

'LIVE SMALL, LOVE LIFE, AND KEEP GOOD COMPANY'

January 20, 2026



MEET JIM CHRISTENSEN, A RECEIVING COORDINATOR AS 'CAN-DO' AS THEY COME

January 20, 2026

By Liz Welch

Jim Christensen's eclectic resume includes being named a finalist for a Nicholl Fellowship from the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences for a screenplay. He was 39 and managing a 20-person staff in a large Minneapolis coffee shop and had written a blue-collar riff on *North by Northwest* that sent up gangster movies. Jim replaced Hitchcock's Madison Avenue executive (Cary Grant) scrambling on Mount Rushmore with a divorced Chicago mechanic rescuing his daughter in the lobby of the Smithsonian's National Air and Space Museum. "I went to LA and met a bunch of agents," he said. "It was heady stuff!"

Ever since then, he said, "It has always been about finding a good day job so I could continue to write."

The recently turned 70-year-old can now add "Receiving Coordinator" (R.C.) at the Park Slope Food Coop to a list of gigs that already includes high school English teacher and soccer coach, advertising researcher and strategist, and manager/trainer of testing and hiring teams that created the TSA in the wake of 9/11. A long-distance relationship lured him to New York where he consecutively managed for the 2010 U.S. Census, was a store manager for Sterling Place, and was a "deliverista" for a 7th Ave. sandwich shop before taking up again self-employment as a painter and handyman.

"I was a sole proprietor, made a business card, and biked my ladder and tool bag all over Brooklyn to do repairs," he said. "It was great! But a bit lonely."

JIM ENJOYED GETTING TO KNOW THE PEOPLE WHO GRAVITATED TO THE REPAIR SHIFT—PAINTERS AND PLAYWRIGHTS, ARCHITECTS, AND JOURNALISTS.

Jim first joined the Coop as a member in 2009 after that long-distance girlfriend made it a stipulation when he moved from Minneapolis to live with her on 7th Ave in Park

Slope. While their relationship did not endure, Jim's appreciation of the Coop did.

"I did the late-night commando cleaning shifts," he said of his early days earning work credits. "They were Sundays 8 p.m. to 2 a.m. but we'd meet just four times a year. I met the most interesting people."



PHOTO BY JENNIFER MACFARLANE

Craving that kind of community in his paid work, he applied for a staff job several years ago, which he did not get. But in 2025, at the encouragement of friends, Jim reapplied—this time for membership coordinator and receiving coordinator positions—and was interviewed the same week for both. As it happens, the Coop’s lead facilities coordinator had recently departed for the New York Aquarium, so management wasted no time in tapping Jim’s handyman experience and skills to help fill the void. For 15 months he fixed many things personally, and organized tools and spaces. Primarily he fielded all repairs requests and evaluated maintenance needs to manage evening Repairs shifts during which members cooperated to cross-train skills and fix things. He transitioned to receiving coordinator in December 2025.

“I loved the Repairs shifts,” he said. “We did all kinds of things, ranging from painting to improvement. A blower in the cooler might need unclogging or a dripping faucet might need to be fixed. People worked cooperatively, often above their skill set. Some even learned how to weld.”

JIM WILL CONTINUE TO DO WHAT HE HAS ALWAYS DONE: “LIVE SMALL, LOVE LIFE, AND KEEP GOOD COMPANY.”

He singled out a bathroom-soap situation as one of their more satisfying small triumphs. Constantly leaking dispensers were a perennial problem until a late-night repair team figured out how the Coop could reduce plastic waste and save money with replacement. “We cut four millimeters from a plastic stirrup-shaped component. This shortened the piston stroke inside the mechanism so it dispenses only as much soap as necessary, making them cost-effective,” he explained. “The team both piloted the modification and also videoed it to share so the next shift could alter the remaining dispensers.”

Jim especially enjoyed getting to know the people who gravitated to that shift—painters and playwrights, architects and journalists. He feels similarly about everyone on

staff.

“The variety of people who work here is astonishing,” he said. “Everyone is nice, professional, skilled and smart. The underlying vibe aligns with our mission statement. It’s not too over-the-top to say I love my colleagues—and I love my job.”

Another loveable facet of his new job: it allows him to read and write. In fact, he continues to write screenplays, including one he and his partner—a writer of short stories and fellow Coop member—have adapted from a memoir set in the Midwest.

As the couple prepare to shop it around, Jim said he will continue to do what he has always done: “Live small, love life, and keep good company.”

Liz Welch is a journalist, memoirist and book collaborator.

MEET THE STAFF: NEW FRIENDLY FACES AT THE COOP

January 20, 2026



September 16, 2025

By Oluwakemi Aladesuyi

Below are excerpts of interviews with the Coop's newest staff members, lightly edited for brevity and clarity.

Andrew Young, Receiving Coordinator



PHOTO BY KATE PREVITE

Member since 2002, staff since August 2024

I was initially resistant when my wife suggested joining the Coop. I thought the whole thing was silly. It's a bit of a cliché but I thought that huge membership, trying to do things in a way that everybody had a voice, would be bureaucratic and slow. What I found once I was working here was that it was all charming. If you wanted to be more involved as a member you could. Over the years we've come here for films or a class. Then there are many other years where I've worked my shift and gotten cheap groceries. But that's the great thing about this place, it's a built-in community. It's there for you if you need it.

“THIS PLACE, IT'S A BUILT-IN COMMUNITY. IT'S THERE FOR YOU IF YOU NEED IT. “

ANDREW YOUNG

As a receiving coordinator I do a lot of things. One is what we call “writing the aisles,” sticking the shelves and making sure things are in place for people to shop. My favorite thing is being a monitor in the receiving room—checking people in for their shift, directing them where to go, working with a large group of people. I am a Shakespeare-obsessive person. Every character in Shakespeare comes into work a shift every month here. There's Falstaff, there's an Iago. They're all here, and that's incredibly vital and entertaining.

A Pitch to New Members: The Coop helps bind the community together. We're in this very unequal neighborhood, and people still come together here and mix together and hash things out. But please, don't put your headphones on during your shift. If I see two people working who've run into old friends they haven't seen, and they're talking for 10 minutes, I'm not going to break that up. That's what this place is about.

What You Might Not Know: Young instituted a special Sunday night deep-cleaning shift using power washers and industrial equipment after noticing that the Coop had lost its deep-cleaning crew during Covid. “People always say, ‘Gosh, you know, I worked really hard, but I felt like I did something and I had a good time.’ It’s kind of like you just feel like the Terminator on the sidewalk.”

Gabriel Concha, Receiving Coordinator



Member since 2007, staff since June 2025

My wife had long known about the Coop, but when she was single she wondered, ‘Does it make a difference to buy an apple for \$2.50 or an apple for \$1.80?’ Then we met, had kids and decided to join.”

My job description is Receiving Coordinator, but I believe there’s an underlined work description: creating community. The goal is for members to chat, to get to know

each other while they work. When people work for the Coop they also begin to realize that they are working for themselves too.

“YOU HAVE TWO HOURS AND 45 MINUTES WORKING WITH ONE PERSON, WHICH IS QUITE A BIT OF TIME FOR NEW YORKERS.”

GABRIEL CONCHA

The other day I saw two people finishing their shift. While they didn't know each other when they began, when the shift ended they hugged and said, 'It's so nice that I talked to you. I really liked talking to you.' This is what we're here for, to promote that cohesive community. It transcends the doors of the Coop.”



A Pitch to New Members: It's hard to take time to get to meet another person deep-

ly, but that is something that the Coop offers. You have two hours and 45 minutes working with one person, which is quite a bit of time for New Yorkers. You can build a relationship, someone you'll see in the street and say "hi" to. It's a great way to feel confident in your community, in how you navigate the planet.

What You Might Not Know: Concha spends his mornings working as a physiotherapist specializing in Body Mind Centering. He helps people with chronic pain through movement therapy. "I help people understand what they have inside their body and how to use it," he explained.

Jacob Slaton, Bookkeeping Coordinator



PHOTO BY JACQUELINE SCADUTO

Member since 2022, staff since August 2025

My wife was talking about this great place with great produce. But when I came, it was the cooperative aspect that drew me in. With a degree in accounting, I'd always thought I'd work for family businesses, mom-and-pops. The reality of modern capitalism is that accountants work with large companies, and that didn't really jibe with me. Working in a community that's based on helping the people around them resonated with my values. It's not profit over everything.

“INSTEAD OF RAISING PRICES LIKE TRADITIONAL STORES, THE COOP CAN FOCUS ON REDUCING EXPENSES ELSEWHERE.”

JACOB SLATON

There's an additional layer of glasses you have to wear when making financial decisions for a coop. We're not trying to make money; we're trying to break even. We don't mark up peaches 80% just because they sell fast when they are in season. The whole idea is to bring produce to consumers at the lowest possible price. That creates an extra wrinkle when you're looking at problems, but that's what regular businesses don't think about. We have benchmarks that allow us to say, “OK, we have a map of where we're going by end-of-year.” But instead of raising prices like traditional stores, the Coop can focus on reducing expenses elsewhere.

A Pitch to New Members: Covid ruined so much when it comes to sharing spaces in-person. It allowed us to stay home, shop online, get groceries delivered. Then you wonder: Why am I not seeing anybody? Why do I feel lonely? You don't build roots by staying in your room or shopping online. While it takes work to get your groceries in-person, you get the opportunity to be around 16,000 other people who have chosen to dedicate their time to creating this place.

What You Might Not Know: Slaton's favorite Coop product is Harry's Berries sourced from a third-generation Japanese American family in California using traditional Japanese agricultural techniques. "I will cut them up and put them in vanilla ice cream in the early part of summer." But they are hand-picked, air-flown strawberries. In other words, expensive. "I'm saving money all year round just for my strawberry fixation."

Oluwakemi Aladesuyi is a journalist, yoga teacher and creative strategist. She is looking forward to buying fresh dates at the Coop.

NEW KIDS ON THE BLOCK: MEET THREE OF THE COOP'S NEWEST HIRES

January 20, 2026



As told to Liz Welch

A commitment to mission and community were the common denominators behind three newcomers' decision to take full-time jobs at the Coop.

DELPHINE SELLES-ALVAREZ, 53

Membership Coordinator
Start date: March 2024



PHOTO BY JACKSON KRULE

“I wanted to be part of this community!”

I joined the Coop in 1997, and it has played an important role in my life—for both the food and the community. I love it so much that, over the years, whenever I saw job postings, I thought about applying. My kids were smaller then, and so the timing was not right. I finally applied for an opening as a membership coordinator and was delighted to get the job.

As a longtime member, I knew how special the Coop was—but I had no idea how much work goes into keeping this place going! I’ve only been here for two months, so I’m still learning all the systems. I spend my days asking questions and listening to how my fellow coordinators handle situations. I get to work with an incredibly bright group of people who are all dedicated to the Coop’s mission, and to working with lots of different personalities, so I learn a lot from them.

So much of my job is responding to members’ questions: Why am I suspended? Can I take a leave of absence? What happened to childcare? (On that note, everyone is sorry that we can’t bring it back! Insurance is just not possible.)

Everyone I work with has the best intentions in mind—the goal is always to find a solution. Years before I was hired, I worked the office shift, which prepared me for this type of problem solving. One thing I have noticed is how much calmer the office is [than it was a few years ago]. The online membership work system is so much easier to navigate—members are not as stressed as they used to be. Remember FTOP when you had to call in or go fill in those paper forms? And how you never knew your status? Newer members still complain—but they don’t understand how much easier it is now!

“THE BIGGEST CHALLENGE, ESPECIALLY AFTER THE PANDEMIC, IS BEING CONSTANTLY SURROUNDED BY SO MANY PEOPLE. I WAS USED TO WORKING IN MY HOUSE, OR AS A GARDENER TALKING TO PLANTS.”

Overall, interacting with all these people—whether my colleagues or the members—is my favorite part of the job. It enforces the feeling of what a special place it is.

FRANCISCO REYES, 36

Receiving coordinator

Start date: February, 2024



PHOTO BY JACKSON KRULE

“When I was looking for a job in advertising, I knew I could run into horrible humans and a lot of ego. Here, the worst you can get is someone who is having a bad day—but is not a bad person.”

I am from Chile but moved to New York one year ago from Mexico City with my husband who is from Germany. We were looking for a place to live in Park Slope, and the broker who helped us find it, also showed us the Coop and said, “I believe this is a place you might like!” We joined in May, 2023.

I’m a gardener and I do ceramics. I was able to make a living doing both in Mexico, but it was harder in New York. I started looking for other jobs—at the botanical garden, as an assistant in pottery studios, even I considered to look for advertising jobs as I used to do that as well back in Chile, when I saw a job listing at the Coop! I learned that I had to be a member for six months—this was July, so I had to wait. When the same job was listed in December, I applied. It was my first interview in English, so I was nervous. But it was an easygoing interview and I got the job!

The biggest challenge, especially after the pandemic, is being constantly surrounded by so many people. I was used to working in my house, or as a gardener talking to plants. Here, my job is half social skills, half organization, and lots of physical labor, too! You walk stairs, carry boxes. I’m trained to know how to write all the aisles and while we each have our favorite—I love doing yogurt—we also need to know how to write everything else.

What I love most about the Coop is it does not feel hierarchical. Everyone is treated with the same respect and curiosity. The idea of being higher or better really does not feel like it exists here. I appreciate that so much.

MAE FRANKEBERGER, 36

Membership Coordinator

Start date: September 2023



PHOTO BY JACKSON KRULE

“I love having opportunities to creatively solve problems for a huge community of people.”

Prior to my job at the Coop, I worked in the live entertainment industry. I stage managed, produced, coordinated all sorts of live events, from Off-Broadway productions to BBQ Tastings to the Mermaid Parade. I love the nature of people gathering to celebrate art, food and each other—so the transition to working here felt natural.

The Coop is an anomaly. Especially in the US. Nowhere in this country is there a food co-op that has more than 16,000 members and runs on unpaid labor to keep costs low. I love getting to be part of an organization like this. It literally blows my mind daily!

“IT HAS STRETCHED MY COMMUNICATION SKILLS IN WAYS I DID NOT ANTICIPATE, AND HELPED ME REALIZE THAT THIS IS NOT JUST ABOUT WORK; IT IS ABOUT COMMUNITY.”

My job is to constantly re-orient people to spaces and tasks in order to set them up for success. I really enjoy working with members and helping them navigate the systems within the Coop. I also like being able to be a part of the group of people who help build and make those systems better. It’s an ever changing process. Of course, there are basic rules for how things are done, but sometimes I’ll ask my veteran colleagues, “Okay, but how would you handle this particular situation?”

Half the time, members are coming into work shifts with no knowledge of the job they’re being asked to do, which is why there is so much emphasis on creating guides to help members navigate these systems—whether they are manuals, or step-by-step guides. Inevitably, people will still have questions, so I’m often fielding those inquiries from members who have different ways of communicating. So I have to decipher what it is they need to know, in order to do their job. And I always want to make sure I convey that information in a way they can understand. It has stretched my communi-

cation skills in ways I did not anticipate, and helped me realize that this is not just about work; it is about community.

Liz Welch is a journalist, memoirist and book collaborator.

STAFF SPOTLIGHT: MEMBERSHIP COORDINATOR JANA CUNNINGHAM'S QUARTER CENTURY OF SERVICE

January 20, 2026



By Leila Darabi

If you've ever been shopping at the Coop when a shopper uses the intercom to ask "Are we out of almond milk?" you may have heard the voice of Membership Coordina-

tor Jana Cunningham. She keeps her ears open for food-related intercom pages, and if the Coop is in fact out of the product, she sometimes shares a recipe instead.

“Call me if you want to learn how to make the best almond milk ever in five minutes!” she recently invited.

AN ISLAND GIRL

Cunningham was born in New York City. “I’m an island girl,” she said, explaining that she was born “on the island of Manhattan, in the village of Harlem,” before moving as a young child to “the mainland” and growing up in the South Bronx.

She describes her mother as an excellent cook. “My goodness! We could go to any restaurant, and she could walk out of there and recreate whatever the dish was from taste.”

When Cunningham was 13, she discovered Islam through her older sister and converted. Rather than explain to her mother that she now wanted to follow a religious diet and avoid non-Halal meat, she announced that she was vegetarian. Nearly five decades later, diet and nutrition remain extremely important parts of her life.

While her mother continued to cook meat, she also served vegetables and “beautiful salads” with every meal, and Cunningham said the “unintended consequence” of her shift in diet was feeling healthier.

“At 13, you don’t think you’re not feeling optimally well. You think this is how you feel,” she explained.

LEAVING CORPORATE LIFE

In her early years, Cunningham studied theater and dance and practiced yoga at home, and she has continued throughout her life. As an adult, however, she worked a corporate job at AT&T. One day, while listening to the radio on her lunch break, she

heard a promotion for a yoga event. As a child, she had loved the PBS program “Lilias, Yoga and You” and she described watching the show, following along, and then teaching her younger sister the poses she had learned.

The lunch break radio promotion reminded Cunningham of this early passion, and she decided to attend the event to meet the teacher. While there, she caught the teacher’s eye. “What are you doing in my class?” the teacher asked. “You should be teaching yoga.”

Cunningham eventually became a yoga instructor.

DISCOVERING THE COOP

Cunningham joined the Coop in 1993, not long after moving to Brooklyn. “In those days there was a street squad,” she explained—members whose work shift involved setting up a table in front of the store, talking to people who walked by, and canvassing for new members. Cunningham agreed to a tour and signed up.



Cunningham has seen the Coop evolve from the over 3,000-member community she

joined to a peak of over 17,000 members just before the COVID-19 pandemic.

“I had made a commitment to all-organic food, and I had three young children, and I practically emptied my savings account sticking to that commitment,” she said. The access to organic produce without breaking the bank and the cooperative philosophy of the Coop appealed to her.

In the beginning she worked different shifts, trying out different roles as a member. “Then I went to the office and I was like, ‘Oh, I like this best.’” One day in 1997, while working that shift, a staff member informed her of an open role for a paid position. Cunningham applied and got the job.

MEMBERSHIP COORDINATOR

Twenty-five years later, Cunningham remains on staff and has seen the Coop evolve from the over 3,000-member community she joined to a peak of over 17,000 members just before the COVID-19 pandemic.

“Running the Coop’s membership office has always been a very challenging job and requires a balanced, compassionate approach with great attention to fairness,” said Coop founder and General Manager Joe Holtz. “Jana has mastered this and more and has been a positive example for her colleagues. The Coop is lucky to have hired her more than 25 years ago.”

Cunningham said working in the office appealed to her “mommy gene.” She has always enjoyed both helping people and teaching, as she did when she taught yoga. (She continues to teach tai chi.) As a Membership Coordinator she counsels members on “cooperative behavior” and encourages them to be considerate and mindful of their roles in the Coop community.

When asked what advice she has for shoppers, Cunningham said, “When people come to shop here, they should not be in a rush.”

PANDEMIC SHIFT

Like all Coop staff, Cunningham's role changed when the store adopted strict COVID-19 protocols.

"The pandemic happened, and I went from an office job to managing a grocery store and being on the floor eight hours a day," she said.

Only staff could work, and members of any status could shop, eliminating the need for a team upstairs tracking member work shifts. "It didn't matter if you were suspended with five makeups, you could still shop," said Cunningham. "So all the membership coordinators went downstairs to run the store."



Like all Coop staff, Cunningham's role shifted when the store adopted strict COVID-19 protocols.

Rather than working from an office and managing member labor, she and her col-

leagues found themselves managing the store and temporary workers. “It was very different. It was a physically very demanding and exhausting couple of years,” she said.

PERMANENT CHANGES

Now that the Membership Office is back open, Cunningham and her colleagues have shifted jobs again, though they have not fully reverted to the roles they played prior to March 2020. “A lot of what we did [pre-pandemic] has moved online, so the job is changing,” she said.

While several membership coordinators have left their jobs in the past few years, the Coop has not filled every opening, in part because the labor needs have shifted. “The jobs here continuously evolve,” Cunningham explained.

“When I first started, there were only five or six Membership Coordinators.” Two years ago, she said, the membership staff was around 18 people and is now about 12, including a few on parental leave.

A DAY IN THE LIFE

Cunningham typically works Tuesday through Friday, four 10-hour shifts per week. She arrives at 7 a.m. to open the store and set up the membership office. She makes sure the cashiers have what they need, that there are tags at the entrance to help count the number of members shopping at any given time, and she sets up the office for her colleague who arrives at 8 a.m. to greet members working that shift.

Then it’s time to “open the gates.” Over the course of the day, Cunningham might help someone on suspension get a day pass to shop, respond to pages from members working on the floor who need assistance, and attend a staff meeting. A big part of her job is the behind-the-scenes office work that helps manage membership.

Cunningham shops at the Coop every day, purchasing greens and avocados to make

a salad for lunch, or picking up blueberries and yogurt for the next day's breakfast. On Fridays she does a larger shop for her days off and likes to walk the produce aisle to see what's new.

One of the many perks that has kept her happy in her job for over 25 years is the constant possibility of new discoveries.

"I like to try new things," she said.

Leila Darabi joined the Gazette as a reporter in 2016. She is the cohost of the Cringe-watchers podcast and shares photos of the things she cooks with Coop ingredients @persian_ish on Instagram.

STAFF SPOTLIGHT: MUSICIAN AND BANDLEADER FRANCISCO FERREIRO

January 20, 2026



By Leila Darabi

If you've ever encountered a man with curly brown hair, olive skin and a not-quite--placeable Australian accent calling out across the produce section or the loading dock as new deliveries arrive, you may be familiar with multipotentialite and Coop staff member Francisco Ferreiro.

He is a band leader, guitarist and educator who has at various points explored many

other areas and interests in life. He studied engineering and physics, worked as a seasonal farm worker on his grandfather's farm, completed compulsory military service in Spain at the age of 18, served in the Australian Air Force straight out of college for a year and a half and worked as a tutor and substitute teacher.

SEEKING FRESH PRODUCE

Born in Australia and raised between that country and his parents' native Spain, Francisco first found the Coop about four years ago while seeking out fresh produce in New York.

"In Spain, you can go out to the local corner store and buy a tomato that looks like the Lancaster tomatoes that we get—you know the really beautiful ones that we get [at the Coop]? I came from that," he said.

Moving from Europe to the U.S. and missing tomatoes that taste like tomatoes was a rude awakening. "But obviously the Coop is the next level, an oasis in the middle of the desert—a food oasis."

Francisco visited the Coop with his wife, Jazmine Arelis Catasús, a printmaker and papermaker. They had heard of the Coop through "Brooklyn folklore" and through a couple with whom they were close friends, Thomas and Jenny. "Thomas is French, and he kept talking about the cheese, the cheese, the cheese."

"THE COOP IS THE NEXT LEVEL, AN OASIS IN THE MIDDLE OF THE DESERT—A FOOD OASIS."

FRANCISCO FERREIRO

FROM SHOPPER TO STAFF

Francisco and Jazmine became members but quickly found themselves on alert due to Jazmine's hectic schedule as a printmaker, working a nighttime bar gig and babysitting.

"She would never do her shifts," laughed Francisco. "So we always had makeups, and I was always at the Coop. And at one point I thought, why don't I just try to get a job here?"

He went full-time at the start of the COVID-19 pandemic and now serves as a Receiving Coordinator in produce and receiving.

"I'm all over the place. I'm quite proud of that," said Francisco. "I've tried to learn as much as I can so far. And I just like to help out wherever I can. I like learning new things and meeting new people so that I'm always evolving."

DISCOVERING MUSIC

The pursuit of music—and acceptance at the prestigious Berklee College of Music in Boston—first lured Francisco to the United States.

After getting into some scuffles in Australia, his parents had sent him to live with his Spanish grandparents in a village outside of Albacete, a city between Valencia and Madrid. Francisco describes the place as a "stopover" between larger cities, a location to "water horses" and move on. "There wasn't much to do for teenagers."

There was, however, a thriving independent music scene as local independent bands had broken through and were touring throughout Spain and Europe. Francisco describes the sound as heavily influenced by the Manchester scene in England, evoking early Radiohead and Sonic Youth.

His grandfather—or *yayo* as he calls him—was a janitor at a music school, and from

an early age Francisco's family had encouraged him to play piano and guitar. They did not, however, encourage a career in music.

"The culture where I came from, [in] my family, music was a hobby. It wasn't something that you could really do [for a living]."

So while he started bands and began to play out at local venues in Spain, Francisco dipped his toe in other areas before accepting his fate as a professional musician.

FROM THE AIR FORCE TO THE STUDY OF SOUND

As a teen, he returned to Australia and spent a year studying for and passing the prerequisite exams to enter the University of New South Wales, where he studied engineering and science. Afterward, he immediately joined the Air Force.

While he loved flying and logged 150 military flight hours, he never saw himself as a soldier. "I remember I was ironing bed sheets in officer training school in Melbourne. It was about 2 a.m. on my first night there and I was like, 'What am I doing here?'"

After leaving the Air Force, he entered a master's program in acoustic physics, the study of sound waves. "I feel like acoustic physics was kind of like [my attempt to] mix music and physics."

But Francisco quickly found himself forming bands, arranging music, and playing shows, leaving little energy for the research demanded by his program. "I used to be surfing all day and playing music; it's just so far from who I am."

His supervisor, trained as a classical musician himself, one day pulled him aside and said: "Francisco, look, at one point I had to make a decision: I'm either going to do physics or become a musician."

Francisco made his choice and, as luck would have it, Berklee College of Music held

auditions in Australia soon after.

FROM GOSPEL CHURCHES TO AFRO-FUNK

After a year at Berklee, Francisco transferred to a school in New York, where he met his wife and made a permanent home. Over the past decade, he has taught physics and music and worked as a musician for a large gospel church in Queens.

Today, his main creative project is a seven-piece Afro-funk band called Turiya Electric, named in homage to jazz musician Alice Coltrane, who took the Sanskrit name Turiyasangitananda.

FINDING A CREATIVE COMMUNITY AT THE COOP

Francisco sees his role at the Coop as linked to his lifelong pursuit of the arts and science. “I feel like food is an empowering and enlightened tool. And for me, it really closely correlates to creativity. Food for me is an art form, too. What you eat is what you are, and it influences your spirit.”

He said he found like-minded creatives when he joined the Coop and then became staff.

“Everyone seemed really open and really cool, which they are. I feel like most of my coworkers are artists or musicians or just really open-minded liberal people. So it feels like a real creative environment.”

“I FEEL LIKE FOOD IS AN EMPOWERING AND ENLIGHTENED TOOL. AND FOR ME, IT REALLY CLOSELY CORRELATES TO CREATIVITY.”

FRANCISCO FERREIRO

CIRCLE OF LIFE

Though he has landed far from where he grew up, Francisco sees the Coop as a continuation of the appreciation for food and farmers that he learned from his Spanish grandparents.

“When I was little, I used to work on my grandfather’s land picking onions and stuff,” said Francisco. “I learned to ride a bicycle on the dirt track of a corn field. I remember the corn fields that day, and for me the association of food is so closely tied with who I am.”

He also links these early lessons to the Coop’s mission of equity.

“I think it’s extremely important in a big city like this that we are building community, so that we’re supporting each other, supporting small businesses, more farms, and growing together as a force,” said Francisco.

“Because we’ve all seen the other option. We’ve all seen monopolization. And we see what it does to the land, to the people, or to the communities. [We need to] make sure we’re reaching all parts of the community and giving everyone opportunities to access the food.”