

BIDDING FAREWELL TO A BELOVED SUPPLIER: MARGARET PALCA RETIRES

July 31, 2023



By Juliet Kleber

Pastry-loving Coop members might have noticed a profound absence in recent weeks: the brownies, loaf cakes, tarts and vegan muffins from Margaret Palca Bakes are no longer on our shelves. After 40 years as a baker Margaret Palca retired in July, closing her long-standing bakery by the Columbia Street waterfront and ending a three-decade long relationship selling her baked goods to the Coop. The *Gazette* spoke to Palca about her career, her time supplying to the Coop and her future plans.



PHOTO BY MICHAEL HARLAN TURKELL

Popular Coop baked goods supplier Margaret Palca Bakes has closed.

“WE’D BEEN WORKING ALMOST SEVEN DAYS A WEEK FOR AT LEAST 35 YEARS.
AND THAT TAKES ITS TOLL ON YOU.”

Palca, a native New Yorker, never planned on becoming a professional baker—she graduated from Barnard with a degree in art history—but the craft has always been a part of her life. She began learning from her grandmother as a small child, shadowed a pastry chef for a brief internship during her senior year of high school, and spent two months cooking in Paris during the summer before college. And while at Barnard, she was still baking: “Even while I was in school, I would start making a lot of something and then see if I could sell it to somebody.”



PHOTO BY MICHAEL HARLAN TURKELL

Margaret decorating one of her famous red velvet cakes.

Her professional life as a baker started with madeleines and expanded quickly. “I’d bring my madeleines to a store and they’d say, ‘This is delicious, but could you make brownies?’ So the next day you’re making madeleines and brownies.” Her first “real, serious job in the food business” was at Fraser Morris, a purveyor of gift baskets and fine foods on Madison Avenue. Palca started at a counter selling pre-made cookies, but the store runners liked the home-baked goods she made so much that they built her a kitchen and promoted her to being the store’s full-time, in-house baker.



PHOTO BY MICHAEL HARLAN TURKELL

Chocolate-chip brownies were a big seller.

Palca spent five years at Fraser Morris before striking out on her own again: “I decided that if I was getting to work at five o’clock in the morning and killing myself for 12 hours a day, I might as well do it for myself.” She started by baking rugelach (one her

most popular items throughout her career) in her home, to supply to Dean and Deluca and Balducci's. Fraser Morris had no need for a bakery without her, so they allowed her to keep all of the kitchen equipment for her own business, and in 1989, Margaret Palca Bakes was founded in Brooklyn. At the time, the Columbia Street Waterfront District was not the bustling neighborhood it is today: damage from large-scale infrastructure projects meant many buildings in the area were knocked down and vacant lots abounded. But construction also ended up being the bakery's saving grace: "All the workers came to buy stuff from us every day, so we had a steady clientele. They loved having a place to come for breakfast and lunch, to get a snack and coffee. That's what kept us going on a side street in the middle of nowhere in Brooklyn."



Margaret Palca with the tools of her trade now in storage at her home.

But the neighborhood and the business both grew, and in the early 1990s, a visitor to the bakery let her know that the Park Slope Food Coop was looking for a muffin vendor. And so began a long and successful partnership. Over the years, Margaret Palca Bakes adapted their offerings to the needs of the Coop and shifting attitudes about food—supplying full-fat and low-fat baked goods, conventional and vegan muffins. According to Lisa Hidem, the Coop’s bread buyer, the vegan muffins became so popular

during the pandemic that the Coop asked Palca if she could expand her selection, which went from one vegan carrot muffin to cranberry and banana as well.

In addition to muffins, loaf cakes and brownies, Palca supplied the Coop with about 200 Thanksgiving pies (apple, pumpkin, mixed berry, and cherry) every year. Reflecting on her experience, Palca noted, “There’s a lot of pressure around the holidays, but it’s also exhilarating. I do feel I’m letting people down for Thanksgiving this year, and I hope they’ll find a pie they like.”

“I’M SO GRATEFUL FOR ALL THE PATRONAGE AND THE LOYALTY THE SHOPPERS AT THE COOP HAVE GIVEN ME.”

While Colson Patisserie will be providing vegan, gluten-free muffins as well as loaf cakes (one of which is gluten-free, though still baked in a facility that processes gluten), the Coop is still searching for vendors to replace Palca’s pies and the rest of her product line. And that can be a complex task considering the Coop’s logistical needs.

Packaging presents a particular challenge, Hidem explained. In an independent bakery or conventional store, permanent staff are able to recognize and price unlabeled baked goods, but the Coop’s member-labor model makes that much more difficult. Products need to be clearly identifiable for members who are unfamiliar with them to stock and ring up correctly. Thus, a prospective vendor would need to be equipped to provide appropriate packaging, labeling and UPC codes. Volume also presents an issue—if an order is too small, it will often incur a delivery fee, raising the price of the items. And many bakeries have large minimum orders, which can create waste and lose money if their products don’t sell well. “We need to make sure it’s worth our time and the vendor’s time,” Hidem said. “It’s a tricky balance.”

While those logistical considerations were challenging at times, the relationship was

well worth it to Palca. She expressed particular gratitude for the Coop’s thoughtfulness regarding packaging and environmental concerns: “I appreciate the Coop because they think about everything—packaging, food waste.... We talked about selling pies in window boxes rather than plastic clamshells because it’s better for the environment, and they agreed, even though it’s more expensive. It’s hard to find another business that cares that much.” And overall, she said, “I’m so grateful for all the patronage and the loyalty the shoppers at the Coop have given me.”



Margaret Palca’s bakery and cafe on Columbia Street sadly now stands empty.

On June 23, Palca threw a retirement party in her shop to celebrate and say farewell to the bakery. It was packed with customers, long-time employees, and friends sharing their stories about the special place the bakery held in the neighborhood and their lives.

Since retiring, Palca has been focusing on projects she didn't have time for, including repainting her house and fixing up her basement. And she's been thoroughly enjoying newfound free time: "We're a little topsy-turvy, but very happy," she said. "I love what I did, but we'd been working almost seven days a week for at least 35 years. And that takes its toll on you." Baking, she acknowledged, has been a tough business: "It's really labor intensive, long hours, hands on all the time. And the profit margin is so small."

She is still baking, of course, though on a much smaller scale: "I make myself cookies all the time because I like to eat cookies for dessert, and I made muffins one morning." She and her husband, Paul, also plan to keep a yearly gig making gingerbread houses for a longtime customer at Christmas time. And with her less hectic schedule, Palca is now considering Coop membership herself.



PHOTO BY ROD MORRISON

Margaret relaxing at home with her husband, Paul Kalin. Paul is Vice President at Margaret Palca Bakes.

At the Coop, customers have been missing her offerings. Palca's goods were beloved not only for their quality, but also their reasonable pricing, especially for a local, artisanal bakery, Hidem told the *Gazette*. "We tried warning people—we shared her retirement announcement on Twitter." But the news hasn't made its way to everyone, and plenty of shoppers have asked where their favorite brownies or vegan muffins have gone. "They're always sad, but everyone agrees that Margaret's earned her retirement after so many years."



The
Margaret Palca
BAKES
Cookbook

**Cakes, Cookies,
Muffins, and Memories
from a famous
Brooklyn Baker**

“Margaret Palca has
all the qualities I look for in a baker:
the soul of an artist,
the heart of a nurturer, and
an obsessive perfectionist streak.”

—**Ed Levine**, founder of
SeriousEats.com

Margaret Palca

Photography by Michael Harlan Turkell

Margaret's cookbook is available at Barnes & Noble and Amazon for around \$20. And Coop members who really miss those brownies can always try baking them with the help of the 2018 Margaret Palca Bakes Cookbook.

Juliet Kleber is a writer and editor based in Bed-Stuy. She serves as a member of the Editorial Board of n+1 magazine.

THE COOP'S PET FOOD SECTION: SMALL PAW PRINT, LARGE IMPACT

July 31, 2023



By Rahima Nasa

The Coop is the one-stop-shop for everything we need to nourish our family and, I re-

cently discovered, our pup too. Nestled in the back of the aisle at the center of the Coop are shelves of food for dogs and cats, litter and plenty of treats. I've overlooked this aisle until recently, when my husband and I welcomed Cardamom (we call her Cardi) into our home. She is still a puppy so we pay a lot of attention to what she eats and the ingredients in her food. When I stumbled upon the pet food section I was delighted by the options. I wanted to know more about what was on the shelves so I called up the buyer for the pet food section, Tomo Mizoguchi.



Mizoguchi has been the Coop's pet supplies buyer for about half a year and hasn't quite been able to put his mark on the pet aisle yet. He's tried his best to maintain the usual selection of items, because members have been consistently buying items from the Raw Dynamics and Honest Kitchen brands. Mizoguchi faces a challenge when certain items go out of stock for long periods of time. In those cases, he tries to switch the item out with something else from the same brand. For example, if a chicken flavor treat is out of stock, he'll look for beef flavor, always checking the ingredient


lists and avoiding anything with artificial coloring. “I go with looking for similar products within the same brand because it looks like the ones that we do have seem to be working,” Mizoguchi explained.




PREMIUM  CAT FOOD
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& EGG RECIPE**

SIMPLE WHOLESOME INGREDIENTS

Real Chicken is the #1 Ingredient

No Artificial Colors or Flavors 

No Corn, Wheat or Soy 

No By-Product Meal 



FOR CATS OF ALL AGES
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MANUFACTURED IN THE USA WITH
FOREIGN AND DOMESTIC INGREDIENTS

Unit Price \$2.80 LB	RETAIL PRICE
	\$8.41
1 Rows	3 LB

Wild Harvest Cat Food - Chicken, Rice & Egg

PHOTO BY CHRISTIAN DIAZ

Mizoguchi has noticed that the cost of canned pet food, for both dogs and cats, has declined over the years. “We used to sell canned food that [was] around \$1.50, but that has gone down so right now we sell the most of canned food that’s around \$1,” he noted. Wild Harvest is the most popular brand among shoppers, according to Mizoguchi. The Coop is selling twice as much Wild Harvest cat and dog food compared to other brands.

But the pet food section has a lot more to offer than just kibble and canned food. Shoppers can pick up essentials like cat litter, poop bags, supplements and treats. Though technically not in the pet food section, raw options in the freezer section also feed Coop pets.

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a daily bar to support dental health and fresh breath

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✕ all natural ✕ wheat free



MEDIUM DOGS
25-50 lbs

coconut + mint recipe
16 dental bars
dog treats · net wt 13 oz (368.5g)

At a glance it would seem like dog treats dominate the pet section. There are several options of treats from local New York state brands like Raw Dynamics and Bocce's Bakery. I've had my eye on some treats from Portland Pet Food Company, which was also started by a pet parent who wanted to give her dog healthier, more natural options to eat. But to my surprise, cat owners are the biggest consumers for the pet section. "Dollar amount wise, we sell three times more cat food than dog food," Mizoguchi said.



PHOTO BY CHRISTIAN DIAZ

While the pet section may have a relatively small footprint in the store, it's clear that members rely on the section to feed their furry companions. Mizoguchi doesn't have any plans to shake up the pet food section any time soon, so shoppers can rest assured that tried and true favorites like Wild Harvest will remain on the shelves. But the Coop is planning to add dried catnip in the coming months. "It's interesting because I do get a lot of product suggestions for the other categories that I order for but I haven't gotten any product suggestions for pet food," Mizoguchi added. Until he

does, he's not expecting to make any major buying changes.



PHOTO BY CHRISTIAN DIAZ

Shoppers who wish to see new products on the pet supply shelves are encouraged to send suggestions to Mizoguchi through their Member Services account (log in, click “contact us” and then the “product suggestion” tab).

Rahima Nasa, a public radio producer, has been a member of the Park Slope Food Coop since 2022.



PHOTO BY CHRISTIAN DIAZ

BUILDING COMMUNITY BY COOKING TOGETHER: COOP COOKING CLASSES MAKE A COMEBACK

July 31, 2023



ILLUSTRATION BY DEBORAH TINT

By Frank Haberle

Brooklyn is undoubtedly one of the world's great culinary capitals. According to the New York City Department of Health, there are 6,646 restaurants lining the avenues of our borough, representing almost every cuisine and culture in the world; with food trucks, markets and other venues, every conceivable dish is at our fingertips. Among the Park Slope Food Coop membership, we are blessed with a multitude of professional chefs as well as talented home cooks who have remarkable knowledge of the many ingredients we hold on our shelves, and of how to prepare delicious meals for our families. The Coop's cooking classes—a series of events organized and presented by a committed working group of our members—offer a remarkable opportunity to learn how to prepare a fantastic range of dishes, using the products available at the Coop.

As the Coop continues its steady progress toward pre-Covid normalcy, one of the most important aspects of this effort is bringing back the programs and activities that helped to strengthen the sense of community that defines our membership. In this effort, the return and rising popularity of Coop cooking classes has been a key ingredient.

“THERE WAS A COMMUNAL SENSE TO THE IN-PERSON WORKSHOPS WITH A GREAT DEAL OF INTERACTION AND HANDS-ON LEARNING BETWEEN THE MEMBERS AND PRESENTERS...”

MANDIRA GHAI, COOKING CLASS CO-CHAIR

The cooking classes that were hosted on-site in the upstairs meeting room for years before Covid-19 were a popular mainstay of the community. The classes brought chefs and home cooks from the widest possible range of cultures and cuisines to share their knowledge and love of great food with members. The classes were always popular events, drawing a core group of “regulars,” both new and long-standing members. With Covid restrictions during the spring of 2020, the cooking classes, like all workshops hosted by the Coop, had to be paused.

Today, under the leadership of co-chairs Mandira Ghai and Jeff Bonar and squad members Sophia Li, Tritia Denaro, Nina Fattahi, Amanda McCleod, Jeffrey M. and Elana Siggall, cooking classes have returned to the Coop in a virtual format—a big change from the pre-Covid, in-person workshops, necessary due to the meeting room being repurposed. Ghai, a Coop member since 2016, remembers that “prior to the pandemic, classes were packed between first-time attendees and regulars who participated each and every month. The interactive, hands-on approach of the in-person sessions, especially the prepared meal everyone shared at the end of the class, really reinforced the communal nature of the Coop.”

When classes had to be canceled due to Covid, the core group of organizers voluntarily continued to meet and plan how to bring back the workshop series. “The team saw a unique opportunity at the beginning of lockdown to translate classes into an online social activity that offered ideas and inspiration, especially during a period when people were overwhelmed by how much more cooking they were doing at home,” Ghai said. “It was a nice feeling of camaraderie for us to keep going in the midst of chaos, and a reminder of how much I enjoy collaborating with the talented, affable people in our squad.” Another initiative by the Food Class Squad was cooking for the Coop’s hard-working staff during the pandemic, preparing meals for nearly 60 essential workers.

“WE WANT THE CLASSES TO FEEL WELCOMING FOR EVERYONE—FROM GATHERING INGREDIENTS TO ENCOUNTERING MOMENTS OF UNCERTAINTY AND HAVING A PERSON THERE TO GUIDE YOU.”

SOPHIA LI, MEMBER

Open to members and non-members, Coop cooking classes offer wide-ranging options for member cooks. This summer, classes have included recipes for summer squash, presented by Jeffrey Mason, and a workshop on blueberry pie hosted by Elana Segall. In all cases, there is a great deal of flexibility in the structure of the workshops, which allows the leaders to be creative. Cooking classes are designed to be accessible to people at all levels as cooks, with presenters walking the group through preparation of dishes, step by step, with plenty of time for Q&A.

Sophia Li, a new Coop member who worked in stocking and checkout before joining the Cooking Class Squad very recently, spoke of how impressive it is to see how the classes contribute to a strong sense of community. “I know a lot of people who have joined the Coop since the pandemic, ranging from professional chefs to people who only eat Ritz crackers. Regardless of your cooking level—from gathering ingredients

to encountering moments of uncertainty and having a person there who can guide you, to hearing other people's questions during the class and discussing together—we are seeking to facilitate a space for learning together," Li said.



D. Tint

ILLUSTRATION BY DEBORAH TINT

“It is a priority that our classes reflect the diversity of the products, producers, and people found at the Coop,” Ghai added. “Anyone with a perspective on food and cooking is encouraged to propose a virtual session. We also want to ensure that what we are sharing is useful, especially given the level of fatigue sustained by online meetings, so community requests and general feedback is extremely valuable as we continue redefining the class.”

“When we shop at the Coop we are surrounded by members representing every food tradition on the planet,” said squad co-chair and professional chef Jeff Bonar. “I am honored to be on the squad that celebrates that bounty! If you have some special food or cooking expertise and want to share it with other members, let us know.”

To learn more about upcoming Coop cooking classes and how to get involved—including doing a presentation—please visit the cooking class website. You can also check Instagram for updates and previous class photos. If you are looking for recipes and past presentations, please visit the YouTube channel or contact the squad directly at info@foodcoopcooks.org.

Frank Haberle is a 30-year Coop member, a professional grant writer, and the author of two novels about 1980s drifters—Shufflers, and the upcoming Downlanders—both published by Flexible Press in Minneapolis.

GIVING NEW LIFE TO COOP PACKAGING

July 31, 2023



By Juliet Kleber

The Coop has instituted robust recycling, food donation and compost programs to minimize waste. But some members are finding even more novel ways to repurpose the Coop's discarded packaging and other refuse.

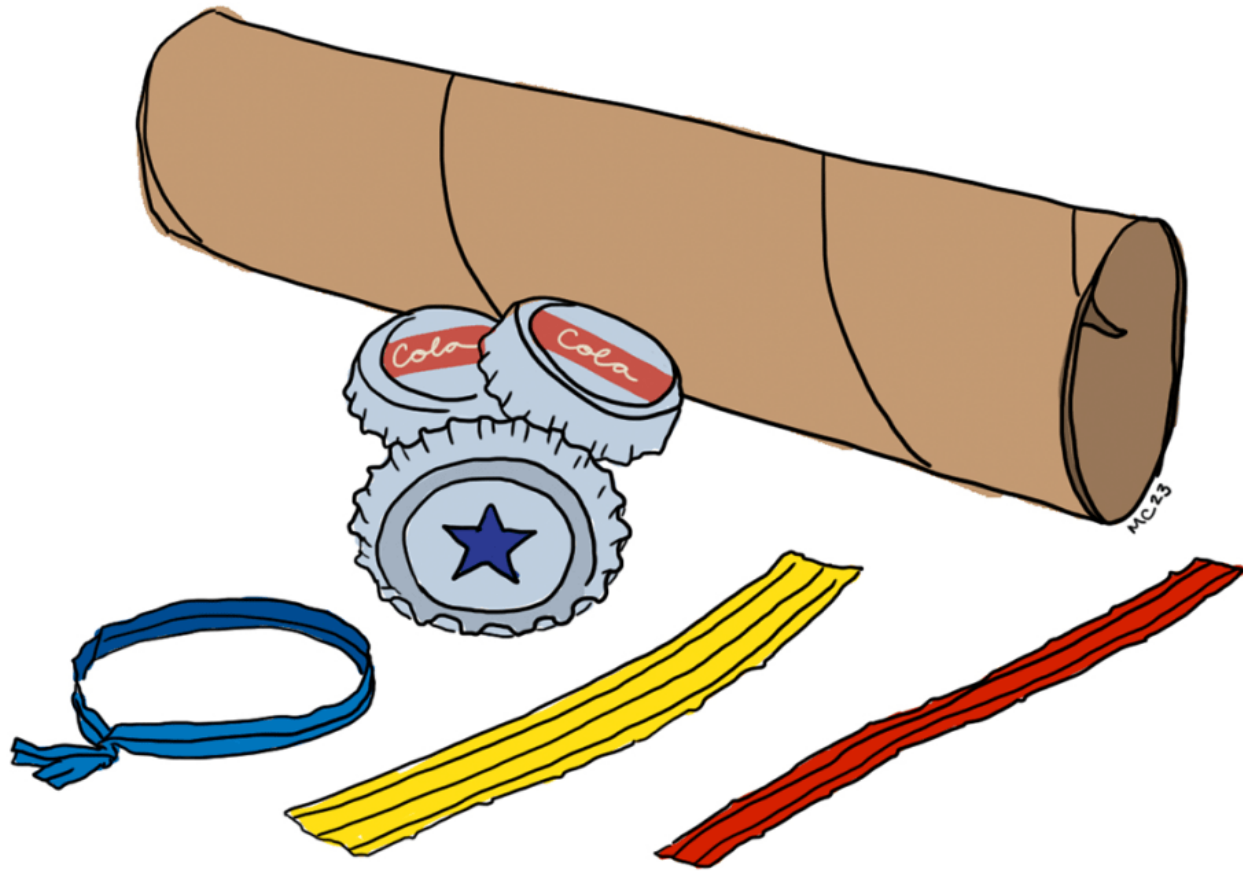


ILLUSTRATION BY MAGGIE CARSON

Wendy Gelsanliter, a Coop member since 2005, is one of them. Gelsanliter is the Materials Center Educator & Coordinator at Teaching Beyond the Square, a local education non-profit. Located on 16th Street just outside of Union Square, the Materials Center houses a collection of found objects donated by New York City residents and businesses, including the Coop. These are items that would typically be discarded after a single use: commonplace objects like coffee machine pods, metal and plastic bottle caps and paper towel tubes, as well as more specialized materials, such as discarded samples from architecture and design firms that make recurring donations. But the discarded items are not just collected—they become “clean, resorted, curated, beautiful trash,” Gelsanliter explained in an interview with the *Gazette*. “People walk in and say, ‘Oh my god—I want to live here!’ ”



The center is open to the public by appointment—visitors can buy materials for \$2 a pound to repurpose for their own projects. But the materials are primarily used as a medium for creative play at the center’s Materials Trailer and in its Materialized Classroom program, which visits schools across the tri-state area in order to give children an opportunity to play, create, and experiment with the objects.

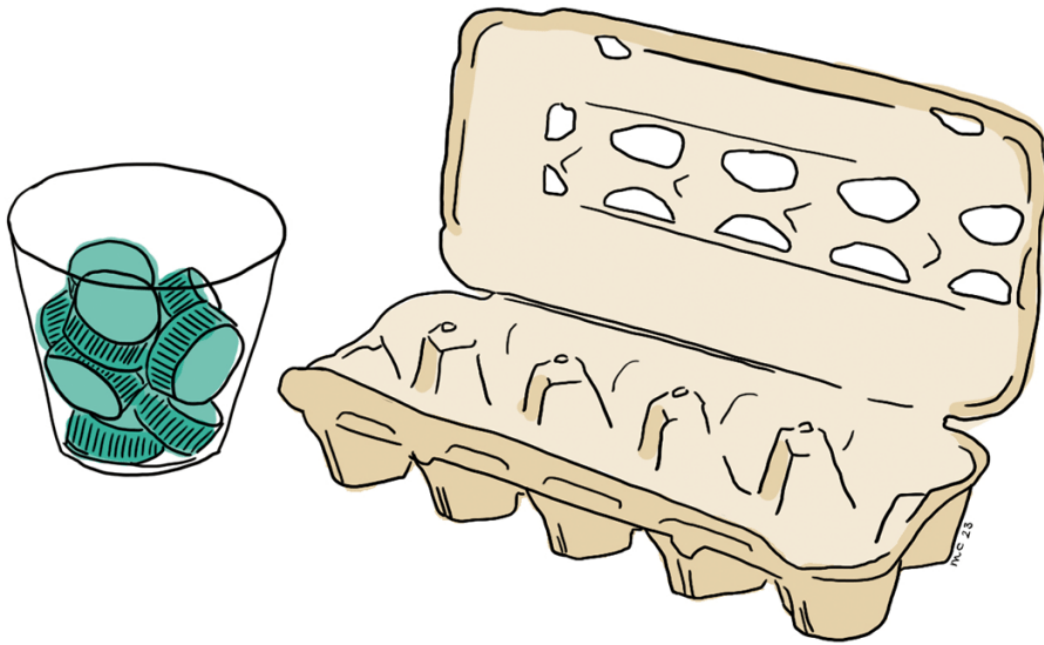


ILLUSTRATION BY MAGGIE CARSON

Children from pre-K to 6th grade engage in open-ended exploration with these found objects, sometimes using them as building materials: “A pre-K student might use objects and say, ‘It’s a playground’ or ‘It’s a ship,’ ” Gelsanliter said. But they might also just enjoy pouring bottle caps from one container to another, or shaking a jar full of buttons to hear the sound it makes.



ILLUSTRATION BY MAGGIE CARSON

“It’s not about the product; it’s about the process. When the grownups get involved, they’re the ones intent on saying ‘What did you make?’ But when they step away the children are so interested in discovering what these materials can do. They’re silent—totally engaged in exploring.”



Gelsanliter is always looking for interesting materials and the Coop has become a great source. It started with can carriers. “I saw someone shelving beer and throwing the can holders into a box,” she explained. “He saw how excited I was... but wanted to know what I was going to do with them, so I explained.” That person put Gelsanliter in touch with the Coop’s beer buyer, Kusi Merello, who now puts the can carriers aside for her. In 2022, Gelsanliter collected approximately 65 pounds of plastic can carriers from the Coop. By May of 2023, she has already collected 20 pounds of plastic—and has just begun collecting other supplies like cardboard, twist-ties, and the plastic tubes inside rolls of register tape when she shops.

Whether students are art-making, experimenting, engineering or just appreciating sounds, colors and textures, the program requires that they follow only two rules:

1. Be kind to others.
2. Be kind to the materials.



Children do not use tape or glue to make permanent objects and all materials are collected at the end of their work to be reused again in the next classroom. Not using adhesives forces problem-solving, Gelsanliter says, but it also allows the life-cycle of these materials to be extended as much as possible. Twist-ties typically last several months, sometimes up to a year if they arrive to the Materials Center in good condition. And children are taught how to use the materials conscientiously. “We teach children not to break the cardboard. And there’s great care in the cleanup process; we teach the children that if you use a twist tie and twist it around, please make it straight and put it back in the jar.”



PHOTO BY WENDY GELSANLITER

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Coop staff and member-workers have been interested in and supportive of Gelsanliter's collection. "I walk around [the Coop] so excited. And people are interested when they see me taking things—I saw a color of can carrier that I needed and asked the member stocking if I could have it. He was curious what I was going to do with it, so I showed him some of the pictures on my phone. What the kids can make with these things is amazing."

"I save everything I ever use—I wash and keep every bottle cap," Gelsanliter said. "Before you throw something away, look at it carefully and ask, 'If I had a whole bowl of these—could I do something with it?' If the answer is yes, don't throw it away. 'If I clean all these apple sauce pouches and put them in a jar it will it look good?' If so, then keep it. Once you start looking at things in a different way, you can't stop seeing it. Your whole life changes."



Receiving Coordinator Jerome Petitgand and his seven-year-old son, Luc, have also seen creative potential in the Coop's refuse, though they've taken a somewhat more

concrete approach. For the past six months, they have been building a detailed model of a medieval castle and village using packaging materials from the Coop—primarily the cardboard boxes that the Coop’s bananas are received and sold in. In an interview, Jerome and Luc told the *Gazette* that the inspiration for the project came from reading the 1977 book *Castle* by David Macaulay, which chronicles the construction of a fictional castle in written and illustrated detail. Jerome explained that their construction project began with the central keep and village but expanded over time: “Luc realized we needed land to subsidize and feed the people.”



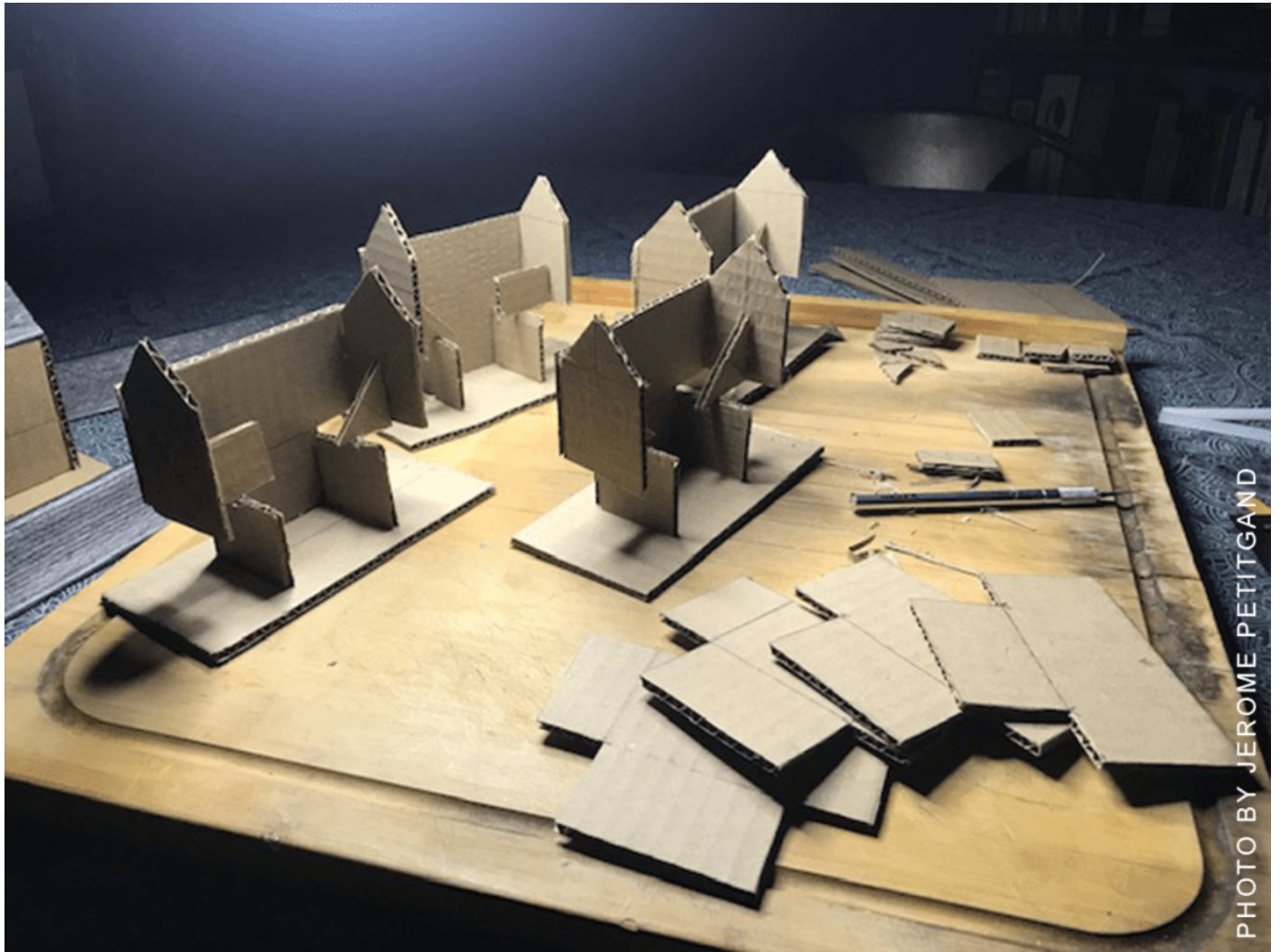


PHOTO BY JEROME PETITGAND

At present, their settlement features the castle, bridges and archways, and multi-story houses, all surrounded by a guard wall featuring watchtowers, a gatehouse, and siege equipment for the toy soldiers attempting to scale it. While Luc did draw some detailed maps and plans, the buildings are modular and rearrangeable.



The buildings are mostly made of flat cardboard cut from banana boxes—they make up both the structure of the buildings and their details. Tiny strips of cardboard are glued onto the facades to replicate the half-timber work of their Tudor-style houses. The towers and turrets of the castle and wall are made with the tubes that hold the Coop’s rolls of produce bags. The roofs are made from the edge protectors used to stabilize boxes (again, mostly banana boxes) when they’re stacked onto pallets. They’re typically about four feet long, but Petitgand and Luc have found that they make perfect slate-like roofs when cut to size.



“I built things like this when I was a boy, even though everything was plastic and beautiful and you could just buy it,” Petitgand told the *Gazette*. “We decided to make it ourselves from scratch instead.” He’s found that he and Luc share that affinity for building. The two have spent many cold winter afternoons and rainy Sundays working on their project, often for four or five hours at a time. And aside from glue guns, hot glue, and tools like box-cutters and X-Acto knives, their village has been made entirely from free, discarded materials.



Now that summer is approaching and the weather allows Luc more opportunity to play outside, the village is often packed away in the seven banana boxes that hold all of its composite parts when it's not being worked on. But the project is far from over. Luc and Petitgand are already planning its next expansion: viking boats and river, all made from Coop cardboard.

Juliet Kleber is a writer and editor based in Bed-Stuy. She serves as a member of the editorial board of n+1 magazine.

APRIL GENERAL MEETING REPORT

July 31, 2023



ILLUSTRATION BY DEBORAH TINT

Proposal to Return to Live GMs Is Highlight of April Meeting

By Frank Haberle

The April 2023 General Meeting focused on two questions: whether the Coop can re-

turn to in-person General Meetings in the fall and how to structure the work-slot credit for attending members. With no committees scheduled to report, and brief reports by the General Coordinators on finances and the shopping floor, the well-managed Zoom meeting of 83 members and staff wrapped up in a crisp 90 minutes.

Open Forum

The April GM began with an open forum, where members weighed in on a number of concerns. Many were related to the reinstatement of elements of the Coop that were put on hold during COVID. A repeated theme was whether the Coop planned to restart the Terracycle plastic collection that was conducted prior to the pandemic, and concerns over increased plastic containers and plastic packaging on the shopping shelves today. General Coordinator Elinoar Astrinsky responded that the Terracycle recycling program was a member-led effort and would be challenging to re-create at this time due to the lack of storage space within the Coop and the enormous cost of shipping. Astrinsky added that Coop buyers are trying to find products that have less plastic packaging. Unfortunately, items such as zucchini blossoms and olives are shipped in plastic to protect their contents.

A member asked several times about the new mask mandate guidelines that allow members to not wear masks on the shopping floor, creating what she perceived as an unsafe environment. Astrinsky invited open discussion of the mask policy at a General Meeting, noting that any actual change of the mask policy would be decided on by members. Astrinsky also invited the member to bring this issue back to the Agenda Committee if she thinks it should be explored again.



One member asked if there was an update to the Coop's bringing back the child care room. Astrinsky stated that plans are being drawn for creating physical space for it. (The former child care room was converted into a bulk food processing work space during the pandemic.)

Coordinator Reports

With Coop Treasurer and General Coordinator Joe Holtz away at a National Co+op Grocers conference, General Coordinator Joe Szladek reported on the Coop's finances. Szladek highlighted some early promising trends in terms of sales: the Coop's net sales for the first eight weeks of FY24 were \$8.39 million, a 16% increase from the \$7.24 million raised in the same period last year. The gross margin dollars of \$1.64 million produced by these sales exceeded the \$1.61 million in actual expenses. Increased enrollment is helping with sales and membership has expanded by 3,500

over the past 52 weeks, with more than 70 members joining each week. At the same time, the Coop has kept staffing levels relatively flat, which helps to keep expenses down.

Questions included a request for a status update on the part-time workers who were hired during COVID. Szladek reported that, with the return to member labor, this program has been largely phased out. There is still a group working in food processing, filling the role of squad leaders in guiding different duties like cheese and olive processing. The Coop does not plan to lay these workers off and, instead, hopes to eventually absorb some of them into Receiving Coordinator positions.



ILLUSTRATION BY DEBORAH TINT

Astrinsky opened the food report with a shout-out to staff who are working very hard to keep everything flowing through the Coop. She then reported that the spring season is often a challenging time for produce. Fall produce like pears and apples are dwindling; nonetheless, “we have beautiful spring flowers and perennials from Glover Farms coming in; we are bringing in soil and compost. Every week more local items will be added.” There are also a lot of new cheese products available.



ILLUSTRATION BY DEBORAH TINT

Questions from members focused on concerns about chocolate products that contain cadmium, arsenic and lead that are still on Coop shelves. Szladek responded that the chocolate question is a complicated one and the Coordinators will bring more information to the next meeting.

Agenda Item: Work Slot Credit for General Meeting Attendance

With General Meetings (GMs) moving back to a live setting (in person at the Prospect Park Picnic House, starting on September 26, 2023), the Coordinators put forth for discussion a proposal that in-person attendance be re-established. As presented, the proposal suggested that up to 75 members could earn work slot credit for each General Meeting and members would be limited to earning work slot credit at one General Meeting per calendar year.

As Szladek explained, “In the past, and per a previous GM vote, as many members that went to a meeting could receive credit for attending—and for up to two GMs a year. This was voted in by the membership at a GM during a period of tremendous growth in the early 2000s when the Coop expanded and had surplus labor. Currently we don’t believe the Coop has enough member labor available weekly at a six-week cycle to support this same structure. We think it’s best to start with a cap of 75 work slots per meeting and one credit per member per year. When the Coop can afford to, we can look into increasing those numbers.”

Szladek added that the discussion of this proposal at this time will not include a hybrid option (Zoom and in-person) because the technology would be challenging.

Questions revolved around the numbers of members who could attend live meetings, and the costs and accessibility of the Picnic House. Szladek responded that up to 250 people could safely attend a meeting in the Picnic House and it was considerably more affordable than other venues.

In discussion, some members spoke in favor of only one shift per year, but thought that the number of 75 could be higher. Others felt that two credits would encourage more members to come regularly. Many members felt strongly that there must be a remote “hybrid” option for members who may have challenges getting to an in-person meeting. “It’s a new world out there,” one member added, “and a lot of people are now operating more remotely. We should consider hybrid.” Another member added that “changes in work culture have changed our sense of accountability to each other. As a member organization of 15,000 we will still only have 250 members attending these meetings. We need to offer more incentives to come to the GM, not less.” Another member expressed concern that without a remote option, people who are at high risk of infection and those with physical challenges will feel that their contribution via the GM are not as welcome.

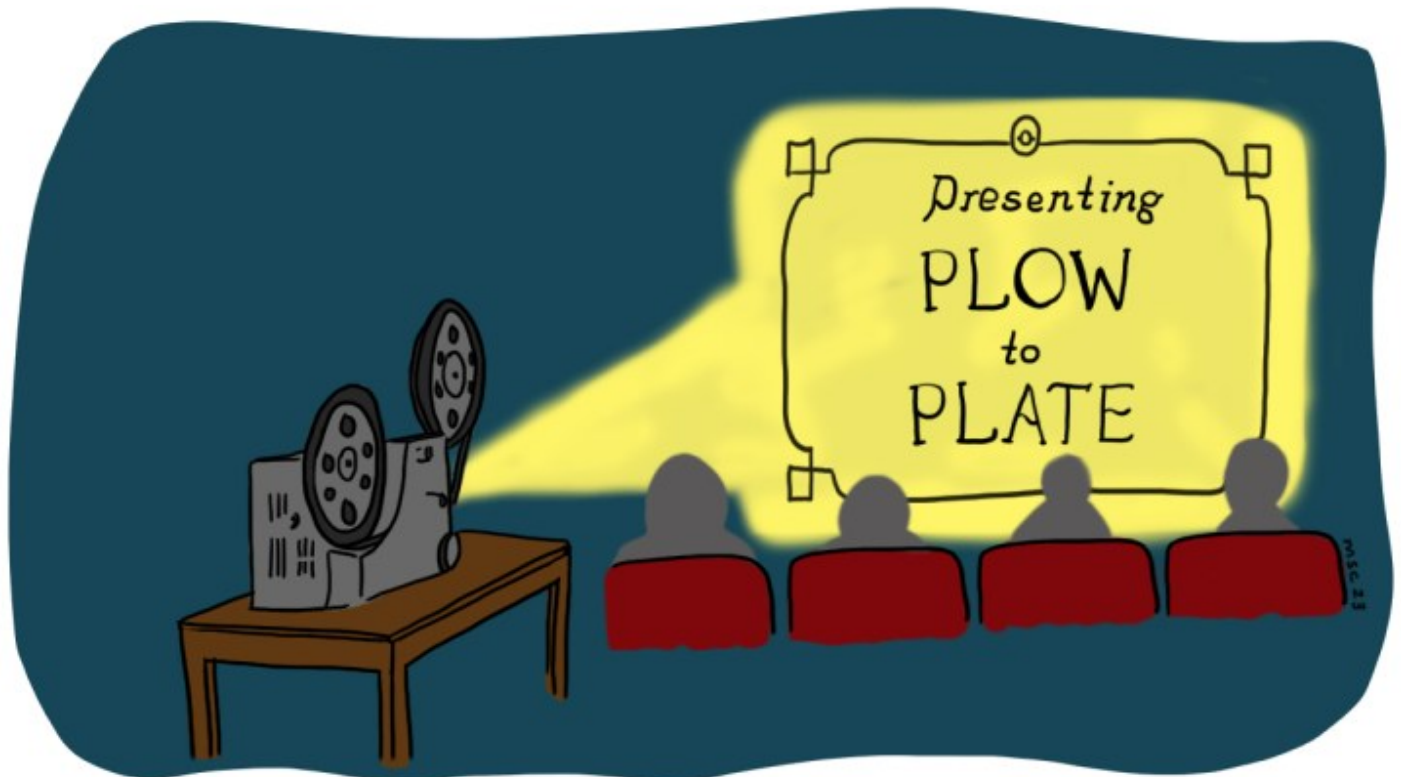
Szladek noted that this agenda item was not intended to address the issue of a hybrid model, but rather to discuss continuing to unwind emergency COVID protocols and re-

turning the GM to the way it was run for decades prior to the pandemic—in person and with some shift credit available for attendance. He encouraged members who were interested in a hybrid (remote and in-person) General Meeting to request that the Agenda Committee include that topic at a future GM.

Frank Haberle works for New Settlement in the Bronx and is the author of the novel Shufflers.

PLOW TO PLATE FILM SERIES

July 31, 2023



A MATTER OF TASTE: SERVING UP PAUL LIEBRANDT

By Adam Rabiner

The media feeds an image of the celebrity chef as cocksure and invariably nasty to

their sous-chefs and other kitchen underlings. The 2011 documentary *A Matter of Taste* tracks the career of Chef Paul Liebrandt, the British transplant to New York who gained fame in 2000 (when he was only 25) for a three-star (excellent) review of his restaurant Atlas from *New York Times* critic William Grimes. By chronicling Liebrandt's ups and downs, hangups and insecurities, as well as his long road to redemption, the film challenges some of the easy assumptions about the life of celebrated and talented masters of food.

You first see Liebrandt in a kitchen photo shoot wearing a white double-breasted jacket stained with a bloody handprint. A pig head sits nearby on the counter in a pool of blood beside a green apple. Aware that he looks like a lunatic murderer at a crime scene, Liebrandt says, "I'm not a nutcase, I'm just an artist." Liebrandt's dishes, creative and unexpected combinations of ingredients like chocolate-covered scallops and smoked bacon sorbet, plated beautifully with swirls of green, red and yellow sauces, resemble paintings by Miro. His one-of-a-kind creations, lacking reference points, mean that whether an invention is "good" or "bad" comes down to one's palate and whether a diner (or critic) likes it or not. One signature dish, a wasabi-apple sorbet amuse-bouche, sounds precious and ridiculous, but almost everyone who had it thought it was the best thing they ever tasted.

Liebrandt's self-identity as an artist has drawbacks chronicled in the documentary. - First, he quits Atlas over menu disputes and in December 2001 takes a job at Papillon, a modest French bistro and bar. Immediately he elevates the pub menu to haute cuisine, but in June 2002, due to a poor business climate, the owners are forced to return to more neighborhood-friendly burgers and fries. Liebrandt grins and bears it for several months, but you can see his unhappiness, as he glances at the clock on the wall and visibly wrestles with his underemployment. After three months of mounting frustration, "his brain going to jelly," as he puts it, he quits. Things aren't going great in his personal life either. "I am too nice," he laments about not having a girlfriend. "I get to the friend zone, not to the end zone."

A Matter of Taste picks up three years later, in December 2005. Liebrandt has opened

his own business and is now making ends meet as a food and drink consultant working on varied projects like gourmet marshmallows. Eventually he lands a gig as the Chef Director of Gilt, located in the New York Palace Hotel, and quickly learns that working with hoteliers, as opposed to experienced restaurateurs, has its own set of problems. As he deals with the many rules that curtail his free expression, he constantly feels like his “balls are on the chopping block.”

Despite these challenges he’s determined to earn another three-star review from the *New York Times* whose new food critic, Frank Bruni, replaced Grimes in 2004. Much of the tension and a driving theme in the documentary is the striving and effort required to get a three-star (or higher) review. Of course, the creativity and genius of the chef—and their ability to not just prepare an excellent dish but also to tell a story or evoke an emotion—matter. But so does the more prosaic stuff like 18-to-20-hour workdays, exacting perfectionism executed with military-like precision and efficiency, a clean and well-organized kitchen and to some degree the whims and tastes of the critic.

Liebrandt parts ways with Gilt in January 2007 and laments that his career seems to be going down the toilet and that he is not as economically stable as he should be at his age. The portrait being drawn is less about the stereotypical tyrannical chef barking orders and screaming at his cowering staff than about how even those with great talent still struggle to make their way in this extremely competitive and tough city.

Eventually Liebrandt’s life gains some footing as he finds a girlfriend and teams up with well-known restaurateur Drew Nieporent to open up Corton on the site of Drew’s famous Montrachet in Tribeca. Will they sway Bruni to give them that coveted three stars? Tune in to find out.

A Matter of Taste, June 13, 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.

ENVIRONMENTAL COMMITTEE SEEKS NEW MEMBERS

July 31, 2023





**ENVIRONMENTAL
COMMITTEE IS
LOOKING FOR
NEW MEMBERS**

The Food Coop's Environmental Committee is looking for multiple new members!

The mission of the committee is to provide education, research, and policy motivation to ensure the Food Coop operates with fidelity to its official environmental policy which mandates that the Coop "support the best products and practices with regard to the health, safety, and preservation of humans, animals, and the overall biosphere." You can learn more about the Environmental Committee's history and activities here: <https://sites.google.com/site/psfcec/home>

The Committee meets approximately quarterly to set plans for action between meetings. We are looking for members with education and/or professional experience in environmental topics relevant to the Food Coop's operations and impact. If you're interested, please send an email with a short description of your related experience to: psfc.environmental.committee@gmail.com.

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THE VACCINE MANDATE AND THE PARK SLOPE FOOD COOP

July 31, 2023



ILLUSTRATION BY MAGGIE CARSON

A Discussion with Joe Holtz

By Frank Haberle

On December 6, Mayor Bill de Blasio announced major expansions to the “Key to NYC” program, the first-in-nation vaccination mandate for workers and customers at indoor dining, fitness, entertainment and performance venues. In addition, the mayor also announced a first-in-the-nation vaccine mandate for private-sector workers. The

mandate, which was to take effect on December 27, would apply to roughly 184,000 businesses—a list which includes all businesses, nonprofit entities and the Park Slope Food Coop. At the time, December 6, the Mayor’s office announced that guidelines would be released December 15—when released, the further guidelines specified that interns and volunteers were included in the mandate.

New York City requires:
ALL MEMBER-WORKERS
must be vaccinated
against COVID-19 to
work a shift.

REMEMBER TO BRING YOUR
VACCINE RECORD TO SHOW AT
CHECK-IN FOR EACH
SCHEDULED SHIFT.

To find out where to get a free COVID-19 vaccine,
visit nyc.gov/vaccinefinder or
call **877-VAX-4NYC** (877-829-4692).

NYC may change recommendations
as the situation evolves. 12.14.21

NYC VACCINE FOR ALL:
SAFE, FREE, EASY

NYC

PHOTO BY CHRISTIAN DIAZ

For the PSFC, this has required a fast and major overhaul of our own guidelines and

practices to ensure that we are in compliance with the new mandate. From the December 6 announcement, the PSFC's 92 paid staff (71 full-time permanent staff, 8 permanent part-time, and 13 pandemic support staff) had to either vaccinate or apply for an accommodation by December 27 (more than 90% were already compliant). However, under the December 15 announcement, the mandate's extension also would include working members (who are, under the City's definition, 'volunteers').

“OUR MEMBER WORKERS ARE NOT REALLY EMPLOYEES AND THEY ARE NOT VOLUNTEERS—THEY SIGN UP FOR WORK SHIFTS VOLUNTARILY AND THEY SCHEDULE THEMSELVES.”

GENERAL COORDINATOR JOE HOLTZ

The new mandates put the PSFC into a short turnaround window over the holidays to work with staff and on-site working members to communicate and clarify the new requirements and put systems in place to ensure that working members kept proof of vaccination or had applied for an exemption. The *Linewaiters' Gazette* spoke to General Coordinator Joe Holtz to learn more about the PSFC's experience with the mandates, how the PSFC responded and what this means to our workforce.

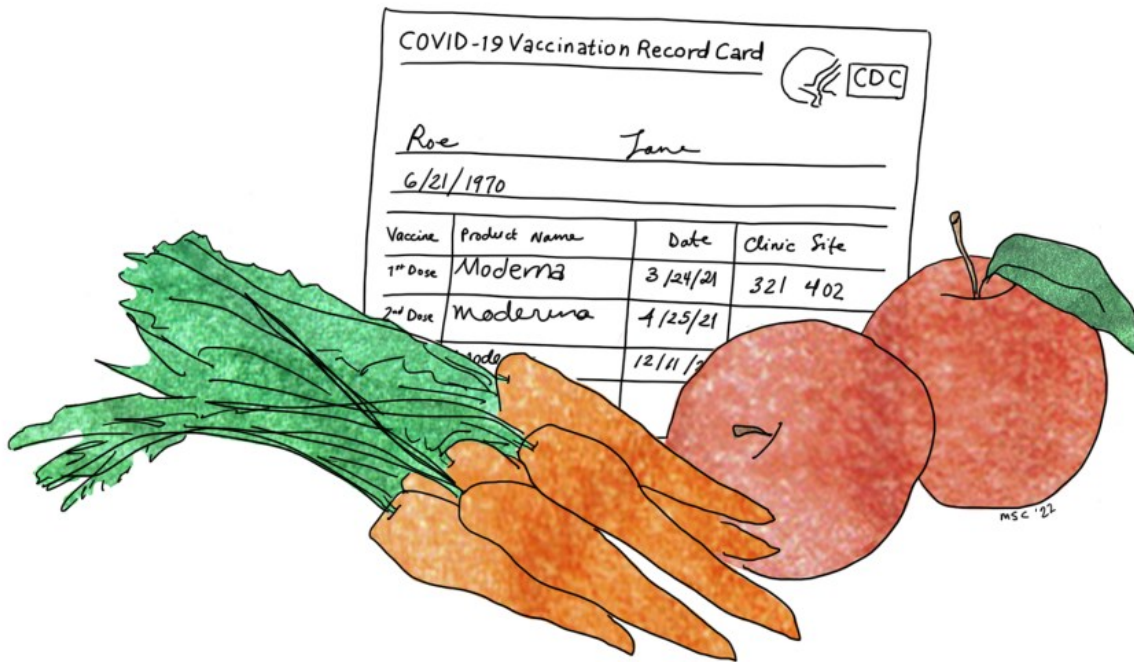


ILLUSTRATION BY MAGGIE CARSON

A Fast Turnaround

“As it was originally announced on December 6, the vaccine mandate was extended to all private employers in New York City—even those with under 100 employees,” Holtz recalled. “Because we currently have 92 employees, down from 200 in July, we were not required by the Federal mandate [since overturned by the Supreme Court] to have workers either get a vaccination or get tested weekly. The new NYC mandate announced by de Blasio required that all workers get vaccinated or get a formal accommodation for not being vaccinated. This announcement gave us three weeks to meet with our staff and ensure that they understood and met the requirements. As this only affected a small percentage of our staff, this did not pose a serious problem, and all of our staff complied.

“The follow-up announcement on December 15, which defined what they meant by ‘workers,’ posed a much bigger problem for the PSFC,” Holtz continued. “By definition, a ‘worker’ under the mandate would include employees, interns, or volunteers. Under their definition, our working members are essentially ‘volunteers.’ So, suddenly, the PSFC was grappling with a serious challenge: how do we communicate to our

10,000 working members that they need to be vaccinated or apply for accommodation in two weeks, in order to work their shifts and stay active at the Coop?”

WELCOME

PROTECT EACH OTHER

At the Coop we take everyone's safety seriously. We require all adults and children age 2 and up to wear a mask that covers their nose and mouth **AT ALL TIMES** when inside the building.



Never pull down your mask. Members that fail to cooperate with our mask protocols may be asked to leave the store. If you have any questions, please visit the Membership Office.

IMPORTANT! VALVE MASKS

Masks with valves do not protect those around you and are therefore prohibited inside The Coop.



NO!

This is based on guidance from the NYC Health Dept.

PHOTO BY CHRISTIAN DIAZ

Holtz pointed out that, unlike the pre-COVID days of two years ago, “the PSFC has worked to build out our member service, and we encouraged members to update their email addresses and register with Member Services. So reaching out to members to alert them was not as great a problem.” The Coop was able to email all members and communicate in various ways. Announcements were made on the PSFC website. But because of the holiday break and the rapid rise of Omicron, there was no definite way to reach every Coop member. By December 27, a system was in place: at the start of every work shift, working members must demonstrate that they have proof on hand or have applied for an accommodation. This is the only way, should a health inspector make an unannounced visit, that we can ensure that the PSFC is protected. At the same time, the mandate supports that more working members interacting with each other, with staff and with shopping members on the Coop shopping floors are vaccinated and that we are keeping our members safer from the spread of COVID-19.

“PSFC IS FORMALLY A BUSINESS ENTITY IN NEW YORK CITY, AND WE HAVE TO OBEY NEW YORK CITY MANDATES.”

GENERAL COORDINATOR JOE HOLTZ

“You could make the case that this was not a reasonable thing to ask,” Holtz said. “Our member workers are not really employees and they are not volunteers—they sign up for work shifts voluntarily and they schedule themselves. We don’t recognize or refer to our member workers as ‘volunteers’—we see them as workers. But under the City’s definition, they are ‘volunteers,’ even if we don’t like the word. When you come to do a work shift, you are a ‘working member,’ not a volunteer. When you come to shop, you are a ‘shopping member,’ not a ‘customer.’ And when you come to the General Meeting and have your voice heard and vote on important topics, you are an ‘owner member.’”

Member Response

Holtz was asked if there has been member pushback on the vaccine mandate. “Some members have definitely pushed back on this,” Holtz replied. “We’ve received some phone calls and emails. One member said that it’s not officially law until the New York City Council votes on it, that the Mayor does not have authority, and that we should ignore the mandate until the City Council votes. But we’re not willing to take the risk of having the PSFC closed down. Another member argued that they don’t believe this is what the Coop stands for. I agree with them, but PSFC is formally a business entity in New York City, and we have to obey New York City mandates. As an administrator of the PSFC, my intent is not to put the PSFC at risk by not obeying this. Another member is asking me to not comply, to make a stand. But that member can write an agenda item, and we can vote on it as a cooperative. In the meantime, the PSFC has to obey rules and regulations in New York City, and we try to follow public health mandates and requirements.

“The most common refrain is to say, ‘I have a problem with these rules at the PSFC.’ But in this case, these are not the rules of the PSFC. These are the rules of New York City.” Holtz recommends that PSFC members who have issues with this come together and communicate with one another. “We are truly a unique organization. But when the Mayor included ‘volunteers’ in his mandate, he was probably thinking of nonprofit groups that have 100 or 200 volunteers. But under the City of New York’s definition, we have 10,000 volunteers. Does any other business or nonprofit entity in NYC have this many?

“We tried to pound the message home to our members,” Holtz concluded. “Some people are still deeply committed to not getting vaccinated. But the PSFC needs to follow the public health guidelines. We want the PSFC to be a good public health citizen. We want everyone here to be a part of preventing the spread of the disease.”



PHOTO BY CHRISTIAN DIAZ