

REPORT ON THE 7/27 GENERAL MEETING

August 27, 2022



GM Reacts to Holtz Suspension, Debates Coop Mask Requirement

By Hayley Gorenberg

COVID-19 controversies dominated the July General Meeting, from the first moments of the freeform Open Forum to the discussion on whether the Coop should continue requiring masks.

Several members used the Open Forum to assert their opposition to the Coop's requirement that members—as workers—be vaccinated against COVID-19. Some complained they had not been allowed medical exemptions from vaccination. Others claimed that the Coop should not require vaccination, believing it would not slow transmission of COVID-19.

“WHAT ARE THE LIMITS AND CHECKS ON THE PERSONNEL COMMITTEE’S POWER? I BELIEVE THAT WE ALL DESERVE ANSWERS, AND I WOULD LIKE TO DEMAND ANSWERS.”

RECEIVING COORDINATOR GILLIAN CHI

Coop bookkeeper Kathy Hieatt urged members to read the *Linewaiters’ Gazette’s* July 25 article on the Personnel Committee’s month-long suspension of General Manager and Treasurer Joe Holtz, which concluded on July 30. Hieatt called for an explanation of the committee’s rationale.

“You took away a month of his salary. He may need that to exist, to pay his rent or his mortgage,” said member Bhakti Sondra Shaye. “It felt bad to me, and it makes me feel terrible about the Coop—and I love the Coop. I feel this is extraordinarily extreme.”

“What are the limits and checks on the Personnel Committee’s power?” asked Receiving Coordinator Gillian Chi, who had previously objected to barring Holtz from Coop premises for a month. “I believe that we all deserve answers, and I would like to demand answers.”

Personnel Committee member Yolanda McBride responded that the committee is elected and invested with authority by the General Meeting to advise the general coordinators on human resource functions and to hire, fire and discipline top staff, in consultation with the general coordinators. McBride asserted that the disciplinary penalty meted out to Holtz was not personal, “was based on facts uncovered in the investigation,” and would have been imposed on any Coop general coordinator.

McBride said the *Gazette* article covering Holtz’s 30-day suspension without pay, plus barring him from Coop premises was “not an accurate reflection of the facts based on what was gathered in the investigation.” Referencing confidentiality requirements,

McBride did not provide any specific information (see sidebar below).

Responding to McBride's reference to confidentiality, member Rachel Porter noted that confidentiality could be waived (as Holtz had done in speaking with the *Gazette*). "The Coop, I think, has too long suffered from hiding behind confidentiality," Porter said.

COMMITTEE OVERSIGHT COMMITTEE CONSTITUTED

The GM elected members to serve on the newly created Committee Oversight Committee, which will facilitate regular reporting to the GM and the *Gazette* on Coop member committees' work. All who stood for election were voted in: the originator of the committee, member Rachel Porter; attorney and mediator Diana Colon; 12-year Coop member Brian Shuman; Kristian Nammack, who previously served on the Environmental Committee and expressed a proclivity for shopping "European-style" (visiting the Coop four or five times each week); member Ned Lochaya; and Sara Bouzas, a member since 2011 who works as a Spanish interpreter in courts and jails, and so places a premium on listening carefully "as required by my job—and I do this in my life as well."

FINANCIAL REPORT

General Coordinator Joe Szladek presented a brief financial report indicating that the Coop's rate of loss had decreased and that a recent eight-week period showed the organization had started to turn a profit before a usual summer downturn while many members are out of town.

Szladek predicted the Coop would likely run in the red for the year overall, estimating the potential for a \$100,000 deficit. "That's a pretty small amount, given what we've dug out of," he said, emphasizing, "it's not just about one year; it's also about the trajectory."

Szladek flagged that the 25 percent pandemic markup is still in effect, highlighted the

number of new members signing up as a “really positive” indicator, and noted efficiencies gained through the new online workslot system, as well as the decision to extend the usual shift cycle to working once every six weeks, instead of the previous requirement to work every four weeks.

GENERAL COORDINATORS’ REPORT

General Coordinator Elinoar Astrinsky reported “a string of wallet thefts,” and cautioned members to keep valuables with them and lock lockers when using them. “Don’t leave your bags strewn about in your cart,” she said. “Let’s all be vigilant.”

She said police had been informed of the thefts, and that the general coordinators were discussing further security measures.

Ending on a positive note, Astrinsky highlighted that Sycamore honeydew melons, peaches, cherries and corn are in season and are “luscious and delicious and sweet.” Watermelons abound, with seeds and without: “They’re both really, really, really good. Buy them!”

TO MASK, OR NOT TO MASK?

Member Elizabeth Tobier, who had submitted a discussion item noting that New York State had largely lifted mask requirements, presented slides that she said supported her argument for lifting the Coop’s mask mandate.

GC Astrinsky had noted earlier in the meeting that the Coop “as an employer and business” has the right to mandate masks, and reported a falloff in members’ readiness, with a “huge uptick in having to hand masks to people to come in and shop.”

“I believe that masks do work,” countered a member who became a temporary worker during the pandemic and, as such, had to wear a mask for full working days—far longer than a typical shift or visit to shop. “This is not a huge sacrifice,” the member concluded.

Another member noted New York's still-high transmission rate, urging, "Until cases start to go down, the mask mandate needs to stay!"

A member who said she is immunocompromised voiced concern that information presented about masks had been inaccurate to the point of being "completely debunked," and that lifting the mask mandate at the Coop would put her "at great risk."

"WE ALL FACE FATIGUE ON MASKING. BUT I AM WILLING TO CONTINUE BEING FATIGUED."

STAFF MEMBER JASON WEINER

A member who said she worked with health-care providers said that "now would be a terrible time" to change the Coop's mask requirement. "We owe it to each other," the member said. "We have been saving each other's lives, and we need to keep doing that."

"Masks work; that's why hospitals use them," another member said.

Staff member Jason Weiner read a prepared statement referencing the Coop's "many immunocompromised members," acknowledging that there was "no question" that "we all face fatigue on masking." But he promoted policy based on science, rather than fatigue, concluding, "I am willing to continue being fatigued."

Masks provide a measure of safety that allows the Coop to maintain its volume of shoppers, said General Coordinator Ann Herpel. She said that cutting the use of masks could lead us to reconsider increasing shopping capacity and likely deter many members from working, ultimately steering the Coop in the "wrong direction" and hurting the organization financially.

Toward the conclusion of the discussion period, one member suggested a medical committee to help the Coop assess its policies as needed.

Hayley Gorenberg joined the Coop in 1993 and became a Gazette reporter soon thereafter.

MOODOMETER: THE RETURN OF CROWDED AISLES

August 27, 2022



By Miranda Purves

On a recent July Sunday afternoon outside the dear old Coop, things were feeling positively *Sesame Street*. Receiving workers paused to chat with friends, walkers sauntered in with carts, and children celebrating a birthday party raced into the foyer to find a scavenger-hunt clue. Suddenly, the mood darkened. “I was in line, you [expletive]! Didn’t you see my kid holding my spot?” a man yelled. He was about 6’4”, and

the object of his rage was a somewhat shorter shopper waiting to enter the store. Other than him, the line consisted of a child who, up until that minute, had been darting around the place-marker pylons, spraying the laminated numbers from a bottle, his face behind a plastic shield.

“I didn’t know he was in line,” the recipient of the onslaught uttered, pulling back from the finger jutting into his face. The crowd quieted as the angry man continued to step toward him. “Don’t talk! Have some respect,” he said menacingly. The neon NEXT sign flashed and the man strode inside, commanding his child to wait by his cargo bike, while the victim of the aggression tried to regain his composure—as did the now-silenced crowd.

Despite the pandemic accouterments of the masks and spray bottles, the rest of the scene resembled the before times: the density of people outside; the genial, lively mood; the sudden altercation. In the past few months at the Coop, other than Coop co-founder and General Manager Joe Holtz being barred without pay for a month, the big news is old news: just as we’d gotten used to shopping under what former Governor Andrew Cuomo once called the “new normal,” the normal-normal Coop has begun to seem possible again, including the defining feature of the return of somewhat more crowded aisles.

There are currently 62 orange shopper tags, aka “carrots,” that the Coop uses to count and limit shoppers in the aisles. According to General Coordinator Ann Herpel, this number has been the same since fall of 2021. But those 62 carrots are running through more shoppers’ hands throughout the day. We’re also filling our carts at a less-harried pace.



Members are seeing the return of a familiar sight in the Coop: crowded aisles.

“Shopping had become utilitarian; you were coming to get your five things and get out,” said Caroline Todd, a transportation planner with the MTA who was waiting outside for her shift to start. “Now it’s somewhere between the old days and that.”

The evolution of hyperexpedient shopping during the pandemic is a lovely example of what design and management theorists call *emergence*. This refers to novel behaviors and innovations that spring into existence organically when different elements within complex systems interact.

“As we all got accustomed to what was happening, people developed tools to make it easier for themselves,” Herpel said. The management quickly adapted to the crisis by combining recommendations from New York state—enforced traffic-flow patterns and decals on the floor marking distances—with new paid employees at the front of the Coop.

“No one was really interested in spending a lot of time in here,” Herpel said. “We were trying to facilitate that, and members responded and began to come in extraord-

inarily prepared to shop, with very detailed lists, schematically working out where things were on the shelves.”

Now some of the fear has lessened, and so has the distance between us. People are reaching over and under, navigating right-of-way and even—*gasp!*—gabbing in the aisles. Inevitably, this means more snapping as well as pleasantries. “People are forgetting about personal space again,” said Todd. But she quickly added that she loves the Coop. “We’re used to some chaos in the lines!”

The Coop’s commercial certificate of occupancy allows for 250 people within its 6,000 square feet. If you divide 6,000 by 250 you get 24 square feet per person, which sounds great: roughly a five-foot radius. But once you take into account the shelving, the checkout areas, the dairy stocking case, the individual carts and the Hollywood and U-boats, that space cushion evaporates.

In other words, we have plenty of legal leeway to sardine ourselves. Until the pandemic, that left the Coop management to determine a reasonable capacity. They had some experience managing crowds on the fly before. Herpel described the scene in October 2012 as Hurricane Sandy blew in: people shoving inventory in backpacks, totes, anything, because all the carts and baskets were in use (they kept more out than), while the checkout line snaked around and then doubled up in produce.

“If someone had passed out in an aisle, the firefighters from next door would’ve taken minutes to get through,” Herpel said. “You could just tell it wasn’t safe.” They decided to hand shoppers numbers and warehouse them upstairs in the meeting room, calling them down as people left.

But it wasn’t until the peak lockdowns in the spring and early summer of 2020 that the store faced external strictures. The state said that essential businesses that remained open needed to operate at no more than 50 percent occupancy and provide six feet of distance between customers. At the Coop, having 125 people in the store wouldn’t allow for six feet between them.

“We settled on 30,” recalled Herpel, “then for a long time we stayed at 40.” The store increased capacity incrementally, two at a time. After the staff was fully vaccinated, they became more comfortable with letting more shoppers in. Once member workers returned in July 2021, they decided to try 56 orange carrots and 20 blue, for workers to shop after their shifts, before settling on the current 62 and ending the requirement that member workers take a carrot to shop post-shift.

The state has long since lifted its capacity limits, but the Coop is so far sticking to its own, finding that this number allows in most members who want to shop without long outside waits. But membership is beginning to creep back up. Before the pandemic, it hovered above 17,000. In 2020, either because members faded away or decisively left, the number was down by 50 percent. Currently, there are 13,500.

Many of the members outside on that Sunday relished the increases and were happy that shoppers were back in the aisles. “I don’t want a line outside!” said Adam Pollock, a Park Slope resident and father of the birthday girl on the scavenger hunt. “I’d rather it be crowded inside, as COVID recedes.” His partner, Michal Lewin-Epstein, added, “I want non-member visits to resume!”

“THE MORE THE MERRIER! DURING THE PANDEMIC, SHOPPING WAS A HORROR SHOW, A KUBRICK MOVIE, AWFUL.”

MEMBER JAMES RUSCHAK

James Ruschak, a member for over 20 years, was standing outside while his cousin, who was working, brought him New York State cherries that had just hit the shelves. “The more the merrier!” he said. “During the pandemic shopping was a horror show, a Kubrick movie, awful.”



Coop member James Rushak

The new members interviewed for this article—who, it’s important to note, have never experienced the pre-pandemic crowds that were once the norm—echoed Ruschak’s sentiment, describing shopping as less stressful now that the store is busier.

Emily Seager, a Rockaway Beach resident, joined almost a year ago in July 2021. “People were on edge then,” she said. “I value people feeling more comfortable now, walking closer to each other. There’s not as much anxiety.”

But Kate Barrow, a social worker and management consultant for nonprofit organizations, still remembers holiday shopping and the different kind of tension generated by Coop crowds, even when they’re not the possibly-contagious, burned-out, masked zombies we’ve all been in the more-recent past.

“I had so many of those experiences [of personal space invasions] pre-pandemic that

anytime it was super crowded I would just end up leaving, as in: I can't handle this stress. 'I think I'm being really polite, you seem to think I'm being really rude, I don't know what to do,'" Barrow said.

Laura Tucker, a writer, noted that shopping in the 35-people days did have a certain luxuriousness. "This is the first Sunday that I am struck by how crowded it is. But I understand they have to do what they have to do," she said.

Some of the Coop pandemic changes will serve to make the store a little less crowded even if we do zoom back up to 17,000 and do away with the carrots. Now, shift changes are staggered. "It took a pandemic to figure this out!" laughed Herpel. "We used to always complain pre-pandemic on a Saturday afternoon at 3:30 when a bunch of people would come off of checkout, food processing and receiving shifts, 'Why did you come shopping at shift change?'"



General Coordinator Ann Herpel

“THERE IS A CAPACITY TO THE COOP. I DON'T THINK THERE'S AN AGREEMENT AS TO WHAT THAT CAPACITY IS. WHAT COULD WE FINANCIALLY SUPPORT?”

GENERAL COORDINATOR ANN HERPEL

Management has also gotten better at comparing revenue with membership information. Because each transaction is tagged to a household membership number, they can see which members are actually shopping and how much each household buys. The store has always had access to these numbers but didn't make use of them until trying to survive the financial crisis in 2020 with the help of federal aid, when both capacity limits and membership cut sales by about 30 percent. Going forward, this data analysis will help us determine how, and when, to grow.

“There is a capacity to the Coop. I don't think there's an agreement as to what that capacity is,” said Herpel. “What could we financially support? It depends on what you want to do.”

If shopping is more pleasant at a \$42 million business rather than a \$58 million business, the Coop would have to make choices, such as having fewer staff members, which is the biggest expense, she said.

But the Coop has to plan for some growth to keep up with inflation, which puts pressure on operating expenses. Even when the economy isn't grappling with runaway numbers, the Federal Reserve aims for a 2-percent-per-year target. To stay solvent, the store needs either to increase the number of shoppers, which equals crowded aisles, or encourage fewer shoppers—via incentives, refunds, minimums or other mechanisms—to buy more food. Or there's the option of markup increases—which would be about as popular as solar power in coal country.

How we feel about crowded aisles is an issue central to how we want to structure our-

selves, what we want to take away from the pandemic and what we don't. Barrow mused that it might be preferable to keep a capacity limit permanently, particularly since there isn't a clear-cut end to COVID-19. But Ruschak's in favor of letting it all resume: "I'm a closet sociologist so I kind of liked the old way. Even when it was bad, it was good!"

Miranda Purves is a writer who's lived in the South Slope since 2005.

COOP SHOPPERS AND BUYERS FEEL IMPACT OF SURGING FOOD PRICES

August 27, 2022



By Leila Darabi

On a recent Tuesday evening in August, Coop member Sabrina Ramos stood in front of the cereal shelves in aisle seven, comparing her granola options. Any other week she might have made her own, but in 95-degree weather, she had dropped by the Coop to avoid turning on the oven at home. After careful consideration, Ramos selected a favorite variety of Early Bird brand granola, noting that the price, while still high-

er than pre-pandemic, seemed to have dropped from an all-time spike of around \$10 to just over \$8 per bag.

“MY SHOPPING BILL IS RIDICULOUS EVERY TIME I SHOP. I KEEP TRYING TO BE CONSCIOUS TO JUST DO TWO BASKETS, BUT I CAN’T GET OUT OF HERE UNDER \$250 A WEEK.”

COOP MEMBER SABRINA RAMOS

A lifelong Coop member whose parents joined in the 1970s, Ramos now shops for her own family of three and finds herself far more conscious of price tags in the past year. Like many Americans, Ramos has noticed a dramatic spike in food costs recently. The Consumer Price Index Report put out by the US Department of Labor recorded a 10.4 percent increase in overall food costs between June 2021 and June 2022, with more dramatic hikes in specific categories of food.

“My shopping bill is ridiculous every time I shop. I keep trying to be conscious to just do two baskets [instead of a full cart], but I can’t get out of here under \$250 a week,” Ramos said. “When I do come in below \$220, I feel somehow victorious.”

COOP BUYERS SEEK DEALS

Reflected in the ebb and flow of granola prices are a range of national and geopolitical issues, from supply chain interruptions to surging fuel prices to global conflict. As previously reported in the *Gazette*, the Coop buyers are the heroes keeping wholesome, affordable food on the shelves despite these intersecting challenges.

“WHEN THE SUPPLY-CHAIN ISSUES STARTED, IT HIT US RIGHT AWAY. ALL OF A SUDDEN OUR DELIVERY TRUCKS WERE NOT SHOWING UP. IT WAS ACROSS THE

BOARD, AND IT WAS DRAMATIC.”

RECEIVING COORDINATOR GILLIAN CHI

Gillian Chi, the receiving coordinator and buyer for many of the store’s shelf-stable items, recently crunched the numbers for the *Gazette*. They illustrate a startling trend in the costs of household staples:

- Cascadian Farm cereal is up 42%, from \$4.05 to \$5.75 a box
- King Arthur Baking Company flour is up 20%–30%, depending on the size of the bag
- Some varieties of Natural Sea tuna are up as much as 42%
- Bionaturae pasta is up 33%
- Rao’s pasta sauce is up 25%
- Murray’s Chicken is up 25%–30%, depending on the cut
- Slope Farms ground beef is up 12%
- Natural by Nature whole milk half-gallons are up 11%, from \$4.84 to \$5.39
- Grindstone eggs are up 7%
- Cabot unsalted butter is up 19%

A notable outlier, said Chi, are Alderfer’s Omega eggs, the Coop’s top sellers, which dropped by 6% thanks to the sharp negotiation skills of Chi’s colleague, Receiving Coordinator Glorina Phillip.

A number of factors contribute to rising food prices, Chi explained.

“When the supply-chain issues started, it hit us right away,” Chi said. “A few weeks before it was in the news, we were feeling it. All of a sudden our delivery trucks were not showing up. It was across the board, and it was dramatic.”

The scramble to find a steady supply of food meant buyers looked less at the price tags and more at the availability of food staples. Now, with fewer stockouts, Coop buy-

ers are refocusing their attention on negotiating deals.

“The first thing is to compare prices across distributors,” Chi said. “A year ago, I would buy from whoever has [a given product]. Now it’s probably back in stock across three companies.” This availability frees her up to comparison-shop and negotiate discounted prices.

A COOPERATIVE OF COOPERATIVES

To keep costs down, Coop buyers rely on membership in the National Cooperative Grocers (NCG), a relationship that allows member coops across the country to collaborate on bulk purchases and buy into negotiated prices. By representing approximately 160 food coops of various sizes, NCG can bargain and lock in prices with the influence of a large national supermarket chain.

“DOMESTIC CHEESE HAS GONE UP CONSIDERABLY, BECAUSE THE PRICE OF SHIPPING AND MOVING THINGS AROUND FROM POINT A TO POINT B HAS GONE UP, AND THE PRICE OF MILK HAS GONE UP.”

COORDINATING RECEIVER YURI WEBER

The NCG relationship allows the Coop to purchase goods at lower prices through UNFI, a major wholesale distributor and, as previously reported in the *Gazette*, the Coop’s largest shelf-stable food supplier. These relationships help, but have not shielded the Coop from supply-chain stockouts and other price increases.

“NCG negotiates a great price, but UNFI doesn’t always have what we need, and if they don’t we have to find other options,” Coordinating Receiver Yuri Weber said.

Weber is responsible for buying for the bulk aisle, including grains, pulses, rice, nuts

and dried fruit. He also buys the Coop's imported cheeses, a category that was hit hard by Trump administration tariffs in 2019 but has remained fairly stable over the past year. Weber attributes this flat pricing to the strength of the dollar against the euro, which balances out any cost increase.

"Domestic cheese has gone up considerably, because the price of shipping and moving things around from point A to point B has gone up, and the price of milk has gone up," Weber said.

His colleague Lisa Hidem has similarly seen the rising cost of ingredients drive up the price of fresh-baked goods.

"In a lot of the very local stuff, we're seeing price increases. And we try to get bread [from suppliers] as local as we can," Hidem said. "I've seen bread prices go up anywhere from 5 percent to on average at least 15 percent. One went up 45 percent." She attributes the rising cost of bread and pastries to the Coop's supplier's commitment to locally sourced grains and the increased cost of butter, flour and milk.

Both Weber and Hidem noted that suppliers have started to add fuel surcharges as the price of gas has gone up. Makers of prepackaged foods, which Hidem also buys for the store, have seen increased expenses in packaging, driving higher prices. "A lot of [food packaging] is plastic; that's a petroleum product. And we all know the price of gas has gone up."

MEMBERS FEEL THE DIFFERENCE

"I've been amazed by how dramatically prices have risen," Coop member Clara Goetz said. "Not just by 30 or 40 cents, but by very significant amounts. My favorite bread, Runner and Stone buckwheat baguette, was \$3.84 (or something close to that) and is now \$4.49."

A member for 18 years, Goetz said the increased cost has affected her shopping. "In

the past, I would get one if I had bread at home or not. Now I'll pass it up if I don't really need it. Now I hesitate before buying what I consider inessentials. No chocolate-covered almonds, which are now over \$15 a pound. I just can't imagine how people on fixed incomes are managing."

Member Hilda Cohen has also felt the cost increase when shopping for her family of four. "I was just saying this to my kids, I feel like my Coop bill has increased about 20-25 percent," Cohen said. "It does affect the way I shop, but more that I am particularly sensitive to wasting anything, so I am simply getting less and we run out quicker."

FUTURE PREDICTIONS

Coop buyers predict further price increases before the bubble bursts. Citing recent articles on a chickpea shortage, Hidem notes that the premade hummus she buys for the Coop could soon become more expensive.

Weber acknowledges that prices of dried fruits and nuts have remained stable, but that could be because the current supplies may not yet reflect the increased costs of this year's crops. As he updates stock in the store, he anticipates having to pay more.

"I'm super-convinced that we're going to see [more price increases] once the new crop comes in that factors in some of the higher food prices and the shipping," Weber said.

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

JOE HOLTZ SUSPENSION

August 27, 2022

Letters to the Editor



Dear Editors,

I am writing to express my dismay at Joe Holtz's egregious suspension. I don't dispute the facts of the case; Joe's coming in to work while awaiting results of a Covid test was not the best choice, but the punishment is excessive. To withhold a month's

salary from anyone is shockingly misguided, but to do so to a founding member of the Coop, someone who has worked tirelessly on behalf of the Coop for decades, not to mention someone integral to keeping the Coop functioning during Covid, is short-sighted and beyond comprehension. Shame on the Personnel Committee. The only way to make this right is to return Joe's docked salary. If that is not possible, I suggest a bonus in the amount of this lost income—let's call it an acknowledgement of the outstanding work he has done for the Coop over the years.

Best,

Helene Davis

COOP MEMBER EXPELLED AFTER REPEATED MASK-WEARING VIOLATIONS

August 27, 2022

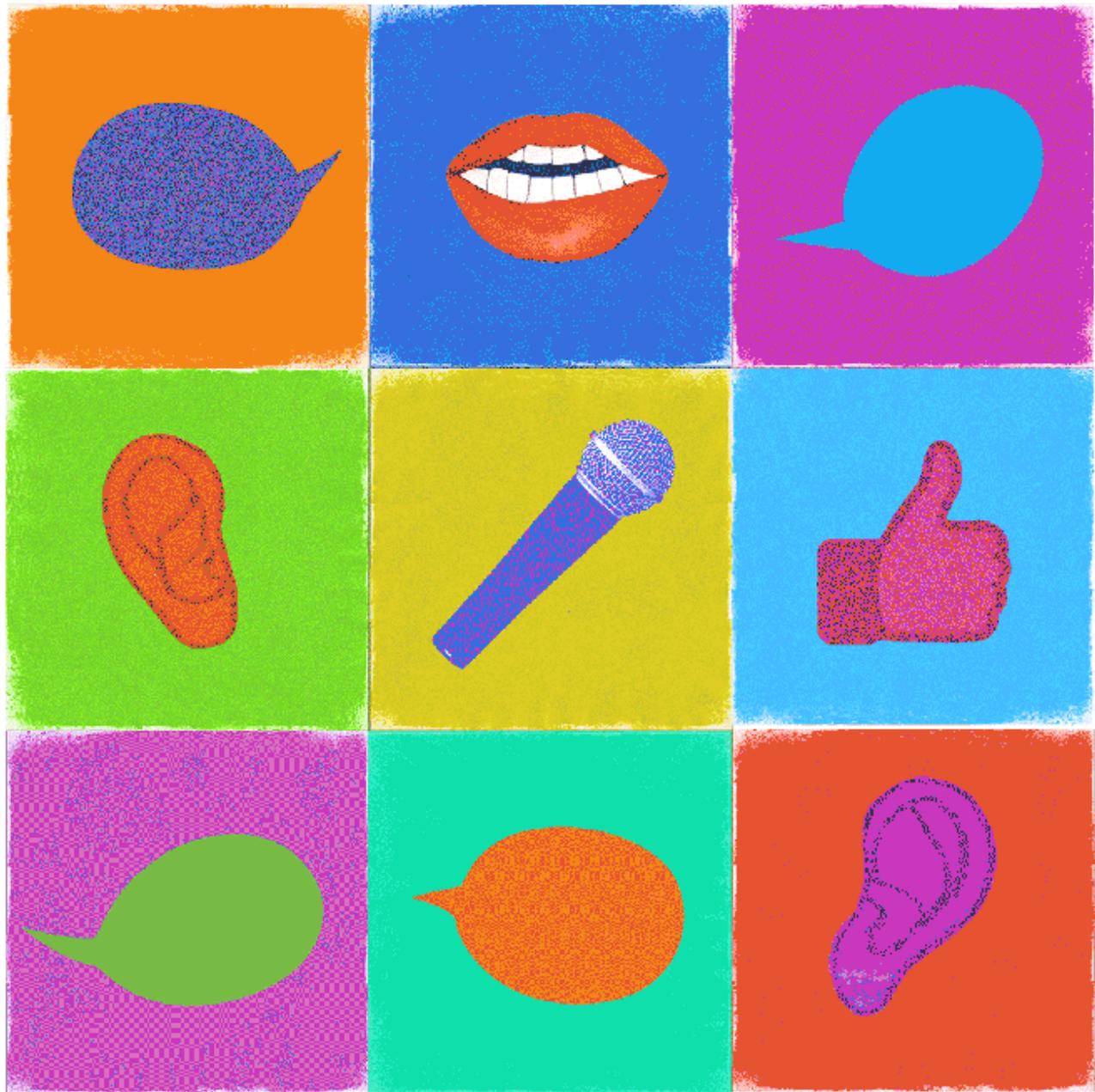


ILLUSTRATION BY CATY BARTHOLOMEW

By Jess Powers

On May 12, 2022, a Coop Hearing was held to determine whether a member violated rules on Dec. 10 and 20, 2020, and exhibited extremely uncooperative behavior. As described in previous pieces regarding the dispute resolution process, participants included the accused individual, various witnesses on both sides, members of the Hearing Administration Committee, the Dispute Resolution Committee (DRC), the Hearing

Officers Committee, and 15 Coop members who served as the Hearing Group, each with responsibilities to ensure a fair outcome.

For transparency, the *Linewaiters' Gazette* reports on hearings but the name of the accused is withheld to protect confidentiality. At the request of the committees involved, all names are withheld.

After a year and a half of delays due to the pandemic, members gathered in a spare assembly room at the Picnic House in Prospect Park. The Hearing Administration Committee organized the logistics, arranged the date and venue, and contacted a list of randomly selected Coop members to serve as a Hearing Group. There were a few bumps: not enough copies of documents were made and participants were not miked, occasionally making it difficult to hear. Members of the Hearing Officers Committee kept the proceedings on track and would ultimately decide on a penalty based on the decision of the Hearing Group. After serving for a few hours, only nine of the 15 Hearing Group participants voted on whether the member violated the rules, per the PSFC Disciplinary Procedures.

The accused and committee members introduced themselves. Two members of the DRC shared the results of the investigation. The accused, who will remain anonymous, is a lean white woman in her 60s who wore green clogs and introduced herself as a dancer and a healer.

The investigator began by explaining that the accused member had exhibited a “flagrant disregard for Coop rules” by repeatedly refusing to wear a mask, had altercations with staff and cashiers, and rejected COVID-19 as a “conspiracy theory.” She had a history of refusing to adhere to Coop rules and had been put on probation in the past.

After an incident is reported, an investigation is conducted and, depending on what is learned, one of nine pre-hearing actions takes place, ranging from a verbal warning to work-slot adjustments. For a dispute to rise to the level of a hearing, the rule-defying

behavior must be generally egregious and continue despite attempts to remedy it. The accused is given the option to resign or to have a hearing or arbitration to determine whether they will remain a Coop member.

The accused interjected that she was “not informed about the ability to bring witnesses” until the last minute. A Hearing Officer stated that the disciplinary hearing letter the woman had received included specific details about the process and that other rules and procedures are available online. He also reiterated that the matter at hand was to discuss what was alleged to have happened on Dec. 10 and 20, 2021 and that what occurred years before was only relevant if it pertained to this discussion.

The first witness, A.M., joined the Coop 25 years ago, worked as a paid checkout worker during the pandemic when member labor was suspended, and subsequently was hired full-time to the Coop staff. She recalled the accused wearing a mask under her chin as she approached checkout and A.M. asked her to put it on properly. The accused responded that “masks don’t protect us.” A.M. explained that it was the policy of the Coop. The accused pulled the mask up and replied, “Are you happy now?” A.M. countered, “You don’t need to be so rude,” to which the accused responded loudly, “You’re the rude one.”

FOR A DISPUTE TO RISE TO THE LEVEL OF A HEARING, THE RULE-DEFYING BEHAVIOR MUST BE GENERALLY EGREGIOUS, AND CONTINUE DESPITE ATTEMPTS TO REMEDY IT.

A.M. said that it was “not an easy time for folks,” between the stress of the pandemic, long lines, and few people allowed into the Coop at a time. She said that some members didn’t realize that the paid cashiers were Coop members, and that a few people were aggressive or disrespectful every week. Cashiers were instructed not to engage these folks further and to call on permanent staff if support was needed. In this case, A.M. was unnerved by the incident and was encouraged to file a report.

When given a chance to ask questions, the accused immediately apologized to A.M. She explained that since joining the Coop 26 years ago, she observed increasing amounts of “micromanagement” and that she was frustrated with the adoption of rules on mask-wearing.

After receiving a letter from the DRC, it would likely have been possible to resolve the case by apologizing to the parties involved and following the mask-wearing rule. The accused explained, however, that she wanted “to be heard.”

A witness who was unable to attend the hearing in person submitted a letter confirming that she witnessed the incident at the adjacent checkout. She stated that the accused “explained why masks do not work” and became “combative.”

The investigators learned that, following the incident at the checkout, the accused went to the Service Desk outside the office to inquire about the mask policy. Another witness who was unable to attend recounted in written testimony that the accused began to yell after hearing her options. She shared that the accused said that people were “trying to control her” and that she was “yelling her theories.”

After the incidents on the first date, a warning letter was sent by mail on Dec. 18. A popup screen alerted the entrance desk worker when the accused arrived to shop. The letter was also presented by hand to the accused by a Membership Coordinator. The accused was given a mask and allowed to shop on Dec. 20, the date of the second incident.

A Membership Coordinator (MC) at the Coop for over a decade was the next witness. She alluded to previous challenges with the accused and the Hearing Officer restated that prior bad acts are not relevant to this discussion. When the accused questioned the MC on her testimony, a representative exchange ensued:

Accused: “As a squad leader, I did things very differently. There was dancing, good music during our shift.”

MC: “Nothing wrong with that.”

Accused: “I have creative energy, I’m being nice, a person who thinks differently and acts differently. It could be frustrating, nobody hearing what you’re saying.”

MC: “I tried to help you with this, I said to go to a General Meeting [Coop decision making process]. Screaming in the aisle is not the way. I came into the frozen aisle, there you were.”

Accused: “I was frustrated. I was not the only member frustrated. It was the wrong time, wrong place. The woman who was on me... I started singing, trying to channel my energy. I was singing too [loudly], told I shouldn’t dance. I’m an artist. My memory is the word ‘fascist,’ not acting as a cooperative, as a ‘fascist organization.’”

MC: “You’re absolutely right, you said ‘fascist.’ I don’t remember ‘organization.’ By the time I got to you, two more people were present. It was a little wild, that’s why they got staff. People felt uncomfortable... I understand frustration totally, but there has to be some common ground. You seem to be very often outside of that common ground.”

Accused: “Every society has somebody who is a little different.”

A former member of the DRC, P.V., testified about an investigation in 2018. It was relevant only in order to demonstrate that there was a pattern of behavior. A letter shared in the welcome packet and later questions asked by the accused revealed that the prior issues involved arriving late or leaving work shifts early, bringing a child to shifts, and not providing adequate direction as a squad leader. A previous investigation led to a six-month probationary period, which was successfully fulfilled. P.V. shared the impression that the accused followed the rules that made sense to her, not the Coop rules in general.

IN HER TESTIMONY, THE ACCUSED ACKNOWLEDGED THE PAST INCIDENTS AND DESCRIBED BEING EXAMINED “UNDER A MICROSCOPE.” SHE DESCRIBED HERSELF AS HAVING A “PERSONALITY OF PASSION” THAT PEOPLE MISINTERPRET.

J.B., a witness for the accused, has worked in food processing and been a Coop member since 2008. She met the accused over a decade ago at a New England dance camp and described her as being community-minded, conscientious, high-spirited, and an amazing teacher.

In her testimony, the accused acknowledged the past incidents and described being examined “under a microscope.” She described herself as having a “personality of passion” that people misinterpret. She shared a family tragedy and said that she received a lot of love and support from the Coop at that time. She expressed feeling attacked in the years since and admitted to acting defensively toward administrative staff in response. She described herself as being “big into conflict resolution.”

The accused also described anxiety and having difficulty breathing while wearing a mask, adding that she had an “ADA card.” The DRC investigators responded that this “never came up” in conversations with her and added that the process to apply for a medical exemption was described in the attachment to the letter dated Dec. 18.

The 15 members of the Hearing Group were allowed to ask questions. They approached the situation with care. One member asked why the accused couldn’t put aside her personal beliefs about masks, having “presented [herself] as a person who likes to spread love.” The accused responded: “I am spreading love, by telling the truth. You’re not getting enough oxygen [wearing a mask], I have a different way of seeing it.”

When asked if she was aware that a mask mandate was in place in the state of New York on the dates in question, the accused countered: “It’s not a law, it’s a mandate.

The Governor cannot make laws, they can only administer them. They attempted to trick everyone. We don't have to follow it."

A DRC member clarified that many mask-wearing cases came before the committee during the pandemic. With the exception of this one, they were de-escalated and resolved by claiming a medical exemption, through workarounds or designated shoppers. She explained that the accused was uncooperative on the phone and the investigator "couldn't have a constructive conversation with her." The accused "would not back down from the idea that a mask is wrong, and she is right." She explained further that this was not the outcome the DRC wanted. The accused responded that she didn't have a conversation over the phone or that it was so brief that she didn't recall it.

The remaining nine members of the Hearing Group were reminded that the "intention is irrelevant." They were to decide whether the accused violated a rule on Dec. 10 and 20 and whether she exhibited "extremely uncooperative behavior."

We left the Picnic House while the Hearing Group deliberated.

The Hearing Group decided that the rules were broken on those dates and the accused exhibited extremely uncooperative behavior. The Hearing Officers then decided that expulsion is the appropriate penalty. The reasoning was two-fold: first, that was the penalty in other cases where members exhibited uncooperative behavior, and second, the context of a global pandemic before a vaccine was widely available made this behavior particularly uncooperative.

Members of the various committees involved in the dispute resolution process are working to refine and continually improve the process. Any proposed changes will be presented during a General Meeting for Coop members to vote on. In this case, Coop peers decided that expulsion was the most appropriate outcome.

Jess Powers works in emergency management and enjoys adventures in nature and

eating. IG: @foodandfury

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

August 27, 2022



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 Coordinator 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 colleagues 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.

JUST HOW “SLAVE FREE” IS TONY’S CHOCOLONELY?

August 27, 2022



ILLUSTRATION BY VALERIE TRUCCHIA

By Miranda Purves

Grocery shopping at the age of 51 with a family of four to feed is mostly a grind now, but I still get one frisson of rebellious adult joy from the aisles when I chuck not one, not two, but five or six Tony's Chocolonely bars into my cart at a time. With the Coop price of \$3.75 per 6.35 ounce bar, it's an affordable splurge. (At my nearest bodega that stocks them, Food Train on 7th Avenue and 11th street, they're \$5.95 each.)

I grew up in the '70s with a mother who, when it came to candy, subscribed to a scarcity angle of parental modeling. Although my brother and I are sugar fiends, as are our parents, dessert was often yogurt and homemade jam. When there was chocolate, there was one bar. My mother controlled it, divvying it up agonizingly, with more for her and my dad.

Now, I have a 16-year-old and a 12-year-old who have their father's fast metabolism, and I'm in charge of chocolate procurement. I stock sufficient quantities each week to, I hope, allow my offspring to grow up free from a survivalist urge to fork their dining companion's hand to the table whenever a chocolate bar appears.

Tony's Chocolonely is particularly well-suited for fostering a sense of abundance, because it comes in 3-by-6-by-½-inch slabs that are wrapped in childlike primary colors, emanating an unrefined, bulk-buy quality.

RESEARCHING THIS STORY HAS FORCED ME TO CONFRONT THE VERACITY OF TONY'S APPEALING MARKETING MESSAGE. WERE THEY REALLY DIFFERENT FROM OTHER MULTINATIONAL CHOCOLATE COMPANIES?

Flavors such as honey nougat, caramel or hazelnut taste like very, very good low-end chocolate. Good enough to lure in even bean-to-bar 75 percent plus cocoa aesthetes, such as my friend and fellow Coop member Jon Bines, who recently started buying Chocolonely milk chocolate bars for his teenagers.

“My enthusiasm is for the most delicious version of whatever the thing is. I have no problem with a slider or a corn dog. I just want it to be a good slider or a good corn dog,” said Bines. “So if you want a fantastic, big thick chocolate bar, you want that one and not some crummy thing from Hershey’s like a Chunky bar.”

His wife, Alexandra Jacobs, mused that “expensive dark chocolate can taste like you’re eating dirt.”

Our families aren’t alone in our yearning for a certain base indulgence. According to one of our chocolate buyers, Gillian Chi, Tony’s Chocolonely is a Coop favorite, selling about 300 bars a week. Tony’s Milk Caramel Sea Salt is our store’s fourth most popular bar, just behind Justin’s chocolate peanut butter cups and two Chocolove flavors (whose popularity might be aided by their mid-shelf placement; Tony’s is down at the bottom).

The emblem stamped on every Chocolonely bar, “Together we’ll make chocolate 100% slave free,” adds to the appeal for conscientious Coop members. I chose to view it as a final seal of approval for my weekly stockpiling, even though my 16-year-old cautioned that there is no such thing as slave-free chocolate. There were some truths, particularly during the pandemic, I didn’t want to hear.

But researching this story has forced me to confront the veracity of Tony’s appealing marketing message. Were they really different from other multinational chocolate companies?

Yes, Tony’s proclaims—vigorously—in their social media campaigns, branding efforts, and their fair-trade stamp and B-Corp certification. (A B Corp, or benefit corporation, is a nonprofit that encourages what is known as “impact businesses,” which balances profits with social and environmental stewardship.)

Not really, according to Ayn Riggs, a one-woman chocolate social justice powerhouse who turned her tiny NGO, Slave Free Chocolate, into an industry influencer. Since

2007, Riggs has issued an annual list of ethical chocolate companies as a way for consumers in the United States to be activists with their dollars. (Riggs said she works on Slave Free Chocolate pro bono; her day job is running a decorative arts company that specializes in Italian plaster finishes.)

In 2021, Riggs took Tony's off her list because their beans are processed into cocoa liquor by Barry Callebaut, a member of what she terms "the chocolate cartel," which also includes a handful of mega-players such as Mondelez International, Cargill, Nestlé, Mars, Olam Group, and Hershey's. These multinationals dominate the market with exports from farms in Côte d'Ivoire and Ghana, which grow about 70 percent of the world's cocoa. The use of unpaid child labor on their farms is well-documented by, among other groups, the U.S. Department of Labor.

THE USE OF UNPAID CHILD LABOR ON COCOA FARMS IS WELL-DOCUMENTED BY,
AMONG OTHER GROUPS, THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF LABOR.

Commodities trading and multinational corporations have kept the price of cocoa low for decades, despite increasing demand as Asian countries have begun consuming more chocolate and as dark bars have gained a reputation as a superfood in the West.

Because farmers, who tend to own only a few hectares and earn about \$0.75 a day in Côte d'Ivoire and \$2 a day in Ghana, can't afford to pay for harvesters, they turn to their children. Instead of going to school, these underage, unpaid laborers spend their days cutting pods off trees with machetes and hauling 100-pound sacks. The plantations are often soaked in Roundup, accidents are common and emergency medical care is rare or nonexistent. This is what the United Nations has defined as modern slavery.

In some instances, the children aren't relatives: They're boys from the even poorer

neighboring countries Mali and Burkina Faso, lured with the promise that they'll be able to send money home but are instead enslaved and kept locked in sheds at night.

Initially, Tony's entire raison d'être was to change this system. In the early 2000s, a Dutch investigative journalist named Teun van de Keuken produced a television show on the chocolate industry. He was so appalled by the exploitation inherent in the supply chain that he and two colleagues eventually decided to start their own company. Their mission was to raise awareness, put pressure on the major players to change their practices, and procure slave-free beans from the poorest regions for their own chocolate.

They called the bars Tony's, after the anglicization of Teun's first name, and Chocolonely because the entrepreneurs stood alone against the companies who upheld the slavery status quo.

The bars are divided unequally. This is to signify the inequality at the heart of the supply chain, but it has the side effect of making you eat more chocolate.

"There's this round piece you have to work around and you can only get too small or too big a chunk," said Luca Bines, Jon and Alexandra's 16-year-old, "so you always go too big."

Van de Keuken's bars, which successfully conveyed both a social justice mission and a sense of zany Dutch fun, were an instant success. Since its inception in 2005, the company has grown vastly. They grabbed an 8.9 percent market share in the Netherlands in 2021 and have expanded, with influxes of venture capital and private equity, across the globe. They have opened offices in the United States, the United Kingdom, Switzerland, Belgium, Germany and Austria. In 2021 they took in 100 million euros in revenue, although they reported operating at a slight net loss due to aggressive international growth strategies.

But as Tony's has expanded, so has the problem they set out to stop. "When I first

started my list,” said Riggs, “1.8 million children were considered at risk according to the [U.S.] Department of Labor. Now it’s gone up to 2.5 million.”

Both Chocolonely and Riggs agree that the multibillion-dollar multinationals are the ones causing the problem, and are also the only ones who can fix it, by collectively assuming the responsibility to pay living wage rates for cocoa and taking a hit in their profits and/or increasing the prices consumers pay.

Not only does the low price of cocoa force farmers to use child labor, it has also, in as little as a decade, led to an 80 percent destruction of rainforest canopy in Côte d’Ivoire’s once biodiverse national forests as farmers extend plantations to increase their low-dollar yields.

NOT ONLY DOES THE LOW PRICE OF COCOA FORCE FARMERS TO USE CHILD LABOR, IT HAS ALSO, IN AS LITTLE AS A DECADE, LED TO AN 80 PERCENT DESTRUCTION OF RAINFOREST CANOPY IN CÔTE D’IVOIRE’S ONCE BIODIVERSE NATIONAL FORESTS.

Riggs acknowledged that many of the high-end bean-to-bar chocolatiers on her list are slave-free and sustainable by default. “They buy from more regulated countries such as Costa Rica or Indonesia, where the farmers are poor, but their children can go to school in the day and get medical attention,” Riggs said.

She cites Divine Chocolate, also carried by the Coop, as an example of a Fairtrade company that is creating alternative economic systems, such as women-owned plantations, within West Africa.

“Tony’s is great marketing, and has raised awareness, but results are results. After 16 years, I think it’s BS that this is changing the industry from within,” said Riggs. “And they’re complicit in slavery by buying from Callebaut.”

Tony's responded via email, admitting the failure to achieve industry-wide change but also asserting: "Have we made lots of impact on the ground at coops we work with, raised a ton of awareness and gotten other companies to join in on the cause? Heck yeah!" (Their email maintains the brand's high-energy tone.)

They say they pay both a fair-trade increase, which still doesn't bring the price per ton up to a living wage, and their own self-imposed premium, which they state does provide the 8,000 farmers in their network "a living income," enough to send their children to school.

Riggs questions whether tracking this is possible within the mélange of small, ramshackle farms dispersed in the forest. Indeed, in February, Tony's tweeted that they'd identified 1,701 cases of illegal child labor in their supply chain in 2021, which they plan to remediate. They write that this "generally come[s] from onboarding new coops." Riggs casts doubt on how they can monitor that remediation when the farmers, even with increased fees for their crops, are still entrenched in poverty. "Transparency shouldn't provide much comfort to consumers," said Riggs. "It's a tool, but it doesn't fix a broken price structure."

If Coop members decided to view Tony's claims as social-good washing and wanted to stop carrying the brand, Chi, our buyer, explains that we'd have to bring it up as an item at the General Meeting.

For now, I'll continue to buy Tony's. I think it's preferable to keep some pressure on in the cocoa-growing regions of West Africa, to use marketing films to introduce consumers to the farmers behind-the-scenes, and to expand the number of farmers benefiting from somewhat higher wages.

I've come to see though, even as I munch down another smooth, thick wedge of caramel sea salt, that my mother's adherence to a model of scarcity was the more honorable parenting move.

Miranda Purves is a South Slope writer and tree hugger.

STAFF SPOTLIGHT: MUSICIAN AND BANDLEADER FRANCISCO FERREIRO

August 27, 2022



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.”

COOP CONVOS: “WHAT’S AN ITEM AT THE COOP THAT YOU’RE EXCITED

ABOUT?"

August 27, 2022



PHOTO BY MICHAEL BERMAN

By Jess Powers

Interviews have been edited and condensed for clarity.

Yuanyuan Dong



Portrait of Yuanyuan Dong

“As an Asian, I’ve had a lot of soy sauce in my life. This [Tsurubishio for Yamaroku] is the best. It retails for \$30 on Amazon. It’s small-batch, aged up to four years, a [traditional] Japanese way of making it.”

Yukiko and Noé Hayakawa



Portrait of Yukiko and Noé Hayakawa

“I joined yesterday and shopped. This is day two. I’m exploring recipes with ingredients I don’t normally use like gluten-free flour. And I’m thinking of a yuba sashimi with wasabi and soy sauce. Yuba sheets are very expensive in Japan; people don’t usually have them at home.”

Mark Silberman



Portrait of Mark Silberman

“I’ve been a Coop member for about 35 years and just retired from my workshift. These Field Roast lentil and sage deli slices are very tasty and have a nice texture. Perfect for when you want a Dagwood sandwich, but you’re a vegetarian.”

Jacqueline Reid



Portrait of Jacqueline Reid

"I use garbanzos to make a curry with potatoes. Sometimes I add zucchini. About 1 tablespoon mild curry powder, 1 teaspoon cumin, and $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon garam masala. If you increase the amount, increase the ingredients."

Jonathan Goldberg



PHOTO BY MICHAEL BERMAN

Portrait of Jonathan Goldberg

“I’ve been a member for three months and live in Windsor Terrace. I’m excited for the dried pineapple rings. They taste like candy! I don’t know how popular they are.”

Sweta Sukhadia



Portrait of Sweta Sukhadia

“The oyster mushrooms are truly special. They have a lot of depth. I like to make Southeast Asian-style curries with them, with turmeric, Indian red chili powder, and cumin. But I use them for a little bit of everything: I’ll add them to a panini or make a scramble with egg on top.”

Kate Gitnick



Portrait of Kate Gitnick

“If it’s in stock, and it looks amazing, escarole. I cook it with onions, white beans, lemon juice, and pine nuts. Today, it’s not as big as it sometimes is.”

Chuck Baker



Portrait of Chuck Baker

“We live in Long Island City. My wife was a Coop member for a long time; we got married, and I had to join. This uncured pork for an Easter ham. I prepare it sous vide. It’s cooked already—you just bring it up to temperature. You don’t even have to take it out of the bag. It’s totally juicy. I make a glaze from a recipe online.”

Mary S.



Portrait of Mary S.

“This face cream called Zum Face. I almost want to eat it. It feels so good on your face. I’ve been a Coop member for eight years. I was shelving, and I saw it. I was just walking around thinking about how much I like the Coop and how happy I am to be here.”

Trishala Deb



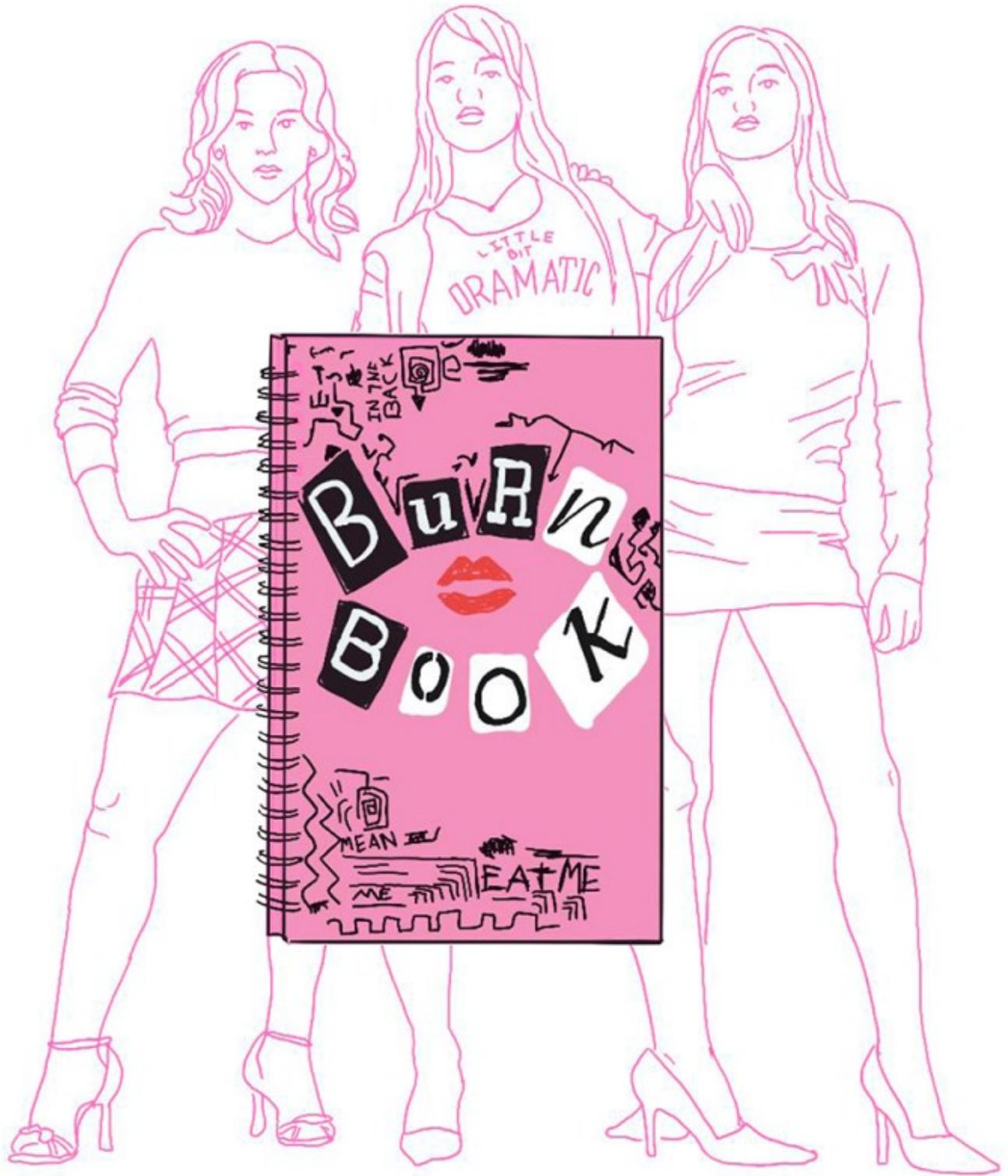
Portrait of Trishala Deb

"I've been a member for three or four years. I like the loose leaf teas. Usually I get Assam, but it's out, so I'm getting Darjeeling. I make a nuclear chai; one cup powers me for the entire day. It's not that deep: I use a premix, stevia and oat milk. But I use extra tea and steep it longer."

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

CROSSWORD

August 27, 2022



TIMOTHY HOSPODAR: BOARD CANDIDATE STATEMENT

August 27, 2022



In October 2020, when our Coop introduced a new phase of member labor, we met with an online scheduler deployed to support it. I showed up on that very first day to

contribute in a way different than I had ever worked before—on a truck-unloading shift. Despite advance scheduling, a hiccup in the system prohibited me from working that first morning. And so, I showed up again on the very next morning, as scheduled, and I worked on the sidewalk at 5:30 AM. I was surprised to like the shift, as there was a reason that I had never tried the shift before, counter to my history of working a variety of FTOP shifts from CHIPS to childcare to cashiering. Well, here's an inconsequential fact about me: I greatly detest predawn roll calls, not to mention my distaste for cold outdoor activities in general. Be that as it may, I made truck-unloading shifts a weekly practice and showed up 27 times across the eight months before the broader phase of member labor began in July 2021.

There's an analogy here as it relates to one thing fatherhood helped me learn. Early morning hours, before the babe awakens, are sometimes the only chance to devote one's free time to things that matter most. The Coop—as a market and as a community—has mattered so much to me, since joining twelve years ago and certainly in the last two. And its future, following these complicated times, is of grave importance. While my optimism helps me trust that survival is a given, I expect that our future state features exciting changes. I'd like to pledge my work shift to the board and our membership at large, because I understand the General Meeting (as a whole) comprises the stewardship of change.

If granted the opportunity to serve our community in this role, I commit to employing several fair tactics I have learned in other roles. In the effort to mitigate bias, I'll exercise sensitive feedback tools of active listening, to ensure that the board clarifies and validates as appropriate in addition to echoing the majority message. I'll help the board identify any unsatisfied concerns to acknowledge disagreement around consensus. My prior work as a facilitator in decision-making sessions for executives has prepared me to promote a diversity of voices while encouraging dissenting opinions be taken into consideration. I respect that any upcoming changes can only result from an array of debate, and I am equipped to support the process. The timing is right, I believe, for me to support the Coop in this capacity.

JESSE ROSENFELD: BOARD CANDIDATE STATEMENT

August 27, 2022



A member since 2004, I have worked as cashier, cheese and olive bagger, FTOP stock boy, babysitter and in 2nd floor guest registration. My paid profession is that of Addictions Counselor on the Lower East Side. My free time has been galvanized by the

2016 elections; I have joined Get Organized Brooklyn and regularly do phonebanking to support voter-expansion drives.

Demonstrably supporting our cooperative goals of shared success, I have brought products to our shelves and successfully brought a proposal to the approval stage at our GM. Pre-pandemic, my work slot was Secretary for the General Meeting and I took the minutes every month. Our meetings are one special set of gears in the whole enterprise, and I was proud to have been re-elected yearly for eight years straight. I consider myself very familiar with the GM and AM processes.

I love it at the Coop. I meet people here I wouldn't usually encounter and discuss things I wouldn't ever know about. I shop every couple of days because of its warm familiarity, and I like being part of an organization that is a standard-bearer for food and environmental justice. The Coop is my chosen community and I feel a part of it every day when I walk down 7th Avenue, seeing fellow members on their way to and from the store.

With a proven record of support for the health of our enterprise, I am running for the Board of Directors because I see the Coop as a business first. As such, the Board is obligated to remain alert to the legal and fiduciary responsibilities of the Coop rather than maintain advocacy for any particular issue. Members at the coming election will likely ask a version of, "How will you improve the Coop as a member of the Board?" My answer will be, "There is nothing that a Board member should do outside of taking the advice of the membership on how to vote for proposals, which they have always done."

For any proposal that is problematic, I will ask myself the same questions as any Board member: Will a proposal ratified by the General Meeting put the financial and legal health of the Coop at risk? Does the proposal violate the spirit and letter of the Coop's own by-laws or NYS articles of incorporation, and our own mission statement?

Thank you and I look forward to your vote. ■

IMANI Q'RYN: BOARD CANDIDATE STATEMENT

August 27, 2022



I was elected to the Board of Directors nearly 17 years ago and have continuously served in this capacity. I have served on the board longer than any other elected

member. I am also a member of the chair committee and have been so throughout my service on the Board.

“Our Board of Directors is not a typical Board. It was required by state law that the Coop have a Board of Directors. As a co-operative we liked our town hall style of governance, that every member has a say, every member has a vote. We wanted to continue that tradition. The Coop’s attorney at that time came up with the idea that the Board should take the advice of the members on all subjects as a means of limiting the powers of the Board. It was written into our By-Laws; most of the Board Members that we’ve had since the Board was instituted decades ago have accepted this policy.”

“I take the mandate to trust the membership and take their advice as a sacred duty. It’s not my opinion, or my position on an issue that is important. It is vital that I respect and trust the voice of the membership. The membership guides my vote.”

I wrote those words three years ago in my bid for candidacy letter. I take the opportunity to state that again. These last three years have been the most challenging for me as a Board Member and most dangerous for our form of governance and possibly the Coop in General. We had to do things as a Board that we had never done. We never meet outside of the General Meeting. During the beginning of COVID so much changed for the Coop and we were in uncharted territory. We got advice from our general Counsel. We not only had to meet but we did so every week for hours! It was exhausting. We wanted the membership to have their voice, to weigh in and decide the direction that we would go as a co-operative. It is in crisis times like those that we could have lost what we had worked over 50 years to protect.

I was so proud and honored to be with that group of Board members: Bill P, Allen Z., Rachel A., Sukey T. and Joe H. We went through that fire and kept our word, our promise to the membership.

I ask for your vote one last time. I hope that more members will step up and choose

to participate in our form of governance. It's easier now to come to our meetings, they are on zoom! All the Coop laws are made here. I also hope that those that really understand our kind of Board will consider running next time we have an opening.

I love the Coop and hope that it exists for generations to come!

Imani Q'ryn

March 1, 2022

AMY CAO: BOARD CANDIDATE STATEMENT

August 27, 2022



Fellow members-owners, my name is Amy Cao, and I humbly submit my candidacy to the Coop's Board of Directors. My growing passion for good food—its origins, its impact, its accessibility—I owe to the Food Coop. I was drawn to the Coop for the promise of delicious, affordable food, and over the years, I find myself becoming more and more attached to the less tangible aspects of what makes our community a true collective—and how to nurture this spirit to help ensure its lasting success.

In my professional life, I am a communications strategist for nonprofits, schools, professional organizations and public and private companies. This often positions me as an advisor to executives, faculty administration, public officials, and even board directors, to help them plan for growth opportunities, manage crises and minimize risks. Previously, the City contracted me to work alongside social workers as a financial empowerment counselor. This brought me face to face with struggling New Yorkers, as I helped them navigate scarce resources in unforgiving situations.

These experiences have exposed me to unique and diverse challenges at all levels of an institution. This formed an inclusionary perspective that informs my daily life. As a liaison to stakeholders at many levels, I am a good listener. I do my best to understand differing points of view, encourage dialogue to solve problems, and respond thoughtfully and decisively when the situation commands it. As a Board Member, I would do this by leaning heavily on my member community.

I believe an elected Board Member has a duty of responsibility to the membership. Over the years, I've had the privilege to speak with many of you over the course of countless shops, while stocking shelves, scanning your IDs and walking your groceries home with you. I am immensely proud of the Coop community, and I am committed to working together with you to secure its financial health and future sustainability, in service to our founding Cooperative principles. With your confidence in my ability to take your lead by heeding the advice of the membership to act in the best interest of the Coop, I hope to earn your vote.