

# The Plainfield Co-op Newsletter

Fall 2020

Out of the Ordinary



## Store Hours:

Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday,

Friday & Saturday: 10AM–8 PM

Thursday: 12PM–8 PM:

Sunday: 11AM–7PM

## Express Window:

Monday–Saturday: 9AM–8PM

Sunday: 11AM–7PM

Photo credit: Gail Falk

*Open Seven Days a Week (see box above)*

**Phone:** 454-8579 **Website:** [www.PlainfieldCoop.com](http://www.PlainfieldCoop.com)

*Email:* [info@plainfieldcoop.com](mailto:info@plainfieldcoop.com)

## Staff

Rin Austin, *Floor Staff/Cashier*  
 Deb Barnwell, *Floor Staff/Cashier*  
 Lindsey Brownson, *Floor Staff/Cashier*  
 Chloe Budnick, *Bulk, Grocery, Frozen, Meat,  
 and Refrigerated Buyer*  
 Stella Brown, *Produce, Floor Staff/Cashier*  
 Laura Conklin, *Beer and Wine, Supplements,  
 Body Care, Household and Gifts Buyer*  
 Jezebel Crow, *Produce, Cheese, Coffee, Tea, and  
 Bulk Herbs Buyer*  
 Cypress Ellen, *Floor Staff/Cashier*  
 Audrey Isom, *Lead Receiver*  
 Silas Kelley, *Floor Staff/Cashier*  
 Kevin Levesque, *Operations Manager, Bakery Buyer and Utility Infielder*  
 Tim Llewelyn, *Produce*  
 Eben Markova-Gold, *Floor Staff/Cashier*  
 Ama Peyman, *Floor Staff/Cashier*  
 Annie Reed, *Floor Staff/Cashier*  
 Stanzi Scribner, *Floor Staff/Cashier*  
 Leah Tedesco, *Membership and Marketing Coordinator*  
 Chris Thompson, *Maintenance Coordinator*  
 Margie Yoder, *Stocking/Inventory/Receiving*  
 Peter Youngbaer, *General Manager*

## Co-op Board Members

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 Les Snow, Secretary, [lsnow@fairpoint.net](mailto:lsnow@fairpoint.net)  
 Roseanne Scotta, Treasurer, [rsmppfield@gmail.com](mailto:rsmppfield@gmail.com)  
 Rose Paul, [rosegeo@myfairpoint.net](mailto:rosegeo@myfairpoint.net)  
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 Shana Siegel, [ssiegel@cdi.coop](mailto:ssiegel@cdi.coop)



## Substitutes

Adrienne Allison  
 Stella James  
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 Newsletter: Glenda Bissex,  
[songboat@vtlink.net](mailto:songboat@vtlink.net)

## Advertise in the Newsletter: Spread the word about your business! Support the Co-op!

Deadline for the Winter issue is December 15, to be published mid-January. The newsletter is published quarterly in a black & white paper version and in color online. To place an ad, contact Elizabeth Mathai, ad co-ordinator, [elizabethmathai@yahoo.com](mailto:elizabethmathai@yahoo.com)

Electronic graphics files are preferred, but we are able to work with any clear copy. For questions about ad copy or help in designing your ad contact Sarah Albert, 802-476-0526 or [sarah@vtlink.net](mailto:sarah@vtlink.net).

## Newsletter Advertising Rates

Ad size	Single issue	4 Consecutive issues (prepaid: 20% discount)
Full page	\$75	\$240
Half page	\$50	\$160
Quarter page	\$25	\$80

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Full-page ad is 5" wide x 8" high  
 Half-page ad is 5" wide x 4" high  
 Quarter-page ads can be either vertical: 2.5"x 4" or horizontal: 5"x 2".



## About This Newsletter

The Co-op Annual Meeting took place in the loveliest setting yet—the Plainfield rec. field, with a backdrop of trees starting to turn and the river whispering. Definitely out of the ordinary, as was sitting 6' apart. About 40 people attended so this newsletter will fill in what happened for the majority of you who weren't there—the reports, the votes, even the snacks.

Although the Co-op still has financial problems, as detailed in Roseanne Scotta's Treasurer's report, the meeting felt upbeat. Like this newsletter, it was filled with “thank you's” for out of the ordinary service to our Co-op and community. Retiring Board President Sarah Phillips and Treasurer Giordano Checchi were honored for their great efforts during difficult times. Fortunately we have several new Board members with energy and vision. Cat Klarich, now President and Rose Paul were introduced previously. You can meet Roseanne Scotta, Treasurer, and Liz Bicknell and Shana Siegel on these pages.

At the center, at the intersection of Board and staff and shoppers, is our extraordinary ring master, Peter Youngbaer. “The show must go on,” and his report in this issue explains how that was able to happen. And as a gardener and chef, he shares his recipe for an out of the ordinary vegetarian Thanksgiving dish.

While most of this newsletter focuses on our Co-op, continuing Board member Les Snow asks us to look at our concern for community and how we might

expand this in the future. He also reminds us of the importance of the Cooperative economic model and vision as a humane alternative to the dominant economy driven by a need for profit and growth. The Co-op enables us to spend as well as to eat in a healthier way.

Thank you all for reading our newsletter and supporting our Co-op. We invite your submissions for the next newsletter—photos, letters, poems, book reviews, etc. The newsletter is a place for looking in depth at issues and people central to our Co-op. Deadline is December 15 for the winter issue..

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# President's Report September 2020

by Cat Klarich

It has been quite a year since the member-owners of the Plainfield Co-op met last September. Our beloved Co-op was in a desperate financial straight and the membership was presented with 4 distinct paths, ultimately voting to cultivate our current model. The message was clear, we needed to work together and pledge support for our little store and its loyal staff. With nearly 50 years rooted in this community, the Plainfield Co-op is your store. Showing its commitment to the Co-op, the membership purchased pre-paid gift cards which saved thousands of dollars in processing fees and pledged

to shop more at the Co-op. Together we pledged over \$87,000—4 times more than was pledged in the previous year! Thank you for your patronage!

Gaining momentum from your enthusiasm and support, we focused on financial stability and increasing staff compensation. After the 2020 Budget was drafted and approved, we set out to hire a new General Manager. Staff members, Chloe and Jezebel stepped up and joined the Hiring Committee. They were invaluable, providing their expertise and insight at every step, even sacrificing their Saturday's mornings! We hired Peter Youngbaer, the former Executive Director of the People's Health and Wellness Clinic. During his tenure there, a flood ravaged downtown Barre. Peter was first on the scene, literally pulling up his rubber bootstraps. Despite this natural disaster, they saw patients that same day—in the garage! We certainly did not anticipate Peter's emergency management skills would come in handy his first weeks on the job or that the staff would literally be putting their lives on the line.

While the Plainfield Co-op has weathered its share of crises, nothing could have prepared us for the impact of a global pandemic. Prioritizing the health and safety of the staff, members, and customers, the store closed temporarily. In a special emergency meeting, the Board of Directors unanimously approved "hero" pay for the employees. They are essential workers, critical for their role in providing this vital service

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Vermont Yarn Shop



At Plainview Farm  
Plainfield Vermont

Featuring yarns made in Vermont,  
or made from Vermont fibers

858 East Hill Road  
454-1114

Hours: Fridays and Saturdays  
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to the community. Under the leadership of Peter and his staff, the store adapted its model to safely serve the community with curbside pick-up, an express window, and this summer, the store re-opened its doors! We appreciate your flexibility as you adjusted the way you shop with us.

We are reminded, now more than ever, that the Co-op is more than a store. The store is the engine that drives the Co-op's impacts for the community. The better the store is, the further our impact will reach. In the spirit of our 7<sup>th</sup> Guiding Principal, *Concern for Community*, we welcome a new Membership Coordinator, Leah Tedesco, who will help us reach our goal of enhanced member engagement, advocacy, and outreach to the community. We need your continued

patronage and invite you to shop with us. Everyone is welcome and you do not need to be a member to shop! By spending your dollars at the Plainfield Co-op, instead of stopping at the local gas station, you support local farmers, bakers, crafters, brewers, and candle stick makers. Your support also ensures the capacity of the Co-op to provide its staff with a living wage. As we navigate through this current crisis, we are humbled by your appreciation and continued patronage.

We want to hear from you! Thank you, as always, for your feedback. Looking ahead at our long-range plans to be more accessible, affordable, and have a positive impact in the community, one thing is certain- we cannot do it without you!

In Cooperation, ◆

# EAST HILL TREE FARM

Nursery for Fruit Trees, Nuts, and Berries



**3499 East Hill Rd. Plainfield, VT**  
**Check: [www.easthilltreefarm.com](http://www.easthilltreefarm.com)**

# General Manager's Report

by Peter Youngbaer

Let me say a few personal things, then give you some specifics about this year, and then close with some bigger thoughts and plans for the future. I'll try to be both brief and candid.

After 7 months on the job, I've made a "note to self," "Peter, next time you decide to come out of retirement and take on managing an essential service grocery store during a worldwide pandemic, think long and hard."

When hired by the Board, I said I had two goals: after 90 days, learn the details of the store operation; and two, finish the year with a balanced budget.

Well,.....stuff happens. I started on February 17, and on March 22, we shut down. Amazingly we were only closed for one day. Here's a little secret: Sarah Phillips, our Board Chair at the time, who works for the state passed along that the Governor was planning to shut down the state, and we should plan as well. We had a week's notice.

Thanks to Paula Emery, Les Snow and a couple other volunteers, including cooperative customers, we did a test run on the 22nd and knew it would work. On the 24th, we re-opened with phone in and email orders for our curbside pickup system. Now, we had bugs with the phone system, the email system, our inventory not being on line, and more, but figured it out and managed to keep our community fed.

I want to give a huge shout out to our dedicated staff for their input in staff meetings and on the fly, their flexibility,

resiliency, and candor. These were personally stressful and challenging times. We were afraid, confronted with an unknown virus and hampered by inherent space and logistical limitations.

Let me also give a shout out to Paula Emery, who organized no less than 21 volunteers to staff the phones. This was invaluable in supporting the in-store staff who did the shopping. We processed literally thousands of orders. Now, as we've slowly re-opened in stages, curbside orders have dropped to maybe 10 a week—still an important service for a small number of people in the community.

I also want to thank the Board, who has met every other week during this time. They approved hazard compensation for staff, approved applying for a Payroll Protection Plan Loan of \$41,045, providing much needed working cash at a time our sales plummeted 30%. They did a survey that got nearly 200 member responses that provided both support and suggestion for improvements to the curbside ordering system. And much more.

The COVID crisis hit the Co-op hard. Not only did sales plummet, but we lost staff due to quarantining of themselves or family members, and loss of child care, or simply having to stay home with children when schools closed. For several months, we scrambled to fill shifts with substitutes. It wasn't until three weeks ago that we actually had all shifts covered by permanent staff.

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## Our Farmers Thank You

Since 1919, the farm families of Cabot Co-op have been passionate about making the world's best cheese. We use only the purest ingredients to craft our creamy, delicious classics. Just maybe, that's why we've won every major award for taste. Learn more at [cabotchese.coop](http://cabotchese.coop)

Unforeseen expenses piled up: in store supplies, personal protective equipment, hand sanitizer, paper bags, sneeze guards, phone and email systems, and office supplies. Hazard compensation added about \$1,000 per pay period. Supply chain disruptions wreaked havoc with our ordering.

COVID distancing limitations meant that our ordering system was operating at maximum capacity. We literally couldn't fill more orders in a day, given that only two staff shoppers could be in the retail space at the time—an important lesson, if we are forced to shut down again.

Another huge expense was a \$5,000 increase in merchant fees for processing credit/debit cards—pretty much the only

way to pay for a while. Our gift card use grew exponentially, but so did the fees. This is an area where members can truly help: please recharge your gift cards with checks or cash—it will help us save thousands.

On the upside, having larger gift card balances helps the Co-op with cash flow. Remarkably, our cash flow has been good, enabling us to keep current with our vendors and other expenses.

Finances: The Board-adopted budget for 2020 was balanced—I think it showed a profit of \$1,000—a reflection of how tight it was going into this year. However, 2019 finished with our first profit in five years—thanks to the membership who stepped up last year with increased

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buying, gift card use, and pledges. The Board declared a Patronage Dividend, and we distributed that in May.

However, once we closed down, we took a hard look. Giordano Checchi, Board Treasurer at the time, worked with me to project what would happen if we remained closed through the end of December. We calculated a loss of \$277,000. As we've been able to re-open in stages, that picture has brightened. Sarah Phillips did another recalculation two months ago, and projected a deficit of a mere \$100,000.

The Board had me do another detailed re-cast of the budget for their September 8<sup>th</sup> Board Meeting, and with some cut-backs in areas such as the elimination of Hazard Pay (which had been cut in half mid-summer), and reductions in several other line items, we are now projecting a deficit of about \$50,000. We hope that about \$30,000 will disappear if the Payroll Protection Plan loan is forgiven, a process I'm currently working on.

That would still leave us with a deficit in the \$20,000 range—more manageable, but not where you want to be heading into our typical winter sales doldrums.

### **What can our member-owners do?**

Some very tangible things:

1. Use checks or cash when re-charging your gift cards, saving us transaction fees;
2. Make sure we have your current email address. 400 people in our database have either no email or a bad email address. Legal mailings, such as the notice for the Annual Meeting and the Patronage Dividend, cost us hundreds in postage, printing, and staff time costs.
3. Get current in your Equity payments. A majority (636 of 1122) of our members are not current. This is vital working capital for our Co-op, helping with cash flow and providing a source of funds for capital expenses, such as major building and equipment replacement. We don't have that level of reserve at this time.
4. Buy more at the Co-op.

Looking ahead, and speaking from my GM position, I have spent a lot of time with our Policy Governance documents

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## **Preserve Your Memories**

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**Alan Taplow — 802-454-4675 — [ataplow@gmail.com](mailto:ataplow@gmail.com)**  
**<http://preserve-your-memories.info>**

and goals, working on daily improvements to our operations. This month, for example, I have done complete personnel reviews of all staff—annual evaluations (which haven’t been done since 2017), updating emergency contact info, reviewing and updating job descriptions, and looking at internal and external pay equity. On the latter, the Board, in its recent budget review, supported my recommendation to step up our wage base by an additional \$.30 an hour, with additional steps planned for January 1, 2021 and 2022. This is due to Vermont’s new minimum wage law, and will help us avoid a situation where a new hire comes in January 2022 at \$12.50 an hour and makes the same as someone who has been working here two years.

We also just had the benefit of a Columinate Co-op Peer Audit Review. This is a group of expert cooperative consultants who advise on all phases of co-op operations. They came and did a video virtual tour of the co-op and review of tons of documents—policies, financials, etc. On Wednesday, we will get the first formal feedback of what they said was our “charming” Co-op. This will be followed by more detailed recommendations of “low hanging fruit” and more significant, longer-range suggestions, supported by consultants who will continue working with us as part of this \$4,500 project, only \$500 of which is our expense, grants having covered the rest.

Our Marketing Committee, headed by Bob Fancher, has worked hard on new signs for the Co-op, a direct mail to every household in Plainfield and Marshfield, a Market Basket of affordable food for your family that will be featured in our October sales flier and social media, and more.

Our Building Committee, currently without a chair, has worked on several projects, including painting the retail floor twice, repairing broken floor tiles in the back office, and overseeing installation of our new backup generator. That will protect against losses like last fall’s power outage.

Our Membership Committee, chaired by Paula Emery, has been busy as mentioned above, and is now beginning to work with our long-awaited newly filled position of Membership and Marketing Coordinator. Leah Tedesco began this position after Labor Day, and has already dived into the massive task of updating our membership database. She will also be the staff liaison for our working members and the Community Center—both areas that need re-thinking in this COVID 19 era.

Our Newsletter Committee, headed by Glenda Bissex, never rests. A new issue will be out as soon as this meeting is over, with the theme of “Out of the Ordinary.”

Finally, two other thank yous.

One of our Co-op Ends is to distribute healthy affordable food and other goods. Thanks to all of you, our members, as of today, we have raised \$9,016 via our Saint Corona Fund, helping our neighbors in need during this stressful time. Almost all has been used, leaving a balance today of \$120.77. Thank you all.

Second, a personal thank you to Kevin Levesque, our Operations Manager and Utility Infielder, for all the help, orientation, and training he provided me under difficult circumstances. I’d be lost without him. Thank you, Kevin. And thanks to all of you for being here today. ♦

# Treasurer's Report 2020 Annual Meeting

by Roseanne Scotta

Here we are again, with another fiscal year in its final quarter for the Plainfield Co-op and time to look at the numbers.

When sales are compared to budget for the past nine months, we have to consider the effect of The Corona Virus on the store and its limited capacity to be open. With this consideration, when looking at the profit and loss report that compares sales and costs from January to August of 2020 to 2019, deli sales, bulk goods, frozen goods, and produce were higher than expected compared to the budgeted amounts. Cheese sales were very close to the budgeted amount and other areas were down. Overall, sales were down \$56,408 compared to what was budgeted for, and 3.6% less than 2019. Costs of goods was down compared to last year (2.9% less) as well as to budget, gross profit was down from last year by \$13,856, or 5% less, and expenses were greater, by 12%. The Co-op ended with a net income of negative \$36,684, a 58% decrease from 2019 and \$42,426 less than budgeted for.

It is to be recognized that this number is greatly effected by the closure of the store and higher costs due to the pandemic, and some of this negative number will be picked up with relief funds.

We saw net income rise from first quarter to second and fall slightly in the third quarter, ending at \$9,189 in the third quarter. It is best for the finances of the Co-op to have a higher net income in the third quarter to go into the winter months when sales tend to decrease. A

positive is that the position of cash on hand ended in a strong position.

In comparing assets from the end of August in 2020 to 2019, total assets including checking and savings accounts, cash on hand, taxes, inventory, buildings and equipment, dividends, equity, and restricted expenditures is a 21% increase from 2019. Total liabilities, including accounts payable, payroll, loans, and taxes payable is a 34% increase from 2019. Equity, including retained patronage, stock, member equity, retained earnings, and net income is a 4.9% increase from 2019. Together, the liabilities and equity is a 21% increase from 2019.

Money for improvements to be reflected in this report went to the purchase and installment of a back-up generator. This will help greatly if the Co-op experiences a loss of power again.

Some of the money lost from the last power outage was covered by insurance but this was outweighed by a loss of sales. The generator costs will greatly benefit the Co-op and its finances over the long haul.

The general manager is working hard to bring stabilization to the systems that care for the people running the day-to-day and new organization behind the scenes with staff and store operations. He is also paying attention and taking advantage of opportunities that support the Co-op and its members, such as gift

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cards and relief funds. The use of gift cards were a plus for the Co-op in helping to stabilize finances in the face of closed doors due to Covid 19 by offering upfront money for use, a win-win for both the Co-op and its supporters.

Continuing to hone in on what the Co-op can offer to enable its members and the wider community to find what they need and complete the majority of their shopping will be very beneficial to the financial stability of the Co-op. It is important as members of the Co-op to ask ourselves questions such as, “What enables me to shop fully and frequently

at my Co-op?”, “What can I say to non-members or neighbors the benefits of shopping at the Co-Op are?” And “What makes the Co-op feel vibrant, alive, and enticing?” These answers can help the sustainability of the Co-op by enabling it to serve our community to its fullest and sustain its place in our community. Together, let’s make it our #1 place where we want to shop! ♦

*Note: Due to its length, we are not including the financials in their entirety, but the rest of the Treasurer’s Report can be viewed at [www.plainfieldcoop.com/documents/2020%20Treasurers%20Report.pdf](http://www.plainfieldcoop.com/documents/2020%20Treasurers%20Report.pdf)*

## **Plum Graham Cracker Crumble** *(NY Times)*

### **Ingredients**

- 1 pound/450 grams black plums (about 4 large plums), pitted and chopped into 1/2-inch pieces (about 2 1/2 cups)
- 5 tablespoons/55 grams packed brown sugar
- 1/4 cup/35 grams plus 1 tablespoon all-purpose flour
- 1/2 teaspoon kosher salt
- 1 sleeve (9 sheets)/145 grams graham crackers, crushed into fine crumbs using a food processor or in a resealable bag using a rolling pin
- 6 tablespoons/85 grams unsalted butter (3/4 stick), melted
- 1 teaspoon vanilla extract

### **Preparation**

1. Heat the oven to 350°. To an 8” square (or round) baking dish, add the plums, 3 tablespoons brown sugar, 1 tablespoon flour and 1/4 teaspoon salt. Toss everything together to coat and set aside.
2. In a medium mixing bowl, combine the graham cracker crumbs with the remaining 1/4 cup flour, 2 tablespoons brown sugar and 1/4 teaspoon salt.
3. In a small bowl, combine the butter and vanilla. Using a spoon, mix it into the graham cracker mixture until the crumbs are evenly moist, then spread it over the plums, pressing down with your palms to create an even, compact layer.
4. Bake about 30 min. or until the crust is golden brown and hardened and plum juice is bubbling up along the edges of the pan. Remove from oven and let cool for at least 5 min. Serve warm or at room temperature. ♦

# 2020 Annual Meeting

by Gail Falk

On a crisp September Saturday, Co-op members gathered at the Plainfield Rec Field for an out of the ordinary Annual Meeting. Wearing masks and seated at least six feet from one another, 40 members conducted the usual Annual Meeting business while, at the same time, enjoying the burble of the Great Brook, the calls of migrating birds, and the early scarlets and golds of the woods by the field.

Paula Emery led the meeting. She recognized staff, volunteers and General manager Peter Youngbaer for their hard work during early months of the Covid-19 pandemic. President Cat Klarich, Interim Treasurer Roseanne Scotta, and General Manager Peter Youngbaer all gave reports, which are elsewhere in this issue and posted on the Co-op website.

Five people were elected to the Board of Directors for their first terms, joining Les Snow of Marshfield, who was already a Director: Cat Klarich, Roseanne Scotta, Rose Paul, Liz Bicknell and Shana Siegel. (Bios are on the Co-op website, newest member bios are in this newsletter.)

Cat honored outgoing Board members Sarah Phillips and Giordano Checchi for their years of service during hard times for the Co-op.

The members approved minor changes to the by-laws:

- The trade name of the store is changed from Plainfield Co-op to Plainfield Cooperative.

- References to the management collective were removed as it no longer exists.
- Directors who have served the maximum term may return to the Board after one year off the Board.
- Newly-elected Board members take office immediately after the Annual Meeting.
- A Board member who misses five *regular* meetings in one year is automatically removed from the Board.
- Paula Emery and Les Snow shared results of a summer survey on member engagement and community visioning. <https://www.plainfieldcoop.com/documents/2020%20Annual%20Meeting%20Survey%20Results.pdf>

Following this, members divided into small groups or worked alone, and then shared with the group imagined headlines that capture a vision of the Co-op of the future. Co-op officials asked members to stay tuned for a follow-up Zoom meeting that will be facilitated by Andy Robinson to examine next steps to promote the Co-op's survival and define our vision.

Vermont's Covid-19 rules for large gatherings prevented the potluck and informal chatting that are traditionally part of Annual Meeting. Thanks to Cabot Cheese, prepackaged cheese snacks were offered along with other prepackaged snacks and drinks that Chloe Budnick, the store's lead buyer, arranged. ♦

# Marketing Committee

by Bob Fancher

The Marketing Committee has been working to increase awareness of the Co-op within the community and to increase sales to both members and non-members.

This quarter we installed two new Co-op signs, one on the building and a new open sign for the existing sign near the street.



We have continued our monthly emails to members highlighting the month's sale items and info about the Co-op's activities. If you are a member and you are not receiving these emails, then we do not have your current email in our database, and you are missing other important emails from the Co-op. You can easily fix that by sending your current email and name to [info@plainfieldcoop.com](mailto:info@plainfieldcoop.com).

The Marketing Committee also maintains the Co-op's website. The website, [plainfieldcoop.com](http://plainfieldcoop.com), always has the latest in current hours and info about shopping in the store, the express window and curbside pick-up. On the Board page of the website, <http://plainfieldcoop.com/Board.html>, you can read the Board's meeting minutes to learn what the Board is doing. And, of course, you can read this newsletter on the website.



New posters have been designed, printed and are being distributed throughout the area to publicize the Co-op.

Our Community Center and Gallery is temporarily closed due to the pandemic. To keep the spirit going, we have assembled images of some of the artwork that has been displayed in the Gallery and videos of some past presentations. Plus, there is a virtual tour video. All of this is on our website at <http://plainfieldcoop.com/Gallery.html>.

As always, the Marketing Committee is looking for new members to help. The pandemic has hurt the

Co-op's business and we are trying to find creative ways to boost sales. Please consider joining us. If you want to join the Marketing Committee or if you have any feedback on any of our activities, please email me at [bhfancher@gmail.com](mailto:bhfancher@gmail.com)

P.S. Watch for our Market Basket promotion, "Real, good food at affordable prices" coming soon! ♦

# Our Co-op's Concern for Community. Pandemic and Beyond

by Les Snow

One of the natural outgrowths of the democratic member control of cooperatives is highlighted in the cooperative principle of concern for community. While that concern is continually put into action by cooperatives around the world, it is especially abundant during difficult times. The cooperative response to the COVID-19 global pandemic is no exception. It is hoped that the abundance of ongoing expression of concern will ultimately lead to an even stronger local and extended cooperative economy.

During the pandemic, our little co-op has worked, and continues to work, exceeding the COVID related government health mandates to help ensure the safety of staff, volunteers, and shoppers—a group effort showing concern for others as top priority. Members are helping each other pay for groceries via the Saint Corona Fund. Volunteers are helping with phone orders and being available for deliveries. Such actions are at the heart of being a cooperative.

Throughout Vermont, the country, and the world, cooperatives (3 million in all!) have multiplied concern for community during the pandemic. The International Cooperative Alliance ([ica.coop](http://ica.coop)), National Cooperative Business Association ([ncbaclusa.coop](http://ncbaclusa.coop)), Neighboring Food Co-op ([nfca.coop](http://nfca.coop)) and other co-op organizations have highlighted efforts of member co-ops to keep their communities healthy and resilient. Meanwhile, a researcher at the Wharton Business School has tracked the behavior of some of the largest investor-owned corporations during the pandemic (the ~200 corporations that signed a much promoted pledge a year ago to show concern for stakeholders other than their shareholders). When compared to other investor-owned corporations, they have increased investor payouts and have been 20% more likely to implement layoffs and furloughs (*The Atlantic*, 8/6/20). Concern for community is clearly not in their DNA.



Photo credit: Gail Falk

Where might our cooperative take its concern for community during the remaining course of the pandemic and beyond? In many ways that is ultimately up to the Co-op's member-owners, but to help move things along the Board has asked member-owners in a couple of surveys and at the annual meeting to provide examples of how the community will benefit in the coming years due to our Co-op's

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initiatives. The responses are very appreciated and show a strong desire for the Co-op to do more for our neighbors.

Below is a summary of the responses so far. **We will be continuing this discussion in a Zoom meeting. More information to follow in a member-owner email.**

#### *April 2020—Co-op Pandemic Response Member Survey, Summary of Responses*

Co-op community service during pandemic, beyond the Saint Corona Fund:

- Delivery service
- Free items outside. People can also donate to it.
- Make it easier to donate to the Fund
- Financial support of staff
- Support of local producers (somehow highlight in call/email-in ordering system)
- Masks/wipes
- Online Co-op gathering during pandemic

#### *Aug-Sept 2020—Annual Meeting Member Survey, Summary of Responses*

Themes of Headlines Envisioning the Co-op's Concern for Community

- Expanded Services (16)
  - To those in need (7)
  - Delivery of groceries (5)
  - Move to Route 2 (3)
  - Example “Co-op's Community Garden Celebrates 10th Year!”
- Serving More of the Community (5)
  - Example “Whole Community Shops at Co-op”
- Support of Local Farmers (4)
  - Example “Co-op Produce Sales are Now 75% from Local Growers.”
- Strong Financial Condition (4)
- Promotion of Human, Consumer,

and/or Animal Rights (4)

- Conversion of Co-op Ownership Model (2)
- Other examples
  - “Little Co-op Feeds Its Community with Creativity and Courage!”
  - “Co-op Redoubles Commitment to Justice, Affordable Healthy Food, and Fairness to All in the Community.”

#### *September 2020 Annual Meeting*

Imagine a news headline 5 years from now highlighting something that is different for our community due to an initiative by the Plainfield Cooperative and its member owners that showed our concern for the community.

- Free monthly community dinners with local entertainment draw crowd at Co-op.
- Co-op sets up a consulting team and buying club for electric cars.
- Plainfield Co-op establishes food shelf.
- Plainfield Co-op opens a community cooperative bakery.
- Plainfield Co-op establishes Organic Agriculture Investment Fund.
- Plainfield Co-op pioneers a resilient locally rooted food system, aimed to serve all.
- Co-op has increased nutritional health of Central Vermont.
- Community Center is open!
- During the 2020 pandemic the Plainfield Co-op stepped up to feed the community and has continued to find new ways to contribute.
- The Co-op decided to each year give 10% of profits to an organization or good cause that people chose at the annual meeting. ♦

# New Co-op Board Members

## Liz Bicknell

Liz Bicknell moved to Plainfield in October 2019 and joined the Co-op on her second day of living in town. Originally from England and having lived in Italy as well as various parts of the USA (California, Oregon, Massachusetts, Vermont), Liz is a keen cook and locavore. She loves the Co-op and finds it a vital part of the town. Liz works remotely as the editorial director of Candlewick Press, a children's books press in Massachusetts that publishes *Maisy*, *Waldo*, *Guess How Much I Love You*, and much more. She has been on the Candlewick Press board for 23 years and also previously served on a nonprofit community center board in San Diego, CA. ♦



*Photo credit:*



*Photo credit:*

## Roseanne Scotta

Hi, my name is Roseanne Scotta. I have lived in Plainfield since 1990 and have considered myself as “transplanted” in Vermont. It is here that I met my husband and we grew and raised our family, with our youngest child graduating from high school this June. We are homesteaders and run a perennial nursery. I am an educator at Maplehill School and a yoga instructor as well.

I was introduced to the idea of a co-operative grocery store and bulk foods in my twenties and was thrilled to incorporate these “new” food concepts into my life. I excitedly joined the Plainfield Co-Op when I settled here.

Food is a vital part of the hub of a community and having a co-op that can support local food and farms and can maintain connection of the people brings strength to that community. I always knew that I wanted to serve on the board of our Co-op one day and all of of sudden, that day has arrived. So here I am, happy to participate in the continuation of the Plainfield Cooperative and hope to help see it grow in serving our community. ♦

## Shana Siegel

Hello. I came to Plainfield (and Vermont) in September 2019 to work with the Cooperative Development Institute, where I assist manufactured home communities to collectively purchase and run their communities as cooperatives. I quickly learned that Vermont has a ton of great stuff going on when it comes to local and cooperative-minded ventures, and I was pleasantly surprised to find that, in Vermont, even

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*continued from previous page, Shana*

small towns like Plainfield have their own food co-ops! I want to do what I can to support the local co-op.

Prior to moving to Vermont, I lived in New York City for many years, where I worked in the academic and nonprofit sectors doing community organizing, research, and policy work. I also lived in upstate New York for 6-7 years, first working as an academic, and then assisting the Board of a small nonprofit with general operations, and with planning, funding, and carrying out some infrastructure projects. I'm excited to meet more of my Plainfield neighbors and to help the Board of the Plainfield Food Cooperative in whatever work they need to undertake in the coming years. ♦



## Missing Faces

*by Glenda Bissex*

To the many thank you's in this newsletter, I want to add two more to our longest-serving staff members, Margie Yoder and Karen Starr. Karen joined us in 2012 and was a member of the former management collective. I appreciated having some conversations of substance with my grocery shopping when she was in the store. I miss her since she left the Co-op during the Covid crisis.

I also miss Margie though she hasn't left the Co-op. But because of health concerns, she's working behind the scenes after hours, doing stocking, inventory and receiving. "Over the years, when I have walked into the Co-op and seen Margie at the counter, it's always a pleasure," comments Gail Falk, "I knew I could count on her cheerful, personal greeting and helpfulness. During times when there were sometimes grouchy or down-spirited staff at the Co-op, Margie has been a consistent bright spirit." Her bright spirit has been shining at the Co-op since 2006!! Margie was also on the management collective and has seen a whole lot of Co-op history. "I love this place," she says. It's mutual. ♦

## Membership Committee

*by Leah Tedesco*

The Co-op is currently undertaking a project updating the member database, which is rife with outdated and incomplete information. This undertaking is headed by our new Membership and Marketing Coordinator, Leah Tedesco. We urge all members to make sure that their information with us is current, as well as complete enough to be able to send important correspondences. You can do this in person, over the phone, by mail, or (preferably) by sending a message to [membership@plainfieldcoop.com](mailto:membership@plainfieldcoop.com). ♦

## **Black Bean Soup** by Julia Moskin (*NY Times*)

### **Soup Ingredients**

- 1 7-oz. can chipotle chiles in adobo
- 2 tablespoons olive oil
- 2 carrots, peeled and chopped
- 2 onions, peeled and chopped
- 4 garlic cloves, minced
- 1 cup red wine
- 2 jalapeño peppers, seeded and chopped
- 1 pound dry black beans (do not soak)
- 2 quarts mild vegetable or chicken stock
- 1 tablespoon dried oregano, preferably Mexican
- 2 bay leaves
- 1 tablespoon kosher salt
- 1 teaspoon ground black pepper
- Red wine vinegar, to taste

### **Pickled Onions and Garnishes**

#### **(optional):**

- 1 small red onion, thinly sliced
- Freshly squeezed juice of 2 limes
- Salt
- Sour cream or Mexican crema
- Whole cilantro leaves
- Thinly sliced fresh chiles
- Sliced avocado

1. Empty the can of chiles into a blender or food processor. Purée until smooth, scrape into a container, and set aside. Put on a teakettle of water to boil, and keep hot.
2. In a large, heavy pot, heat olive oil over medium heat until shimmering. Add carrots, onions and garlic and cook, stirring, until softened but not browned, 5 to 8 minutes.
3. Pour in wine and let simmer until pan is almost dry and vegetables are coated. Add jalapeños and cook, stirring, just until softened, 2 minutes. Push the vegetables out to the edges of the pot and dollop 2 teaspoons of chipotle purée in the center. Let fry for a minute and then stir together with the vegetables.
4. Add beans, stock, oregano and bay leaves. Stir, bring to a boil, and let boil 10 to 15 minutes. Reduce the heat to a simmer and cook, partly covered, stirring occasionally and adding hot water as needed to keep the soup liquid and runny, not sludgy. Continue cooking until beans are just softened and fragrant, 1 to 2 hours. Add salt and pepper and keep cooking until beans are soft.
5. Meanwhile, make the pickled onions, if using: In a bowl, combine sliced onions, lime juice and a sprinkling of salt. Let soften at room temperature until crunchy and tart, about 30 minutes. Drain and rinse with cold water. Squeeze dry in paper towels and refrigerate until ready to serve. If desired, chop coarsely before serving.
6. Adjust the texture of the soup: The goal is to combine whole beans, soft chunks and a velvety broth. Some beans release enough starch while cooking to produce a thick broth without puréeing. If soup seems thin, use an

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A Shout Out to the **Community Mask Project** for making dozens and dozens of masks for our customers and staff. These have helped facilitate safe shopping for all. Thank you so much! These folks have made hundreds more for the community—health care facilities, schools, and more. A great and much appreciated effort. Thanks to:

Pat Boyle  
Jessica Della Pepa  
Julie Hackbarth  
Jeneane Lunn  
Mary Trerice  
Shirley Walesch  
Jane Youngbaer

*Soup, continued from previous page*

immersion blender or blender to purée a small amount of the beans until smooth, then stir back in. Continue until desired texture is reached, keeping in mind that the soup will continue to thicken as it sits.

7. Heat the soup through, taste and adjust the seasonings with salt, pepper, drops of red wine vinegar and dabs of chipotle purée.
8. Serve in deep bowls, garnishing each serving with sour cream, pickled onions, cilantro leaves, sliced chiles and avocado as desired. ♦

## **Paleo Pickled Beets** from *The Primal Desire*

5 lbs beets, any type is fine  
2 cups water □  
3 cups apple cider vinegar □  
2 cloves  
1 bay leaf □  
1 cinnamon stick □  
6 peppercorns □  
4 allspice berries  
Jars, lids, canning pot

1. Wash and peel beets (greens are also edible and delicious!)
2. Slice larger beets, put in a pot of water and steam for 3-5 min, drain but keep the water □
3. Add water (using the beet water), apple cider vinegar, cloves, bay leaf cinnamon stick, peppercorns and allspice berries, bring to a boil and then turn down to a simmer. □
4. Prepare the jars, sterilizing the glass, rings and lids. □
5. Gently pack the steamed beets into the jars leaving 1/2 inch of space from the top. (while they are still hot) □
6. Add brine to the jars, filled so that there is 1/2 inch space from the top, but the beets are covered. Wipe jar rims and put hot lids on. □

You can place them in the fridge and in a few days they are ready to eat. They will last 2-3 weeks unprocessed in the fridge. □

If you decide to water bath can them (as I did) they must be submerged in boiling water 20 minutes (depending on your elevation) and make sure they seal! ♦

## Peter's General Manager Vegetarian Thanksgiving Entrée— Soybean Croquettes

by Peter Youngbaer

I first made this dish many years ago, and it has become the vegetarian staple for our Thanksgiving dinners. Brazenly borrowed from *The Vegetarian Epicure*, by Anna Thomas, Vintage Books, 1972, it works particularly well with soybeans, onions, garlic, and herbs from our own garden. Add squash, green beans, salad, and apple and pumpkin pies—all home grown—and it's a great harvest celebration.

We typically have about two dozen people at my daughter's meat CSA farm, so the fresh turkey, pork, and other treats from there make for a complete feast for carnivores and vegetarians alike.

I generally double or triple the recipe, and make the croquette mix the day before, leaving the assembly and baking for Thanksgiving Day. Any left-over croquette mix freezes well and makes for a quick and hearty mid-winter dinner.

### Ingredients for croquettes:

2 cups cooked soybeans	½ tsp crushed rosemary (key flavor ingredient!)
1 small onion	½ tsp thyme
1-2 cloves garlic	1 Tbsp parsley
4 shallots	4 Tbsp wheat germ
4 Tbsp butter	Salt and pepper to taste
1 cup milk	1 beaten egg
4 Tbsp flour	

Crushed cereal or breadcrumbs (I prefer crushed corn flakes for a golden crust)

Mash the soybeans through a grinder or food mill. Mince the onion, garlic, and shallots and saute in 2 tablespoons of the butter just until the onion is transparent. Melt the other 2 tablespoons of butter in a small skillet, while heating the milk. Stir the flour into the melted butter and add the hot milk, stirring over a small flame until you have a smooth, thick sauce (essentially a white sauce). Add to this the sauteed onion mixture.

In a mortar, crush together all the herbs. Now, combine in a large bowl the ground soybeans, the white sauce, the herbs, and the wheat germ. Add salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste.

In a shallow dish, beat the egg with a little milk. In another dish, put the crushed cereal. Shape the soybean mixture into croquettes about the size of a large egg (battered hands help with the sticky goo). Dip the croquettes first into the egg, then lightly into the crushed cereal, then the egg again, and the cereal once more. Make sure they are well coated. Place them in a greased, shallow making dish and bake in a very hot oven (410°) for 20-30 min. This makes 4-6 servings (depending on the size of your croquettes).

I always serve it with a **Cranberry Cumberland Sauce** (see next page), but applesauce and sour cream also go great.

### **Cranberry Cumberland Sauce**

2 lb thick, whole-berry cranberry sauce

½ Tbsp. dry mustard (or more)

Juice and grated rind of 1-2 oranges

1 tsp. lemon juice

1-2 tsp. corn starch

2-3 Tbsp. sugar

Grated cinnamon or cloves (optional—I use both)

Grated lemon peel (optional—I like it)

Dissolve the mustard in the orange juice, together with about a teaspoon of cornstarch. Add this mixture to the cranberry sauce, along with the lemon juice, the grated orange rind and 2 tablespoons of sugar. Heat the sauce, stirring constantly, for about 10 minutes.

Add a little ground cinnamon and cloves at this point, along with any grated lemon rind you want. Taste the sauce for seasoning, adding more sugar, if needed. If the sauce is too thin (depending on the density of the cranberry sauce you start with and the amount of orange juice you add), dissolve another teaspoon of cornstarch in a little juice or water and stir it in. Chill the sauce well before serving. Keeps well in the refrigerator for leftovers.

Enjoy! ♦

## **SHOUT OUT! To our phone volunteers!**

*by Peter Youngbaer*

When COVID 10 forced the Co-op to close its doors to the public March 22nd, we launched a phone and email curbside pickup ordering system. This could not have worked without a huge amount of volunteer hours our members put in. They handled customer orders and questions with patience and aplomb, and for that we are eternally grateful. Recruited and managed by Paula Emery (the ultimate cat-herder), we could not have fed our community without you. We hereby acknowledge your tremendous good work.

Paula Emery

Les Snow

Amy Lester

J. Peter Young

Tim Spence

William Woodard

Andrew Perchlik

John Harrison

Scottie Harrison

Lucy Schmid

Erok Gillard

Heidi Wilson

Marianne Perchlik

Alana Dorf

Annie Coughlin

Alexis Smith

Gail Falk

Mark Yorra

Kit Gates

Lucy Blue

Ryan Gillard ♦

# Virtual Exhibits at PCC Gallery



Local Vermont artists are invited to participate in PCC Gallery shows, as part of the cultural programming during the Pandemic time. The online presentation of the shows is easily accessible through the Coop's website and includes virtual tours of the exhibitions, slideshows of the artists' work and other materials with all of the documentary footage by Jerome Lipani of ORCA.

The Gallery might be open in the future to private, covid-safe visits. If you are interested in exhibiting your work in the PCC Gallery, contact the

Curatrix Alexis Smith: [vtpiegirlco@gmail.com](mailto:vtpiegirlco@gmail.com)

Our next exhibiting artist is Katya Popova. Her exhibit "Homage to Vermont" will be on display during late October, comprised of works created while in Vermont.

<http://plainfieldcoop.com/Gallery.html>

## About Katya Popova

Excerpt from interview with *BostonVoyager*

I grew up in the former Soviet Union, in the city of Moscow. My father was an artist. When I was five years old, he gave me paintbrushes which kept me preoccupied until I went to art school at the age of ten. I remember going with my father to work "en plain air," drawing Moscow architecture or beautiful countryside landscapes in Latvia, where we used to spend summers. We never planned to leave the USSR until the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1990.

Now, after many years of wandering as an adjunct professor, freelance designer and experimental artist, I don't have all the answers, but I do have a more defined direction. I teach at the New England Conservatory since 2014, creating visual arts experiences for fantastic music students. I participate in festivals and exhibitions in New England and abroad and I often visit my parents, who still live at the North Shore, and spend time with my



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father, who is still my best artistic advisor and critique.

I believe that different mediums inform each other to help me sculpt my practice and keep its experimental nature alive. As an artist, I moved from 2D work to creating 3D projects. This was largely inspired by my passion for organizing and changing the perception of space. Throughout different projects: creating murals, 3D installations, experimental performances, or shadow theater, I constantly learn about new mediums and new directions in my artistic practice. As a Russian expatriate, I am constantly influenced by Russian constructivists and suprematists, like El Lessitsky, Rodchenko and Lubov Popova (no relation). German expressionism gave space to minimalists, and the Modernist mantra “less is more” is my creed.

As time goes by, my taste becomes more defined and it is easier to find direction in my art work, what I dislike, which helps with artistic choices. The three-dimensional nature of my projects always calls for collaboration and I work with various teams of artists as well as my musician students. I am really grateful to be teaching since it is one more way for me to develop my thinking. I constantly learn from my students, and the work I do for my classes informs my art work.

Along with my artistic practice, I created murals (Redtail, Industry Lab), 3D installations (MassArt), “Curiosity Collective” (Ipswich, UK), “Redtail Art Collective” (South Boston) or engaged in experimental performances in programs such as Theater School #8 (Zvenigorog, Russia) and took part in “Originale” by Stockhausen at the New England Conservatory along with many shadow performance experiments at different venues in Boston such as “The Hearing Room,” “Deep Thoughts,” and “The Puppet Showplace Theater.” Throughout these different projects, I constantly strive to learn about the world and develop my own artistic practice. ♦

<http://bostonvoyager.com/interview/meet-katya-popova/>



*Katya with Petrushka  
Bread and Puppet, Glover, VT:*

# Special Thank You's

*from Board President Cat Klarich*

Let's give a huge shout out to the indomitable Peter Youngbaer and the faithful staff—Rin, Deb, Lindsey, Chloe, Stella B., Laura, Jezebel, Cypress, Silas, Audrey, Kevin, Tim, Eben, Ama, Stanzi, Leah, Chris, Annie, Margie, and subs: Adrienne, Stella J., Sara, and Julia! Kudos to the community—members and non-members—who joined us for the annual meeting. It was nice to see your smiling eyes!

A very special thank you to Paula Emery for leading the annual meeting, Brandon Klarich for running the sound and Fred Wilbur for generously donating the sound system. A big thanks to Lucy Blue for helping us mark our safe distance, Laura Ziegler who does a phenomenal job on the Co-op flower gardens and Gail Falk who takes minutes during our meetings. Thank you to the Board of directors—Rose Paul who organized the annual meeting, Roseanne Scotta who stepped up as interim treasurer, Les Snow for spearheading the community surveys, and the recently elected Liz Bicknell and Shana Siegel for stepping up at a crucial time. It is a pleasure working with you!

A fond farewell to outgoing Board President Sarah Phillips who provided 4 years of service! She led the us through the transition of the management collective, hired Kevin, the former general manager,

secured Jean, an interim volunteer manager, and finally through a hiring search that landed us Peter! She also led a series of kitchen table conversations and meetings presenting the four paths forward that the membership voted on. We appreciate all that Sarah had given to our Co-op and will miss having her on the board!

We bid adieu to Treasurer Giordano Checchi who resigned after 3 years on the board. He provided valuable interpretations of the finances to the rest of the board, staff and membership in his Co-op newsletter articles, and he was a close advisor to Peter when he took the reigns as general manager. He put together an impressive report on the impact of the “peek-a-boo” intersection and RT 2 bridge project that we are still referring to as we look ahead to the future. Thank you for your many years in service to the Co-op!

Farewell to Karen Starr. You are sorely missed and we wish you the very best. You truly are a star!

Thank you to the super-helpful Bob Fancher for his dedication to the website and marketing committee. And finally, gratitude to the Wonder Woman, Glenda—teacher, researcher and author—who has published countless newsletters in her many years in service to the Co-op. We'd be in the dark without you! ♦

