

SALUTING JOE HOLTZ, AN ICONIC FIGURE IN THE COOP’S HISTORY

July 15, 2025



PHOTO BY STEFAN RUIZ

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By Zach Schiffman

How do you honor the 50-year legacy of the Coop's longtime General Coordinator, Joe Holtz? On June 1 at the Prospect Park Picnic House, the Coop community saluted Holtz, an iconic figure in the Coop's history, with three waves of guests, over multiple snack stations, musical performances, interactive exhibits, pre-recorded tributes and painted portraits.



The event was organized by three Coop staff members, with food and drinks almost exclusively sourced from the Coop. Catering support was provided by Winner, which was founded by a former Coop member.

The celebration was structured into three sections, each lasting around 90 minutes. The first 50 minutes allowed attendees to mingle, enjoy snacks and refreshments, explore a multimedia showcase and photo archive, sign Holtz's guestbook and have portraits taken.

Each wave then concluded with a speaker, a video featuring Holtz's pre-recorded speech touching on his history at the Coop and a personal appearance and remarks from Holtz himself, most of which involved anecdotes about scrubbing the Coop floors and stocking the milk fridge. The finale was a group portrait on the lawn orchestrated by a documentary team that captured the event.



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A celebration of
JOSEPH HOLTZ
JUNE 1ST, 2025



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The first wave featured Gillian Chi, a longtime staff member who served as the event's MC despite initial nervousness. "I've never emceed anything before, maybe spoken into a microphone twice in my life," she confessed.

Chi, like everyone at the event, said, "It's hard to imagine the Coop without him." Musical entertainment during this wave was provided by the James Shipp Band, which is made of entirely of Coop members. Member John Webber presented a portrait of Holtz made with MetroCards by artist Juan Carlos Pinto, along with a painting of the iconic PSFC Neon sign by member Erik Schurink.

The second wave featured Jess Robinson, a member and former staffer, as the speaker. Musical entertainment was provided by Coop member band Krissie & the Kranks. Staff member Yuri Weber performed "Hey Mr. Tangerine Man," an adaptation by

former staffer Allen Zimmerman, adding a playful, nostalgic element.

The final wave featured staff member Jana Cunningham as the speaker. “The On-Alert String Band,” also composed of Coop members, provided entertainment. A highlight of this wave was the presentation of a custom event T-shirt to Holtz—an original design reading “Holtz 73”—which staff and members proudly wore throughout the event.

Throughout the day, attendees shared heartfelt reflections.





PHOTO BY STEFAN RUIZ







Sherry Showell and John Decker, members since 1996, described Holtz's support for the compost squad. Showell noted Holtz's unwavering support helped their group grow significantly.

Reflecting on his retirement, Sherry admitted feeling overwhelmed, asking, "Who do I go to now?" Newer members Meredith and Lucy, who assisted with food and drinks, shared their impressions. Lucy remarked, "It's amazing to see all the history—different generations coming together to celebrate."

Meredith, reflecting on the Coop's enduring values, added, "So many of the themes that spurred them to start it are the same things that we're experiencing today. It's a really kind of reassuring feeling in this time, just to know that we have an institution that has lasted longer than me."

Kathy, Holtz's wife, sat quietly off to the side and described the celebration as "very moving," expressing how great it was to see how much people love him and respect him. She warmly shared her belief that Holtz, being "a gregarious person," was truly enjoying the recognition and interaction, adding, "I think he's really liking it a lot."

Longtime member Scott Klein characterized the moment as "the end of an era," while emphasizing the Coop's enduring strength. He said he enjoyed reconnecting with other members, noting simply that "just seeing people" was his favorite aspect.



PHOTO BY STEFAN RUIZ



Coop Exterior Through the Decades



Park Slope Food Coop 1960's



Coop's Rug Cleaners prior to the Coop's expansion in 2002



Delivery of rooftop equipment in 1980's



2001
January-June
Removal of floor in 1994 to create an open space with other buildings



PHOTO BY STEFAN RUIZ



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Abigail Dunn, who received work credit to staff the event, described it as “vintage Coop,” and appreciated the chance to meet both new and longtime members. She complimented organizer Silvia Ennes Cabrera for the event logistics.

Cabrera brought her 15 years of event-planning experience prior to working full-time at the Coop to the celebration.

“My mind always goes to food,” she said. “What is the Coop known for? What do you think about when you think of the Coop? And I think about the cheese, bulk, produce and bagels.”

Each table had creative combinations of cheese, dried fruit and crudit  . Ultimately, she had to skip the bagels—“We eighty-sixed the bagels because it was just too

hard.” Not only were the snacks a hit, but they were elegantly displayed. “I had a lot of fun getting together stuff to build a little display in the center of each of the tables.” Her earliest memory of Holtz? “He had a belly and a red beard, if you can believe that.”

Elly Dittmar, one of the membership coordinators who helped organize the event, took on the task of curating the photo archive.

“I basically just combed through our archival folders, which, none of them are named—just a massive file of all these random photos,” she said. “Surprisingly enough, it’s extremely hard to find pictures of Joe. In all of these 50 years of archives, there were very few pictures of Joe.”

She eventually had Holtz look through the selections and add his own blurbs. What stood out most to her about the event was how many members were involved: “All the band members, all of the people working today are members. One of the people who helped us prep the food is a member, and the person who owns [the restaurant] is actually a former Coop member. It just feels really nice to be able to pull this all off entirely with people that are part of the Coop.”

Staff member Jason Weiner, handling multimedia presentations, which were displayed on iPads hung in the back of the Picnic House, found joy assembling tributes from international coops, especially from France. “It was really, really endearing,” he said, emphasizing Holtz’s global impact. “The evolution of this place...couldn’t have happened without the work of Joe and other people. It’s nice to celebrate that.”

When the guest of honor was asked how he felt at the expansive event, Holtz told me, “I’m feeling great.”

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

AFTER MANY YEARS OF SHIFTS, A GOLDEN REWARD: COOP RETIREMENT

July 15, 2025



By Zach Schiffman

Dolores Natividad had been a Coop member for more than 31 years. Hitting three decades of shifts marked an important milestone for her: retirement. She recalled being at the Coop on a Saturday, thinking to herself, “It’s been a really long time since I’ve been working here at the Food Coop. Since I am 65, how much more time do I need before retiring?”

Natividad went upstairs to the Membership Office and gave her member number. She soon learned that she had earned that golden ticket, Coop retirement, which offers her a well-deserved privilege: membership for life without having to do shifts.

The retirement program has an almost mystical air about it, which was made clear in discussions with several members.

“I hope I can afford to live in New York long enough to make it to Coop retirement, whenever that is,” one member remarked.

Early in the Coop’s existence, members could only ask to stop working when they reached 75. But in 2008, a new program was established with a sliding scale, granting retirement status to members based on a formula that takes into account their age and the number of years they have been a member.

Members who are 60, for example, can retire if they have been a member for 30 years, while members who are 70 or older can retire if they have at least 10 years of membership.

Walecia Konrad, a former reporter and editor for the *Linewaiters’ Gazette*, recalled that she realized that she might be eligible when she turned 64, given that she had been a Coop member for 22 years.

“I was just looking on the website, and I was really surprised,” Konrad said. “My husband is younger than I am; he was like, ‘Oh, you should look for the formula. I think you might be able to retire.’”

After applying through Member Services, approved members receive a phone call congratulating them on retirement.

“It had become really hard to get shifts,” said Sandye Renz, 66, who has been a Coop member for 19 years. “So I thought, ‘Hmm, maybe I won’t have to do any more.’ So I went to the office and was told I could retire, but I still owed one shift. And I still couldn’t get a shift.”

Renz, who primarily worked office and checkout shifts, later got a call clarifying she no longer owed that shift, along with congratulations on her retirement.

The retirement program is voluntary, as many long-time members enjoy their shifts

and elect to keep contributing to the Coop. Renz said she “won’t miss doing shifts,” but she looks back fondly on working days like Halloween. “We did costumes,” she said. “That was always fun. One year I was the tag for vegetables—I just wore it as a mask on my face.”

Retirement can spark a lot of reflection, as it does outside of the Coop. As a reporter for the *Gazette*, Konrad attended countless General Meetings, and she remembers votes that have changed the Coop over the years, from approving benefits like walking shifts and daycare to things we may take for granted now, such as the ability to purchase meat or beer.



Dolores Natividad in front of the Membership Office

Natividad recalled the days before the Coop accepted debit cards as payment.

“I used to do the new member orientation shift, and I remember getting tired of saying, ‘Debit cards coming soon!’ Every month, over and over,” she said. “If you didn’t have enough money, you’d have to run to the bank and get money or use a check.”

Major world events have shaped the membership experience. Many retired members mentioned the pandemic, which made it more difficult to feel a sense of community at the Coop. Others recalled the time on Union Street after 9/11, when a wooden sculpture was erected outside the firehouse next to the Coop. “Having that sculpture right between the firehouse and the Food Coop, it was very emotional,” Natividad said.

Over decades of membership, retirees worked a diverse array of shifts. The office shifts were a favorite. “I started doing the office for a while, because my daughter was little and she didn’t like staying in child care, so it was easy for her to run into the office all the time and hang out with me,” said Renz, whose children are now grown. “But when the office got more computerized, I started doing checkout, and then I did everything. I have done every shift pretty much.”

Way back when, Natividad said, she did some grueling shifts. “The first was helping to unload at the wee hours of the morning—helping get the food off the truck and put it on the gurneys—because I liked lifting heavy things. It was satisfying. It was like a workout,” she said.

She also served on the Coop’s Diversity Committee and gave new member orientations, though her favorite shift was serving food at CHiPS, the pantry and soup kitchen nearby on Fourth Avenue.

Natividad believes that her Coop shifts, specifically her time working on the Diversity Committee, informed her own field work as an exercise physiologist.

As an over-three-decade member, she said, the Coop has been involved in the fabric of her life. “Even when my husband asked me to marry him, I said, ‘The household needs to be in good standing and you need to join the Food Coop.’”

MEMBERSHIP COORDINATOR ANNETTE LASKARIS EMBARKS ON HER NEXT CHAPTER

July 15, 2025



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 because 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.