

A SECOND LOCATION, HOLIDAY HOURS, AND THE PERILS OF DARK CHOCOLATE: MAY GENERAL MEETING REPORT

July 3, 2023



By Anita Bushell

The PSFC May 2023 General Meeting, which took place on Zoom and was attended by 128 people, focused on the referendum to approve the opening of a second PSFC loca-

tion, in addition to elections for the Annual Revolving Loan Committee, and the Annual Pension Education and Reporting Committee.

OPEN FORUM

In the Open Forum, members brought up several concerns, including the size of pre-bagged bulk aisle items, which some say are too large for those living alone. General Coordinator Joe Szladek said pre-bagging alleviates crowding in the aisle and that there are no plans to suspend it. Another member asked about paid staff members training Food Processing workers; General Coordinator Elinoar Astrinsky said workers must be trained by food handling professionals. The member clarified they would like to see this expense reflected in the general budget. A member requested where the names of current board members are; General Coordinator Ann Herpel said the names are not on the PSFC website, but are in Member Services. One member asked about masks being reinstated; Herpel said this issue might be addressed at the July General Meeting. Finally, Coop Treasurer/General Manager Joe Holtz acknowledged outgoing Board of Directors member Bill Penner and thanked him for his 15 years of service.

TREASURER'S REPORT

Holtz shared the financial summary for the 12-week period ending 4/23/23. Highlights included:

- Average weekly sales were \$1,046,541 (2023), compared to \$902,058 (2022)
- Money generated by sales/gross margin was \$2,467,000
- Expenses for the same period were \$2,383,000
- There was an \$84,000 gain (for the first time in years)

Holtz spoke about how membership growth could increase sales; (currently there are 15,700 members, compared to 17,000 before the pandemic).

In addition, Holtz discussed an informal agricultural loan of \$100,000 for seeds to a farm in financial need. Holtz reviewed the history of this practice, which was suspended during the pandemic, and stated this loan was a General Manager, not a General Coordinator, decision. Holtz mentioned the need for community-supported agriculture, suggesting members create a formal loan program, in anticipation of farm growing seasons. During the Q&A period, a member asked about communication; Holtz said the farm reached out to the PSFC.

GENERAL COORDINATOR REPORTS

Szladdek reported on the recent Consumer Reports study on high levels of cadmium and lead found in several brands of dark chocolate. 28 brands were tested, and cadmium or lead were found in 23. The PSFC contacted the FDA about the study's findings and is awaiting a response. Szladdek also spoke with the National Cooperative Grocer; one solution is to place signs in the chocolate section alerting members to the CR study. Szladdek stated the PSFC is waiting for more information before making a decision.

Herpel reported on staff changes: Receiving Coordinator Tim Mahoney has resigned. New Receiving Coordinators Eric Alger and Dennis Dorgan have started on night/week-end schedules. Part-time Receiving Coordinator Tanya Steinberg has moved to full-time status. Membership Coordinator Jack Stroman has rejoined the PSFC staff on a part-time basis.

Herpel discussed Juneteenth and July 4 holiday shopping hours (Juneteenth: Monday, June 19, 8 a.m.-5 p.m; Independence Day: Tuesday, July 4, 8 a.m.-5 p.m), and new office hours because Member Services has reduced demand for in-person services. Leave of Absence requests can now be made in Member Services. Length of a leave currently aligns with the six-week work cycle. Finally, Herpel reminded shoppers to stand in line (not proceed to a cashier) until called upon, avoiding congestion. During the Q&A a member asked about when Animal Welfare Committee guides to meat and dairy purchases would be available.

AGENDA ITEM: ANNUAL REVOLVING LOAN COMMITTEE ELECTION

Staff Liaison Holtz outlined the committee background in context of the International Principles of Cooperation and history of the PSFC advising other coops. As the practice continued “sometimes advice wasn’t enough; sometimes maybe money should be involved.” The Revolving Loan Fund and committee were created in 2012, with a donation of \$60,000 from the Coop (\$20,000 a year for three years). It is a donor-advised fund, and the committee looks after the money, directing where it is invested. Currently there are two outstanding loans to Greene Hill Food Coop (\$10,000 and \$12,000) at a 2% interest rate. Committee member Wendy Fleischer’s term is expiring, and Holtz gave Fleischer’s background, urging members to re-elect her. Members were directed to the Simply Voting website to vote and Fleischer was re-elected. During the Q&A period a member asked about loan defaults; Holtz stated the money is in a foundation. A loss would be to the fund, not the PSFC, as it no longer has fund access.

AGENDA ITEM: ANNUAL PENSION EDUCATION AND REPORTING COMMITTEE ELECTION

Jesse Shapiro gave the committee background, stating that he, Allison Thrush, and Kathy Martino are seeking re-election for second two-year terms. The committee does not act as an advisor or make decisions; its primary function is to monitor pensions and follow the investment guidelines the pension trustees have established. Shapiro gave his, Thrush, and Martino’s backgrounds. Members were directed to the Simply Voting website to vote and Shapiro, Thrush, and Martino were re-elected. During the Q&A period a member asked about overlap with newly elected members, as well as current projects the committee is working on. Shapiro responded that overlap would take place because of committee-term length, and that projects in development include a *Linewaiters’ Gazette* report.

AGENDA ITEM: REFERENDUM OF PSFC MEMBERS TO APPROVE SECOND LOCATION RECOMMENDATIONS

Second Location Committee member Jonathan Farber started the presentation, outlin-

ing the history of the proposal, introduced at the February 2015 General Meeting. A Second Location Study Committee was approved in July 2016.

The highlights of the proposal are as follows:

1) The PSFC should rent/lease a building of similar size to the PSFC that would allow for doubling pre-pandemic membership/revenue; 2) Locate the building near Park Slope; 3) Establish a budget of up to \$20,000,000, raised through a PSFC member loan program and outside funding. The key recommendation is for a referendum of all members to 1) form a new Second Location Steering Committee to prepare the Coop for this expansion; 2) to authorize the officers of the PSFC to approve the transactions and contracts necessary for implementation; and 3) to allow the Steering Committee to abandon the project if it is unworkable or undermines the financial strength of the PSFC. The group believes the study remains relevant to the future of the PSFC for four reasons: 1) Opening a second location is a multi-year process requiring significant advance planning; 2) the current membership drive demonstrates that demand for joining remains high and is key to success at a second location; 3) other Northeast communities in New York, Vermont, Massachusetts, and Maine have successfully expanded coops; and 4) Brooklyn retail real estate has fallen significantly, making a second location more feasible.

Farber asked the membership to review the report, located on the PSFC website, and outlined next steps, which include voting to authorize a referendum of all members to decide if/how the PSFC opens a second location; and hold the referendum, hopefully in September, for members to approve/disapprove the recommendations of the Second Location Study Report.

Holtz spoke about the ongoing demand for PSFC membership. New applications were processed starting in December 2021, but the demand continues to grow. “We have built a good thing, this cooperative that we all contribute to; what is our obligation to others when we have a good thing?” Holtz asked members, urging them to approve the referendum.

Micheal Freedman-Schnaap outlined key findings of the Second Location Study Report, noting that the last PSFC expansion was in 2000-02. He stated “we are testing the limits of what is possible in this space” in terms of current membership versus how much food can come in/out of the building.

Holtz defined what a referendum is, in this case advice to the Board of Directors on whether to empower a Second Location steering committee.

In the Q&A period members asked about the comparison to coops that are not located in New York City; the age of the report, which predates the pandemic; and the financial feasibility of a second location.

Members were directed to the Simply Voting website to vote and the referendum did not pass, by a vote of 74 no and 64 yes.

BOARD OF DIRECTORS APPROVAL

Bill Penner asked the Board to approve the April minutes and asked the Board whether they were in favor of accepting the advice of the membership in reference to Agenda Items One, Two, and Three from the 5/30/23 General Meeting, which the Board accepted.

Anita Bushell is a freelance writer who has been published in Friends Journal, Ford Foundation Report, and Uncensored: American Experiences with Poverty and Homelessness. She just published Object Essays.

HOW TWO COOP MEMBERS SEEDED A BRONX COMMUNITY GARDEN

July 3, 2023



Erik Schurink '23

ILLUSTRATION BY ERIK SCHURINK

By Sara Ivry

Park Slope Food Coop members Bruce Zeines and Sheryll Durrant spend a lot of their time thinking about food. How to grow it. How to distribute it equitably. How to make it a more integral and healthy part of the lives of people in their community—their neighbors in the Longwood section of the South Bronx, in one of the country's poorest Congressional districts.

They are relative newcomers to the area. Zeines and Durrant moved there from Brooklyn in 2016 to take up quarters in what was a superintendent's apartment. Their new home was in the basement of a building that's one of four enclosing a thriving oasis of green. The 8500-square-foot patch of Eden is known as the Kelly Street Garden, is where they now spend their days.

Indeed, Kelly Street is what brought them to the Bronx in the first place, to take up positions as its general manager (Zeines) and resident garden manager (Durrant).

IT'S NOT ALWAYS ABOUT DOLLARS, IT'S ABOUT CREATING SOMETHING THAT MAKES PEOPLE FEEL GOOD.

"We were looking for something with meaning," Zeines explains on the phone, birds chirping in the background. Until they moved, Zeines made a living as an art director and Durrant worked in marketing for everything from casinos to a housewares company to a university.

All the while, they were committed members of the Park Slope Food Coop, availing themselves of fresh produce and reasonable prices while nurturing an awareness of larger issues such as food distribution networks and food justice.



Being a PSFC member “dovetailed with me getting interested in eating healthy,” Durrant says. “Understanding that The Coop was intentional about relationships with farmers. It was this whole gestalt about how The Coop’s food is related to the well being of the farmers who grow the food.”

It was not the first time she’d thought about how food grows.

“Both sides of my family are steeped in agriculture,” says Durrant, who hails from Jamaica. “We had a large yard. We grew fruit trees. We grew food.”

In her home country, as in many places, a life in farming is associated with financial insecurity. Given that, Durrant’s goal was “to move to the city, to go into a career where there is financial well being.”

Ergo the casinos. Yet even while that was going on, Durrant embarked on a return to her roots; she volunteered in local community gardens in Ditmas Park and elsewhere. Two years after the 2008 financial crash, she took a retirement package and dove into volunteering full time, networking and learning from other urban gardeners. In 2014, she attended Farm School NYC, an urban agriculture training institution that holds classes across city gardens, farms, and class spaces. Now a leader in the field, she has developed community-based projects, mentored others in how to run community gardens, become a master composter, and designed and led workshops related to food justice and food insecurity.

In addition to her work at Kelly Street, Durrant also serves as the Food and Nutrition Coordinator for New Roots Community Farm, a robust half-acre site in the Bronx managed by the International Rescue Committee.

But back in 2016, when the couple first arrived at Kelly Street, the garden was something of a mess. “It was disorganized,” Zeines says. “We had to run it the way you run a business. We had to have a small staff. We had to pay small stipends.”

To do so, they applied for grants and other sources of fundraising to pull together some \$5,000. They started public programming in the garden, offering Qi Gong classes, instruction on herbal medicine, drumming, Congolese dancing, and print and other art making. Along with garden staff and volunteers, they grew and dried herbs to supply a community apothecary. They began the community food education program, where local chefs come in for food demonstrations using garden produce. And they grew vegetables, fruit, legumes, and plants of all kinds.

The collective aim of these garden-building programs is, Zeines says, to provide a source of “joy coming from a space, from the fact that you’re around things that are growing.”

THE GARDEN FOR ME HAS BEEN SOUL BIRTHING. WE ASSUME WE HAVE A SOUL,

BUT I THINK WE HAVE TO GROW ONE.

“Community gardens are good for communities, but it’s not something developers have a shared opinion about,” he continues. “It’s not always about dollars, it’s about creating something that makes people feel good.... It’s a known fact that working in the soil, working around things that are alive is very good for the spirit. It’s therapeutic, soil therapy.”

Durrant agrees. “Working outside is the best thing you can ever do. It’s very liberating. And it also opens your eyes about the deep food insecurity that exists in America.”

“Everybody needs to know where their food comes from, how it’s grown, and also to have care for the people who serve you your food when you eat in a restaurant and who grows it,” she continues. “What surprises me is how little value we put on something that is integral to our well being. America’s food system is trash, highly profit oriented, too much sugar, too much filler, and the emphasis on clean, healthy food—it’s made to seem unattainable and that only a certain level of people can afford it. Everyone should have access to healthy food.”

To that end, the garden, whose operating budget is now about \$140,000 a year, runs a free farmers market on Fridays from April through October where volunteers and staff provide fresh food to some 400 households a week. Kelly Street supplies the market’s produce along with New Roots and upstate farmers, some of whom, like Hepworth, are also Food Coop suppliers.



More generally, the existence of community gardens signal, Durrant says, a neighborhood's response to calamity of some sort—crises of addiction, incarceration, or gun violence for example.

"In the Bronx, a lot of the community gardens grew out of the Decade of Fire," which left abandoned and vacant lots in its wake, she says. "Community gardens are from members who stayed in and decided they'd reclaim their space. It is in response to trauma, so people can have respite."

Kelly Street Garden, like others of its kind, strengthens ties among community members who work together for food security, sharing the fruits of their labor with one another and with others, no questions asked. Working in them, Zeines points out, offers a way to learn about oneself.

“This garden is led by women of color. This is a community of color and here I am, a white Jewish guy, and I had to confront myself in a lot of ways,” he says, explaining that in spite of his or anyone’s best efforts to be open minded and compassionate to one another, we all harbor latent prejudices and we all have ego.

“The garden for me has been soul birthing. We assume we have a soul, but I think we have to grow one.”

Sara Ivry is a long-time member of the Park Slope Food Coop. She’s delighted stone fruit season is finally upon us again and already grieving the end of summer.

STORY OF PLASTIC SCREENING & PANEL FOR PARK SLOPE FOOD COOP MEMBERS

July 3, 2023



By Rebecca Davis, for the Environmental Committee

The Story of Plastic, the award-winning documentary, will be made available for free streaming for all Park Slope Food Coop members between July 6 and July 20. This film presents a cohesive timeline of how we got to our current global plastic pollution crisis, and how the oil and gas industry has successfully manipulated the narrative around it.

To watch the film, register [here](#) to receive a link for free streaming. Then, on July 18, from 7-8:30 p.m. join members from the Environmental Committee, and Beyond Plastics Policy Director Megan J. Wolff, PhD, MPH for an online discussion to find out how plastics affect our shopping, our bodies and our lives and what we can do together to put an end to it.

The world's population has tripled since the 1950s, but production of plastic has increased over 70 fold in the same period (and is on track to double again by 2040). This has consequences for every living thing on the planet. Most visibly, animals eat and choke on plastics (or become entangled), but less apparent are the tiny microplastics that are now being found in the human body, including in breast milk and newborn babies. Plastic is in and around us. Why is this happening? What are the impacts, and what can we do? How might this affect what we buy and eat from the Coop itself?

ANNOUNCING THE RESTART OF THE COOP'S COOKING CLASS

July 3, 2023



By Jeff Bonar, for the Cooking Class Squad

The Food Coop Cooking Class Squad is delighted to announce our post-Covid restart. Our virtual sessions are free and open to members and non-members alike.

The Coop Cooking Class squad first and foremost celebrates our community. Every time you visit the store, you are surrounded by brilliant professional chefs, innovative food entrepreneurs, home cooks representing every food tradition on the planet, and everyday chefs with a passion to prepare something special. We celebrate guest chefs of every category in our classes.

The Coop Cooking Class is also a celebration of the bounty inside the store. Many of us are delightfully engaged with the goods during each shop, trying to figure out what that new thing is, and how to best utilize it, and asking ourselves can I really carry one more thing home. Even for old favorites like summer squash, there are many new varieties and fresh and tasty examples. Who among us hasn't said "I wasn't planning

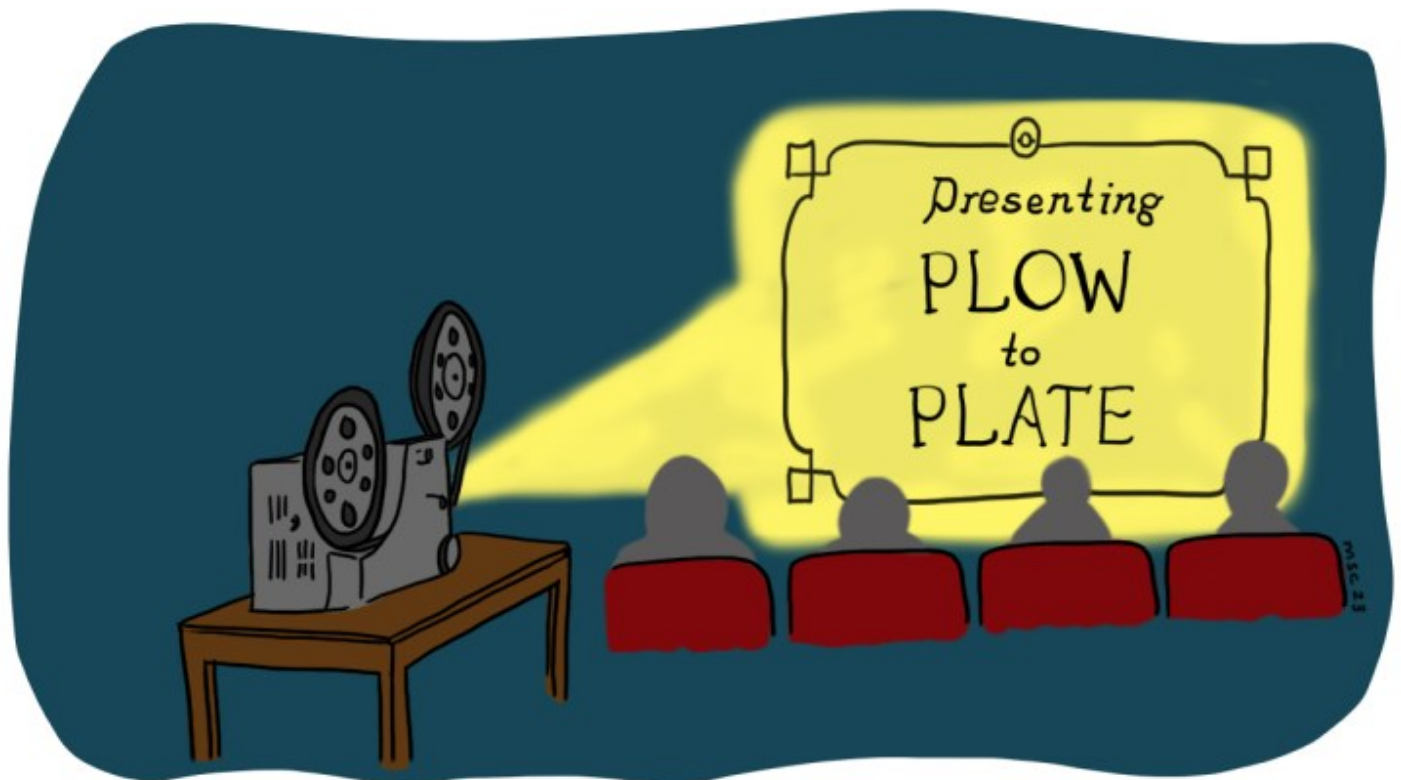
to buy more _____ , but that purple version looks so good...", or "I have no idea what to do with _____ , but I love how it looks and smells...". If you can relate, then the Coop Cooking Classes are for you.

Come celebrate our bounty with us while leveling up your cooking skills.

You can follow us on Instagram at @foodcoopcooks and get more information at Food-CoopCooks.org.

PLOW TO PLATE FILM SERIES

July 3, 2023



AMERICAN MEAT

By Adam Rabiner

American Meat is a 2013 documentary focusing on pig, poultry and cattle farming in the United States past, present and possibly future. Hog farmer Chuck Wirtz from West Bend, Iowa is typical of the present-day farmers who prefer the industrialized model for its efficiency and productivity. Whereas earlier in the 20th century, swine, like many farm animals, were raised in open barns on larger areas of land. By mid-century, they were brought indoors and confined to smaller, temperature-controlled spaces. Now one of Chuck's pigs will spend its entire life confined to a ten by eighteen-foot space with 24 brethren.

Like many of the farmers interviewed in this film, farming is Chuck's family business, passed down from parents to children. Chuck did not go to college but started taking care of the pigs full-time right out of high school. When Chuck was a boy, he spent hours upon hours helping his parents by pitching manure while listening to a transistor radio. As an adult he spends a good portion of his day walking through the Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations (CAFO) looking for sick pigs, segregating those ill ones from the others and administering antibiotic shots. The work is less physical than it used to be. As a child he and his parents could spend all day caring for 500 animals. Today with the aid of machines to pump, haul and spread manure, he can take care of 10,000 in two hours.

Chuck finds that farming brings him closer to God and the wonder of his creations, whether through witnessing the birth of an animal or seeing a crop slowly grow from seed to harvest. His worldview is traditional and homocentric. God created his pigs for food to sustain humans.

Standing in stark contrast to this paradigm and representing the potential future of farming, Joel Salatin, owner of Polyface Farm in Swoope, Virginia, believes in letting his animals be their true selves. Unlike many conventional farmers who debeak their chickens to prevent cannibalistic behavior, Salatin observes natural patterns of animal behavior and uses them to his advantage. His birds are allowed to express their "chickenness."

Nicknamed the “Lunatic Farmer,” Joel has invented various contraptions such as The Egg Mobile and a composting barn known as The Pigaerator where cows spend the winter eating hay and creating manure. Corn is periodically added to the hay-manure mix and fermented over time. In the spring the cows are released into the fields to eat fresh grass and the pigs are brought into the barn where they smell the fermenting corn and dig deep to eat it. This mixes air into the manure-hay mixture which creates compost which is then spread on the fields in the fall and helps to create a new harvest of healthy, nutrient-rich grass for the cows the following spring. And the cycle continues.

AMERICAN MEAT CONCLUDES THAT IT IS POSSIBLE TO TRANSITION TO A WORLD WHERE THE POLYFACE MODEL IS THE NORM IN THE UNITED STATES.

Many farmers have already begun to emulate Salatin’s low-tech, non-capital-intensive solutions requiring physical labor which the film holds up as an idealized vision for what farming can look like. Ironically, farmhands pulling “egg mobiles” across pastures call to mind the way families worked the land side by side in the past. Back to the Future.

Polyface Farm, for all its innovations that set it apart, shares industrial farming’s emphasis on efficiency. However, while industrial agriculture achieves this from scale, capital equipment, computers, modern machinery, chemical fertilizers and contemporary medicine, Polyface and its imitators have achieved impressive and similar results from the intelligent use of land and animals rotating across the same acreage.

American Meat concludes that it is possible to transition to a world where the Polyface model is the norm in the United States. To realize this vision would require hundreds of millions of acres, but there are currently a billion acres of pasture and crop land in the United States. Because it is much more labor-intensive than current methods, such a shift would require a new generation of young farmers—which is beginn-

ing to happen. Several other changes would be necessary including redirecting subsidies for manure pits and corn and soy production, as well as funding innovations in distribution and production, including farmers' markets, buying clubs and community supported agriculture (CSAs). More companies would have to source from these smaller, local farms, as Whole Foods and Chipotle have begun to do. Pollyannish or no?

American Meat, July 11, 2023 @ 7:00 p.m.

Screening link: <http://www.plowtoplatefilms.com/events/>

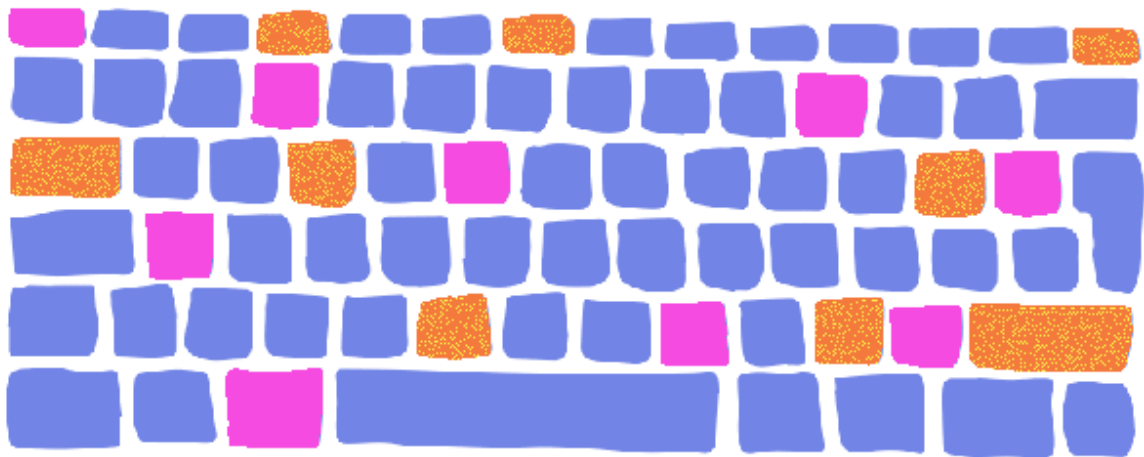
To be added to our mailing list for future screening announcements, please email a request to jsfaerber@yahoo.com.

Adam Rabiner lives in Ditmas Park with his wife Dina and two children, Elan and Ana.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

July 3, 2023

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



LET THE PEOPLE VOTE ON A SECOND STORE!

To the Editor,

I've been excited about the idea of the Coop opening a second store, but I wasn't able to make the May General Meeting. So is that really that?? Please put it on the

agenda again, and for those who get the chance to vote on it at a future GM—please let it move forward so that all of us can have a say!

This idea is about charting a way forward for the Coop—creating a new location would allow us to significantly expand the Coop’s membership, giving many more people (in a new neighborhood!) access to the amazing, affordable food selection all of us love. Cooperatives around the world operate according to a set of seven core values, and launching a second store would advance at least two of them: concern for community, and voluntary and OPEN membership. Our current store isn’t big enough to let everyone in who wants to be in, and the Coop has had to cap membership for years. The Coop is an extremely cool model of cooperation that most people have never seen before, that could enrich a lot of other people’s lives. Let’s share that!

Even if you have reservations about this idea, what the Second Location Study Committee is proposing is to create a NEW committee, which would continue to develop the idea and move it forward only if feasible. In other words, every good question that you have will be considered by that new, very smart group of people, and if that group can’t figure out how to make it work, it won’t happen. So why waste all of the work that’s been done so far by voting the idea down now?

Please don’t let fear rule the day. Give this proposal another chance & let the second store move forward!

Iele Paloumpis

DITCH THE FLIMSY CHEESE WRAP

To the Editor,

I was impressed by how little waste we generate. But we could do much better. I can’t

fathom why the cheeses still need to be wrapped in plastic. A few years ago, at least the plastic wrap was substantial and could be reused as long as the cheese was in the house. But this thin, perhaps less toxic wrap is bad all around. I'm sure no one likes to unwrap the cheese from under those sticky, sticky labels that hold the loose ends. My husband simply tears it open, leaving the cheese unwrapped to dry out and spoil. I undertake the painstakingly difficult task of pulling the ends of the plastic from under the label so I can rewrap the cheese and keep it for 10 days or so. The plastic we use now rips so easily there is little left to maintain the freshness of the cheese. A bad situation all around.

The new Zero Waste store in my neighborhood uses a paper called Formaticum, a paper that will biodegrade but is specifically designed to keep the cheese fresh. I belong to the Coop for several reasons, but minimizing my environmental impact is very, very important to me, and I'm guessing, to most members. Please make the transition. I'm willing to pay more for the environment. And thank you.

Ann Schneider

LET THE FULL MEMBERSHIP VOTE ON A SECOND STORE

To the Editor,

I'm disappointed that the idea of the Coop opening a second store was shot down at a recent GM by a margin of just 10 votes. I hope the Coop will give the idea a second hearing and allow all members to weigh in.

The Second Location Study Committee (which I'm not a part of) has been working to determine the feasibility of this idea for the last six years. The group includes people with expertise in urban planning, business, community development, and the creation of grocery stores that improve food access for underserved neighborhoods. They've

determined that the idea could work—the Coop has more money than ever before, we have a tried-and-true, scalable model, we could launch a second store without financial risk to the current one, and it would allow us to let in thousands of new members the current store can't accommodate.

The Committee wants to put the proposal to a vote of the full membership, and give members a month to cast their ballots—enough time for everyone to review the proposal, ask questions, and vote on their own schedule. But they can't do that unless it makes it through a GM—an hours-long experience that many members don't have time for, or don't fully understand the importance of. People at the GM asked some good questions about the proposal, but rather than allowing the conversation to continue, they voted to end it in a meeting that less than 1% of members attended.

This proposal gets at the heart of the Coop's mission: providing affordable, fresh food, in community. A second store would allow us to give that to thousands more. Please put this on the GM agenda again, vote yes to let the conversation continue, and then let all of the members decide.

Adrien Lorenzo Weibgen

DEMOCRACY DIES IN DARKNESS—BUT THE SECOND LOCATION SHOULD NOT

To the Editor,

Should 15,000 more people have access to the good food, low prices, and cooperation that we enjoy at the Coop? Should the Coop double its tremendous impact for the community and regional farmers? This is some of the promise of a second location of the Coop, which the May General Meeting (GM) struck down by only 14 votes to move to a Coop-wide referendum.

The GM had 138 votes, less than 1% of active members. It was a marked contrast in verdict and sample size to the 2018 survey in which 86% of members strongly or somewhat supported a second Coop location. That survey saw 2,442 members respond—17 times the GM vote.

Expansion is not only a question about the future but also a crucial part of Coop history. We grew by nearly 10,000 members from 2001 to 2022, and those members could not have joined but for real estate purchases and transformations like accepting debit cards. The second location would continue that lineage of generosity that the majority of members have benefited from.

There are many important questions about a second location: Where should it be? How should it be funded? The Second Location Study Committee (SLSC) has grappled with these questions for nearly a decade. Their Draft Report and Recommendations and infographic give me confidence that we can answer those questions collectively.

We should engage with the Draft Report and make our voices heard, and we can look to Coop history for hope. Michael Freedman-Schnapp of the SLSC noted that the early 2000s expansion “was actually voted down the first time in a referendum [several years earlier]. So we were incredibly lucky that the opportunity to purchase that building came up again.” May we earn that second chance and take it so fruitfully.

In cooperation,

Phil Wong

A BELOVED MEMBER'S PASSING, LOVE FOR THE LOUDSPEAKER & THE AMY'S KITCHEN SITUATION: NOTES FROM THE FEBRUARY 28 GENERAL MEETING

July 3, 2023



By Sara Ivry

More than 100 Coop members gathered on Zoom for the February 28 General Meeting, which focused on two issues: the tragic loss of long-time member Rachel Porter and how to boost member involvement in General Meetings.

Porter, who died earlier this year from cancer (see related article), was a vocal and impassioned participant in the Coop since joining in the 1990s. As the meeting kicked off, Chair Committee Member Josef Szende invited participants to share their

thoughts on her passing, while noting that in her spirit the meeting should also be productive.

Joe Holtz, the Coop's general manager, treasurer and a general coordinator, praised Porter's commitment to the Coop and to its ideals, noting that she founded the Committee Oversight Committee, now getting off the ground. She also co-founded and chaired the Revolving Loan Committee, a fund meant to help launch coops elsewhere.

This year is the Coop's 50th birthday. "In 2013, the only reason we had a fortieth birthday party was because Rachel Porter made it happen," Holtz said. "She was a person who loved the Coop, loved the model of the Coop, talked about how important our Coop model was all the time and what she meant by that was member involvement. She just cared so deeply about the Coop, and she will be extremely missed. I will miss her deeply."

Other Coop members and staff echoed Holtz's sentiments. General Coordinator Elinor Astrinsky remembered Porter making a presentation on how the Coop operates at an event on ways of tackling hunger in New York City presented by Congresswoman Nydia Velazquez.

"IN 2013, THE ONLY REASON WE HAD A FORTIETH BIRTHDAY PARTY WAS BECAUSE RACHEL PORTER MADE IT HAPPEN."

GENERAL MANAGER JOE HOLTZ

"She was very well spoken and very passionate about the Coop. I too will miss her," Astrinsky said, also recalling Porter's thoughtfulness and culinary talents. "She was the best baker around. She made the staff Christmas cookies just of her own volition."

Member Mitzie Rothzeit pointed out that members who run the *Linewaiters' Gazette* had recently refused to publish a submission about matters including member-staff relations by Porter, alleging it was too long and too negative. The *Gazette*, Rothzeit said, owes it to Porter given her passing to publish it in full after all. (Editors' Note: Porter's letter did not comply with the guidelines for publishing letters in the *Gazette*; these guidelines are available in the newsletter's About section.)

Pivoting to a discussion of Coop finances, Holtz presented preliminary data comparing gains and losses in the year that just ended at the close of January 2023 with those at the end of the close of January 2022. The data are preliminary as the Coop is currently undergoing an audit. That said, total expenses for the year just ended were about \$1.7m less than they were the year before. Holtz explained that at the height of the pandemic, the Coop employed more staff than it did in the past year. He also observed that the operating income loss was less in the past year than the year prior, and that cash flow was now up more than \$2 million thanks to government assistance in the form of employee retention credits. In addition, the temporary price mark-up from 21 to 25 percent—imposed to offset pandemic-related losses—is still in place.

Several members wondered whether the mark-up should become permanent to guard against unexpected economic downturns or other challenges in the future. Holtz countered that “low prices are part of our strength, so I would like us to keep recovering from Covid, keep our sales higher and controlling our expenses and hopefully we could lower the mark-up over time and get back to where we used to be, or as close as possible, while being financially prudent.”

In her report from the general coordinators, Astrinsky observed there has been a shortage of people signing up for cleaning slots at the end of the day and truck unloading first thing in the morning, and encouraged members to take these shifts if they are able. She noted the hiring of Receiving Coordinator Miles Golightly and reported that Coop leadership sent out a survey regarding member preferences over whether to continue a mask requirement.

(Since the survey went out and the February General Meeting took place, the Coop lifted its mask mandate.)

Member Rachel Bergstein took issue with the survey, objecting to the lack of opportunity to add notes and its limited range of questions. “The survey now,” she said, has “no way to bring in a disability justice point of view and center the voices of people who have the most need [for masks].”

JD Davids seconded this opinion, noting that the point of the survey should not hinge on member preference but on need. If there’s even one member who needs others to be masked because they are medically vulnerable, then the spirit of the Coop and co-operation demands that we keep them.

But member Daniella Liebling said that since both the Centers for Disease Control and the city had lifted mask mandates, so too the Coop should lift it post-haste.

The Labor Committee’s Erica Smith reported on the Coop’s stance regarding Amy’s Organics, which has laid off some workers after they tried to form a union. Smith said that Amy’s is in the process of building a facility in the New York area. Given the amount of business the Coop does with Amy’s, perhaps it can play an influential role in encouraging the company to condone and respect unionizing efforts.

“THE MISSION OF THE MEMBER INVOLVEMENT COMMITTEE WOULD BE TO INCREASE A CULTURE OF INFORMED SELF-GOVERNANCE BY CREATING NEW WAYS FOR MEMBERS TO COMMUNICATE WITH EACH OTHER AND TO PARTICIPATE IN CO-OPERATION.”

GEORGE SARAH OLKEN, MEMBER

Members introduced two proposals in the General Meeting’s agenda portion. The first

was presented by Beth Ruck and George Sarah Olken, who picked up a discussion they first introduced last summer: the creation of the Member Involvement Committee (MIC), which aims to create new channels of communication between and among members.

According to Olken and Ruck, there is a need for a body or vehicle for members to communicate with one another and share ideas outside of the General Meeting, which a small minority of members attend.

“We all love the paging system at the Coop,” Olken said. Along those lines, then the “mission of the Member Involvement Committee would be to increase a culture of informed self-governance by creating new ways for members to communicate with each other and to participate in cooperation.”

Among Ruck and Olken’s suggestions are signs posted alerting members to the big issues at future General Meetings near check-out; a table set-up outside the front door where a broad swath of members might be solicited to answer surveys; open mic events; a bulletin board where news might be posted.

“This committee will be a resource for membership,” Olken said. “Outreach and education is core to its mission. We need to understand what we want, who we are, and so we’re going to create more spaces for members to weigh in and more spaces to communicate.”

He suggested that the work of the proposed MIC would lessen the burden on Coop staff who field questions from members.

Ruck added that the committee would strive to get involvement from diverse members, and would have a multi-tiered management structure and offer members work-slot credits.

“I FIND IT NOURISHING TO SEE THIS FORUM AND THIS EXCHANGE OF VIEWS AND SO MANY OTHER PEOPLE WITH DIFFERENT EXPERIENCES WHO BRING IT ALL TO BEAR AND SPEAK.”

BRIAN SHUMAN, MEMBER

While some members at the General Meeting praised the idea of seeking out more member input into the all decisions at the Coop—noting that out of a membership of thousands, there were just over one hundred attending at the meeting—others took issue with the need for creating another committee, and one that seems inessential and redundant given that channels of communication already exist, including the *Line-waiters’ Gazette* and social media accounts.

General Coordinator Ann Herpel questioned the assumption that low attendance at General Meetings indicates membership disengagement with the Coop. “In fact, 12,000 people are engaged on a regular basis through their work slot,” she said. “We don’t know what happens on their work slot where they’re engaged with other members, and they’re engaged with staff. That might be the level of participation they want in the Coop and there’s nothing wrong with that.”

She furthermore noted that asking for work slots to incentivize participation in such a committee takes away from more urgent work needs, referring to the shortages Astrinsky reported. In addition, she said the Coop is a complex organization and many member queries are in fact ones only staff can answer. Olken’s suggestion, therefore, that this proposed committee would ease staff workloads is misguided.

Wally Wentworth suggested one way to increase attendance at General Meetings is to offer work credit for attendance, as was the case before the pandemic. His comment foreshadowed a proposal presented at the meeting—the last of the evening—by Daniella Liebling designed to encourage greater membership attendance and partici-

pation at General Meetings. Her idea is that meetings be simultaneously in person and remote for those who cannot physically attend. She also proposes restoring work credit for attending, and that remote attendees be required to keep their cameras on for the duration of the meeting to receive credit.

Holtz objected to the idea of giving remote attendees credit. He also said that to assume greater attendance at meetings means necessarily greater engagement is false, as January General Meetings used to have very high attendance rates owing to the fact that people were making up shifts they had missed over the holidays, and not because they suddenly were proof of a desire to participate in democratic processes.

For his part, member Brian Shuman finds attending General Meetings is its own reward.

“I find it nourishing to see this forum and this exchange of views and so many other people with different experiences who bring it all to bear and speak,” Shuman said. “I don’t always agree with what everybody says, but I think it’s a wonderful forum and that in and of itself makes meetings worth attending whether in person or remotely.”

Sara Ivry is a long-time member of the Park Slope Food Coop. She lives in Clinton Hill with her son and her dog.

HUDSON VALLEY FARM COOP COMMITTEE REPORT

July 3, 2023



By Jonathan Farber

The Park Slope Food Coop (PSFC) voted at the April 2021 General Meeting to become the original sponsor of a new and separate cooperative business, the Hudson Valley Farm Coop (HVFC). The website is under development at <https://www.hvfarmcoop.com/>.

The Hudson Valley Farm Coop is a proposed enterprise that will acquire, improve, and operate fifteen farms in the Hudson Valley for the benefit of its shareholders and the wider community. The start-up budget for the project is \$30 million. The HVFC will raise funds through a unique financial mechanism called a Direct Public Offering, and will provide its members the rare opportunity to own a stake in socially progressive and ecologically regenerative farms. Investments will help to recreate, sustain, and protect this wonderful corner of our threatened and critical agricultural region.

Since our last update, published in the July 2022 edition of the *Linewaiters' Gazette*, the Park Slope Food Coop Hudson Valley Farm Coop Committee (HV FCC) has reached full operating capacity with nine active Coop members and General Manager Joe

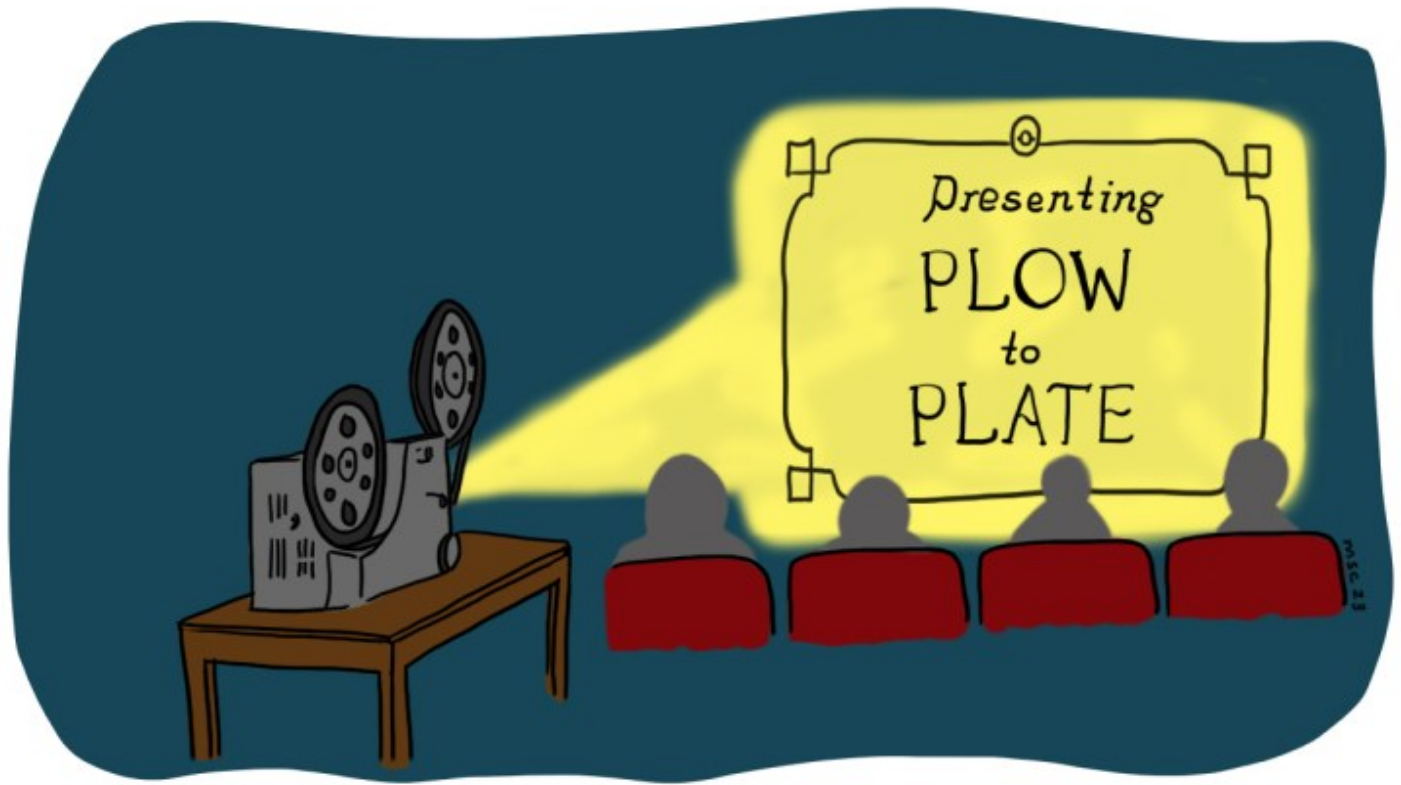
Holtz. We have formed three working groups focused on writing the business plan, preparing the financial model and developing an outreach and marketing strategy. The full committee meets monthly in-person and we anticipate opening a portion of our monthly meetings for PSFC members to attend when the Coop is able to provide in-store meeting space for larger groups.

The HVFCC is recruiting for pro bono legal assistance from one or more Coop members. The proposed HVFC will be a not-for-profit Cooperative Corporation licensed in New York and legal consultation provided may fulfill pro bono service requirements. This is an opportunity to work with a diverse team creating positive change in our food and farming systems.

The most immediate need is for attorneys to assist with filing a Certificate of Incorporation; preparing bylaws, structuring and administering a Direct Public Offering and promoting a farm worker, and more. Interested PSFC members may reach out to: info@hvfarmcoop.com.

PLOW TO PLATE FILM SERIES

July 3, 2023



Sweet Dreams

By Adam Rabiner

The 2012 documentary *Sweet Dreams* is about the people of Rwanda who in 1994 experienced a genocide in which over 500,000 Tutsi were killed and the country severely traumatized, including members of the first and only female drumming troupe, Ingoma Nshya, which means “new drum” or “new kingdom.” Ingoma Nshya’s founder, theater director Odile “Kike” Katese, intended the troupe to usher in a new chapter of support, healing, and reconciliation. Traditionally, women were not allowed to touch drums, an instrument performed by men for kings, not for any sacred reason but because they were deemed to be “too heavy.”

Ingoma Nshya’s members are both Hutus and Tutsis. Some are widows whose husbands have been murdered; others are wives of husbands who have been imprisoned. There are rape victims, children of imprisoned parents and orphans who are the sole surviving members of their family. But these differences are secondary to each musician’s insistence on commitment, such as showing up on time for rehearsals. All

find drumming healing and cathartic.

More broadly, Kike feels her countrymen and women are broken, empty bodies moving in space, but dead inside. They need to re-learn life, re-experience joy, smile, cry and feel again, create new memories and traditions. When, in 2009 Kike meets the two proprietors of Brooklyn's Blue Marble Ice Cream, Jennie Dundas and Alexis Gallivan, it occurs to her that this delicious, fun and joyous dessert could help Rwandans discover how to live happily again. She asks if they can help her open Rwanda's first local ice cream shop, to be named *Inzoni Nziza*—Sweet Dreams—a cooperative to be founded by the drummers.

THE WOMEN HAVE A LOT RIDING ON THIS VENTURE, A MEANS OF FINANCIAL SECURITY HARD TO COME BY IN RURAL RWANDA.

You share the troupe's enthusiasm as they excitedly set out to visit a neighboring bee-keeping collective in the Nyungwe Forest, inspect a dairy cooperative, locate a retail space (where they post a handmade cotton sign proclaiming, "coming soon, ice cream, coffee, and dreams"), form committees and start taking English lessons and basic business classes.

Yet inevitably various dramas and obstacles ensue, such as which ten lucky women will be selected for the coveted positions of store employees. Can the women afford the monthly dues required of them, and will the essential ice-cream maker, donated by South Africa, be fixed in time for the grand opening? The suspense, tension, pain and hope in that final one week countdown to opening day is palpable. The women have a lot riding on this venture, a means of financial security hard to come by in rural Rwanda.

The women show they learn a lot from their marketing lessons. At the grand opening they rent a truck and drive it through town shouting slogans worthy of a professional

PR firm:

“Ice cream is here! It’s the New Thing.”

“It’s hot, it’s very cold, it’s good.”

“If you’re old, it’ll make you young again.”

At the ribbon cutting ceremony they give out free samples, pound on their drums all day and are deliriously happy. Their sweet dreams are coming true.

The story of Ingoma Nshya shows how friendships can thrive even among those who have every reason to fear or hate one another. It demonstrates that we have more in common with one another, in this case artistic freedom and expression, passion for music, dance and song, and liberation from sexist taboos, than artificially constructed reasons that divide us.

The engaging business tale chronicling the creation of Inzoni Nziza is also one of persistence in the face of adversity, of cooperation and compromise, of taking classroom learning and applying it with concrete planning and action and ultimately, the reason Plow to Plate has chosen to present this film, the power of ice cream to transform a nation.

THEIR SWEET DREAMS ARE COMING TRUE.

Together these organizations give the women so much confidence and empowerment that they later partner with male drummers from Rwanda and their brother country, Burundi, to put on a joint collaborative celebration of festive drumming, dancing, singing and joy making.

When they board a plane for an international tour in Holland—many for the first time—they are not intimidated at all but rather excited for what the future holds. They have come a long way in putting their past traumas behind them as they move towards a more optimistic and peaceful future.

SWEET DREAMS

A FILM BY ROB AND LISA FRUCHTMAN



Sweet Dreams, April 18, 2023 @ 7:00 p.m.

Screening link: <http://www.plowtoplatefilms.com/events/>

Adam Rabiner lives in Ditmas Park with his wife, Dina, and two children, Elan and Ana.

IN MEMORY OF RACHEL PORTER

July 3, 2023



By Thomas Rayfiel

During the pandemic, Rachel Porter began hearing store-wide announcements referring to “shoppers” and “customers.” Dedicated not just to the efficient functioning of the Coop but to the concepts behind its creation, she immediately wrote, in the *Line-waiters’ Gazette*:

“The Coop has never referred to members as shoppers or customers, because those phrases suggest competing interests between store owners (or staff) and those who shop. Our Coop is practically unique in rejecting that division, which is why members can trust the Coop to provide the groceries we want without advertising or deceptive practices.”

Rachel, who died recently at the age of fifty-three, joined the Coop in 1995. She was, as her friend Sara Ivry recalls, “a principled, strong-minded brilliant individual who lived her ideals in a way that few others I know do. She was fiercely committed to the mission of the Coop and was a great champion of it.” A squad leader for ten years, she then worked on both the Revolving Loan and Committee Oversight committees.

“Rachel was the driving force behind the Coop having a 40th birthday celebration in 2013,” General Coordinator Joe Holtz remembers. “About a year before that, Rachel co-founded the Revolving Loan Committee whose purpose is to financially support start-up coops that use our member labor required model. Rachel loved our Coop and was always working to encourage us to build on our foundational strengths and not take continued success for granted.”

“SHE VALUED THE STRUCTURE OF INDIVIDUALS ORGANIZING THEMSELVES FOR THE COMMON GOOD. FOR HER, I THINK, IT WAS THAT VERY RARE AND TREASURED EXAMPLE OF THE WORLD ACTUALLY WORKING AS IT SHOULD.”

DAVID TEPPER

At Edward R. Murrow High School, where she was a special education teacher, Rachel initiated and led a Restorative Justice Initiative, “striving to establish an effective, evidence-based alternative to retributive criminal justice policies and punitive school discipline, capable of reducing violence and fostering public safety.” She was also, for many years, a social justice researcher volunteering for organizations involved in pro-

gressive causes.

But Rachel's engagement with the Coop extended well beyond serving on committees and monitoring store-wide pages. Almost everyone who remembered her raves about her phenomenal skills as both a baker and warm-hearted host.

"I have images of her cart overflowing with enormous amounts of produce, always the most straight-from-the-earth variety in terms of no extra packaging or pre-washing, of her leaving the Coop on her bike with a Garden of Eden bursting from her bags and basket, ready to be orchestrated into splendid food," says Lara Tabac.

"As a very skilled baker," David Tepper notes, "a voracious reader of recipes and all kinds of food writing, and an incredibly generous host who always had a crowd at her table. Rachel loved the Coop for its food and culture. (She was very upset when we stopped carrying yeast in bulk.) Moreover, she valued the structure of individuals organizing themselves for the common good. For her, I think, it was that very rare and treasured example of the world actually working as it should."

Rachel is survived by her two sons, Ulisse and Sasha Narici-Porter, her former husband Manlio Narici, her mother Joan, and her brother Josh.

IN MEMORY OF HELEN HOLTZ

July 3, 2023



By Thomas Rayfiel

Helen Holtz, a longtime Coop member and organizer of many memorable celebrations at the Coop, died recently. She was 74. Helen joined the Coop in 1979. In the early 1980's, she chaired many General Meetings and was later Recording Secretary, but it is for her pioneering work on the Fundraising Committee that she will be most fondly remembered.

"She was creative and dedicated to making every event work well," Sarah Zahnstecher recalls. "She made it fun to paint signs announcing the latest event and even kept one of mine after it was over. Importantly, she was a fighter for gender equality and social justice before many people understood the divisive society we live in. What else would you expect from someone who spent so much time making the Coop thrive and the world a better place by her presence in it? Helen was the kind of person I thought would always be here with us."

Martha Siegel, who succeeded Helen on the Fundraising Committee, points in particular to her organizing of huge parties for the Coop's fifth, tenth, fifteenth, and twentieth birthdays as well as the Food Coop Music Festivals from 1983-1987, which took place at PS 321. "Helen probably organized the food. Steve Browman and I ran the music," Siegel says. "They were very successful events and definitely increased the feeling of community."

Daniel Brooks, also a member of the committee, notes: "Helen led a dedicated team of 'Funsters' who organized dances, auctions, performances and other festival opportunities. We would meet in her apartment and discuss and argue over themes and events and the kind of flowers that would decorate the tables. She let no detail slip through the cracks and kept us all thinking of new ways to socially engage the Coop members."

"SHE LET NO DETAIL SLIP THROUGH THE CRACKS AND KEPT US ALL THINKING OF

NEW WAYS TO SOCIALLY ENGAGE THE COOP MEMBERS.”

DANIEL BROOKS, FUNDRAISING COMMITTEE MEMBER

In her professional career, Helen liked to say she worked first as a “stripper,” a job that involved removing a photographic emulsion with its image from an individual negative and combining it with others in position on a glass plate. When that skill became obsolete, she retrained to become a diagnostic medical sonographer, a health care professional trained to use imaging technology to help physicians diagnose heart problems.

“She made a tremendous effort in going back to school in order to make a living for the purpose of helping people,” Zahnstecher adds. “It was very hard and she kept at it.”

Helen is survived by her husband, David Chorlian, her brother, Coop General Coordinator Joe Holtz, her sister-in-law, Kathy Blyn, her niece Sarah, and her nephew David.

Member Thomas Rayfiel is the author of eight novels. He has also written “living obituaries” for VICE TV.

SKYHILL: A LOVE STORY

July 3, 2023



Member Submission By Louise Johnson

My love affair with laying hens began after I retired from teaching in Brooklyn and purchased 15 acres on a hilltop plateau an hour east of Albany. I lived alone, surrounded only by sky and distant trees. My goal was to model food as a key solution to pollution, chronic disease and climate change. And to model this by holding events and inviting PSFC members, etc., to visit this piece of nature I quickly named Skyhill. This was 2004.

I was a member of PSFC's Environmental Committee and became its upstate organizer, forming a loose coalition of upstate food coops around lobbying (we called it "informing") about problems with GM/GE/GMO food. PSFC joined with Albany's Honest Weight Coop to create NYSAGE (New York State Against Genetic Engineering), and for almost three years we worked with farmers, statewide coop members and some scientists, to repeatedly inform in every office in the state legislature about our three bills. Members of PSFC trekked to Albany for two lobby days and other events. The six public events and resulting newspaper articles added to our outreach about GMOs. Three bills were passed in the assembly only. The Senate was a piece of work.

Our expectation was to inform, which we achieved. I learned enough about the corrupt and dysfunctional New York legislature and about the art of lobbying to realize why folks speak of the need for revolutions. That was 2007.

THIS IS AN APPEAL: URBAN RETURN-MIGRATION TO RURAL FARMLAND, THE ROOTS OF ALL AMERICANS, IS NEEDED TO PROTECT OUR WATER, SOIL, AIR, AND FOOD.

I built a barn and bought 25 laying hens which became over 300 hens in a few years. Hatching eggs led to 26 roosters in one season, and to 14 years of unique descendants of inter-bred heritage breeds. I continue to be stunned daily by the diverse beauty and “chickenalities” I live among.

I want to relate stories of chicken prowess, intelligence, problem-solving, social organization, playfulness, sharing and caring. My very out-of-date website still has a few photos. I also want to stay at Skyhill forever. But, as I approach 80 years, I have run out of stamina and am no longer able to lift and haul and run eggs to the Albany coop. I plan to take only a few hens and some fertile eggs to Maine where my daughter has moved and awaits me.



IMAGE COURTESY OF LOUISE JOHNSON



IMAGE COURTESY OF LOUISE JOHNSON



IMAGE COURTESY OF LOUISE JOHNSON



IMAGE COURTESY OF LOUISE JOHNSON



IMAGE COURTESY OF LOUISE JOHNSON



I leave behind a legacy of two separate egg farms, with five new, unique and spacious chicken abodes (one, is also a greenhouse), a lovely stream and waterfall, more than a hundred new fruit and nut trees and shrubs, a large raised-bed garden, acres of woodland, solar panels, two passive solar homes and perhaps lots of hens in need of someone who will also love chickens.

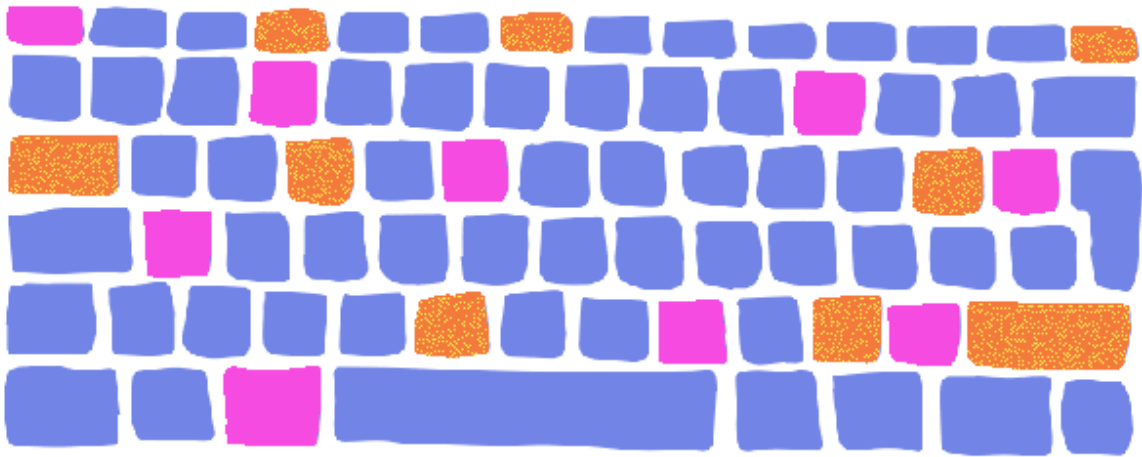
Both rural properties were transformed from wannabe suburban houses with ridicu-

lously huge lawns to model communities of chickens moving freely among extensive climate victory gardens. This is an appeal: urban return-migration to rural farmland, the roots of all Americans, is needed to protect our water, soil, air, and food. Meaningful and fun work for retirees, and all others.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

July 3, 2023

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



INVITATION TO JOIN "CIVIC SWEEP" ON EARTH DAY, APRIL 22

Dear Coop members:

Ever wish you could do something about unsightly graffiti on lampposts, stop lights and mailboxes? Well, now you can actually paint out the offending graffiti by joining

the Park Slope Civic Council's "Civic Sweep," to be held on Earth Day, April 22. Join us any time between 10:00 and 2:00 pm on the sidewalk on Fifth Avenue between Third and Fourth Streets (near the Old Stone House), and you'll be provided with cans, brushes, rags, and latex paint in appropriate colors to fan out across Park Slope to beautify the neighborhood. You can also pick up and bag litter out of tree beds and other spots the city doesn't clean. For more info on the Sweep and other sustainability initiatives (including how to join Park Slope's oldest and most prominent civic association for only \$40 a year!), google "Park Slope Civic Council" or go to www.parkslopeciviccouncil.org.

Hope to see you there!

*Timothy Gilles, President
Park Slope Civic Council*

MARIJUANA AT THE COOP

To the Editor:

Years ago, there was a big debate in the Coop: Do we want to carry beer? The members voted and now the Coop carries a truly amazing variety of beer, from crisp IPAs to malty stouts. The time has now come for another vote: Do we want to carry marijuana?

A walk down almost any street in Brooklyn now has stores that sell marijuana. The corner bodega sells it under the counter, and new places in Park Slope (like The Smokey Joint and Nice Guys DC), sell it in splashier digs. At the current time, the Coop does carry CBD products, so this is not a move that is totally off-base.

One of the Coop's suppliers of apples and other produce is Hepworth Farms. Last

week there was an article in the *New York Times* about how they are now cultivating marijuana as one of their products. I believe we should continue to support our local farmers—and to make Hepworth Farms Weed available to our members. We can even get them to specifically name strains: Cooperation Indica, Work Shift Sativa, or maybe a nice Joe Holtz Hybrid.

As the market for legal weed expands, it would be good to know that the Park Slope Food Coop's selection is organically grown and locally sourced. What do you think?

David Meltzer

MASKING OPTIONAL

To the Editor:

I was dismayed to receive notice that masking will be optional [at the Coop] as of March 20, with no consideration for those impacted. There are Coop members who have pre-existing conditions and/or who are vulnerable, and while they represent the minority of members, we are obligated to look out for their safety first, despite the vote. One reasonable solution is to set aside two or three weekday shopping/workshift slots that are fully masked. The Coop rose to the occasion when Covid hit, and I urge leadership to keep in mind that many members with limited income and resources rely on the Coop, and we should be able to make the small effort to wear a mask so that they may continue to shop and work without fear of being harmed.

Thank you.

Gary Winter

THE PUSH BEHIND THE COOP'S SWANKY NEW STREET CARTS

July 3, 2023



By Anita Bushell

Got a lot of groceries to cart home? You're in luck: The Coop has a fleet of bigger, shinier grey beasts to aid the journey back to your doorstep. The new models have a smoother glide and don't make as much noise on the sidewalk as the older street carts, but they have their downsides. Coop member Tom Paul, who does the walker shift, observes: "They aren't deep enough to carry heavier loads of grocery bags but they are lighter and have less rattle than the older, heavier carts."

We spoke with General Manager Joe Holtz, who oversees the cart supply at the Coop, about the need for new models, the replacement process and his favorite features of the new fleet. We also got to the bottom of a rumored "national cart shortage."

Let's start with terminology. What are the outdoor carts called?

The carts you are referring to are what we call street carts or walker carts or simply outdoor carts. The manufacturer of the old carts called them "Carry Out Carts." The company we're using now calls them "Grocery Bagger Carts."

How would you describe your role in overseeing our cart supply?

I have been ordering outdoor carts since we started using them in the early 2000's. Before I order new carts, I consult with other staff, in particular membership coordinators, as to whether the number of carts that we have are insufficient for the Coop's needs.

THEY HANDLE GREAT. THEY OPERATE MORE LIKE A SPORTS CAR. I HAVE NEVER DRIVEN A SPORTS CAR.

What was the problem with the old carts?

There was no problem with the old carts. The old carts were made by Technibilt, which was bought by the German company, Wanzl, in 2012. I believe we started buying them around the time we expanded into our third building in 2001 (the third building is where aisles four, five, six, and seven are, as well as all the checkouts). Then Wanzl/Technibilt decided to stop making them.

How long did we have the old carts?

The first carts we bought from Technibilt were around 2001. The first model we bought had wheels that were inset, meaning that the wheels did not add width to the cart. The problem was that many times people found that the wheels interfered with where one needs to place one's feet while walking behind the cart. Then a new model came out with the wheels on the outside and that problem was solved.

What are the features of the new street carts at the Coop?

They are a little wider. It's a little harder to hang bags from them due to shortness of the upper extension of the verticals. They handle great. They operate more like a sports car. I have never driven a sports car.

THE "NATIONAL CART SHORTAGE" WAS MENTIONED ON A LOUDSPEAKER ANNOUNCEMENT THIS WINTER URGING SHOPPERS TO BE PROMPT ABOUT RETURNING THEIR SHOPPING CARTS TO THE PARKING AREA WHEN THEY WERE NO LONGER NEEDED.



New cart on the left; old cart on the right.

Why did we need new carts?

Over the years, the main reason we need new carts is that they go missing. Occasionally a cart gets so old and so beat up that it can longer be repaired. But that is rare compared to carts going missing.

We heard there is a “national shopping cart shortage.” Have you heard of this shortage as well? *[Editor’s note: the “national cart shortage” was mentioned on a loudspeaker announcement this winter urging members to be prompt about returning their shopping carts to the parking area when they were no longer needed.]*

Not a “shortage” but rather a lag. It took about 18 weeks for the new carts to arrive after we placed an order. They arrived in October after having been ordered in June.

How many outdoor carts does the Coop own, and how many new ones did you order?

Based on input from other staff, we determined that we should have a minimum of eight carts. I was pleasantly surprised that we still had six old carts when the [six] new ones arrived. I expected that the old carts could have been as low as four based on historical attrition rates. As of last week, two of the new carts were missing, one was out service as it was in need of repairs, and three were in service. There were still six old carts last week. Sometimes missing carts come back.

How much do the new carts cost?

The price for each cart, including the cost of delivery, was about \$450.

What has feedback on the new carts been like?

I have not heard much from anyone except that it is nice to not have a cart shortage—but that is temporary. We may have to order more soon. The new carts are not as rugged as the old carts, in regard to the back wheels system. Our Facilities Coordinator, Crystal Goldenstein, is looking into improving the wheel system on the new carts so that they are more durable.

Anita Bushell is a freelance writer and native New Yorker who just released Object Essays. Her work has been published in Friends Journal, Motherwell Magazine, and Grande Dame Literary.