. I guess it's up to each one of us as members to decide what we value in a "community."

Lisa Martin

(former Temp worker)