

Harvest Herald

NEWS FROM THE BLUE HILL CO-OPERATIVE GROCERY AND CAFÉ



In October of last year, the Co-op held a potluck picnic and meeting for our Members. About 100 people got together to eat, talk, and catch up on the workings of

the Blue Hill Co-op. At this gathering the Board of Directors announced that an "option to purchase" had been obtained on a South street building site with relocation of the Co-op as the goal. I wish to present a summary of where we stand at this time and how the relocation process will work.

The overarching goal is to move the Co-op to a location that allows for more parking, increased retail & backroom/office space, and the ability to incorporate other aspects of the Cooperative community function such as a permanent home for the Blue Hill Farmers' Market. I see it as a desire to remove the limitations of our present location and take a step towards a more flexible and multifaceted future.

Where we stand as of January 2013.

The Relocation Committee made a thorough analysis of available sites to determine which location was best suited for a new Co-op. The findings were presented to the Board of Directors and a decision was made to secure the site by arranging an option to purchase the property. This means the Co-op has until August of 2014 to decide if we wish to purchase the Petty Foundation property on South Street (between Mainescape & NAPA). While this process was unfolding, the Finance Committee has been sorting out the various funding tools that will be needed to turn this idea into a reality.

A couple points have become clear.

If we are to establish a reliable cost figure for this project a certain amount of design work will need to be done. Funding realities will require choices be made regarding

what features are needed and how large the project can be. Some noble or desirable options will not be feasible and will be omitted.

The ability to fund this project will ultimately depend upon the amount of money that can be raised through gift giving and grants. Borrowing from banks, Co-op members, and other public or privately funded organizations will be limited by our ability to repay those loans and as such will not suffice on their own.

So, how do we proceed from here?

The Board of Directors and committee members have set

upon a path that works like this.

1. The Relocation Committee will use a series of surveys (staff, Co-op members, customers, vendors...) to determine what design features are deemed most important if we are to address the shortcomings of our present location. That is, after all, what this is all about.
2. The Relocation Committee will then do enough design work to establish a cost estimate.
3. The Finance Committee will be working on a project budget that shows where the funding will come from. Local commercial banks, regional & national Co-op funds, and a number of state and federally funded programs are willing to loan us money.

Our membership has shown willingness to loan money to the Co-op in the past and this avenue will be explored in an effort to generate more funds at a lower cost.

A local non-profit group, "Children Families Communities" of Ellsworth, is willing to act as a fiscal sponsor. As a non-profit, they will solicit donations earmarked for our project. Through this relationship we

can also pursue grants. The Cooperative Fund of New England has also offered to fill this role.

Over the past decade, the Co-op has built up reserves that will remain intact throughout this process. Our by-laws stipulate that 50% of Member equity remain untouched by capital expenditures such as this. That rule will be respected.

4. A Capital Campaign committee will then be established with the goal of raising the amount of funds needed to cover the difference between project costs and the established debt

limit.

Major decision points in this process.

- a. The start of fundraising. Are we prepared to do this well and do we have a contingency plan for possible outcomes?
- b. The option to purchase the site expires in August of 2014. Do we purchase the property? This could be affected by fundraising results, but is not entirely dependent upon that outcome.
- c. Taking out the actual loans. Many different variables must be firmly in place before this is undertaken.

The steps of this process were determined by Co-op Board and Committee members with help and input from Bill Gessner of Cooperative Development Services. I point this out because I wish to note that a professional with many years of experience working with Co-op relocations and expansions has been involved in the planning.

Throughout this discussion many people have graciously given their time and thoughts. Including but not limited to; Aaron Dority, Gary Freidman, Leslie Goode, Keith Herklotz, Jerome Lawther,

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MANAGER'S REPORT

I Got Your Relocation Plan, Right Here

As we all know, the Co-op is on course for a major relocation and it is truly going to take a cooperative effort. This article kicks off my new regular column, which will help us all navigate through this exciting endeavor.

As Vice President of the Board, I ask you, not what has the Co-op done for you, but what can you do for our Co-op? If you haven't thought about it yet, I would like to present these ideas, which must be valid and appropriate, or else the newsletter staff would not have published them.

I am fully aware that the Blue Hill Co-op has been discussing relocation since 1864. Many of you might say, "The Board has been working on this for years, what makes you all so special that you think you can pull it off now?" Well, I honestly believe it stems from an atmosphere of mutual respect, effective organization skills, and at meetings I spike the Board's tea with amphetamines.

Since the process is going to take a number of years, the staff has been working their tails off to get the current Co-op location to be a cleaner and more efficient store. You may have noticed that, magically, there is more room in the produce and bulk departments. By the time this goes to print, I'm sure there will be even more wonderful changes. So what can you, as an owner, do to help? Look no further!

How about a little Guerilla marketing. Much of the community in the Blue Hill Peninsula does not even know what we sell (this is actually true). Here's a way you, as an individual owner, can make a difference. Purchase your favorite product from the Co-op and stock it on the shelves of Merrill & Hinckley, Rite Aid, and Tradewinds. When their customers discover it and try to buy it, the manager will say, "We don't sell this. That looks like something they sell over at the Co-op." Tada! Guerilla marketing!

We are going to need to inspire more of our community to become Co-op owners for this relocation to work. That is why I have come up with a mathematically guaranteed, financial bonus system. For every owner you bring in, you get a quarterly check for ½% of their grocery purchases. And for every member they bring in, you get ¼% of those member's purchases. The percentages you receive get smaller as you go down each level of the... triangle, but this exponentially growing number of people will insure wealth and riches

beyond your wildest dreams. You do need to front the money for the groceries that you suspect your future recruits - uh, I mean owners - will buy, but it all works out in the end. Don't worry if you don't totally get it. We'll have special introductory weekend trips to make sure current and potential owners are fully... on board.

So let's dream for a moment about our new location. A larger store should have the space for a greater variety of products and services. We would now have room for a deli, a juice bar, an expansion of traditional Maine products - such as Red Hot Dogs (organic meat floor-sweepings, dyed with beet juice), a grind-your-own-peanut-butter machine, squeeze-your-own-orange-and-carrot-juice machines, and... milk-your-own-milk! From the Co-op's very own friendly cow, stationed in the corner of the store. How great would that be? A quart too small? A gallon too big? Grab a stool and squirt out as much as you want. As the program shows success, we would progressively expand to a variety of "milk-your-own" animals: goat, sheep, yak, and - hopefully in our lifetime - dolphin.

One reason grocery prices will go down, in the new store, is warehouse space. The more space we have for back-stock, the more our buyers can purchase our most popular items, in bulk, at a serious discount, and pass that discount on to us. The more storage space we have, in theory, the cheaper everything gets. And since we're a Co-op, I think it should be mandatory for owners to dedicate 7% of their living, barn, and garage space to storing even more back-stock items. This shouldn't be a shock, since you'll already be warehousing the pre-purchased groceries for your potential future enlisted owners.

So as you can see, we have a lot to discuss to figure out how we can all help (and I don't mean my already super-cute, yet rejected concept: children-only barn-raising.) In my next installment, I will discuss how the new location can keep the "charm" of the Co-op. I don't want to disappoint, but I will not be suggesting installing warped floors or recreating the forced intimate contact we all make with fellow shoppers while shopping through narrow aisles.

Jim Picariello

Notice of Board Meetings

The Co-op Board usually meets on the third Tuesday of each month from 6:30-9:00 p.m. The meetings are held at the Howard room at Blue Hill Library. They are open to the membership. The next Co-op Board meetings will be held on March 19th, April 16th and the Annual Meeting May 21st.

Co-op Board Officers & Members:

Mia Strong, *President*

Jim Picariello, *Vice President*

Marge May, *Secretary*

Richard Paget, *Treasurer*

Allison Watters, Aaron Dority,

Keith Herklotz, Laura Livingston

DEADLINE FOR SUMMER ISSUE:

APRIL 15, 2013

The Newsletter Team

Managing Editor: Jesse Holloway

Layout and Design: Michelle Keyo

Ads: Deborah Wiggs; 374-2159

Columnists/Writers: Andy Traub,
Steve Benson, Co-op staff & Board

General Manager:

Mark Deeny

Store Hours

7 a.m.-7 p.m. Monday - Saturday

8 a.m. - 6 p.m. Sunday

(207) 374-2165

info@bluehill.coop

www.bluehill.coop

Letters to the Editor

The Newsletter Team welcomes input. If you have something you'd like to share with other Co-op owners, please send a letter to: Letters to the Editor, Blue Hill Co-op Community Market, PO Box 1133, Blue Hill, ME 04614, or send an e-mail to newsletter@bluehill.coop. Letters may be edited for style, not content, and should be brief. Please include your name, address, and daytime phone number.



STORE DEPARTMENT NOTES



WINTER PRODUCE

andrew felger
Produce Manager

The transition to winter in the produce department is always a difficult one- produce is at its best when it is locally available and in season. The growing season is not necessarily winter. This spring, summer and fall saw a bountiful harvest from area farms. We do still have a few local products: King Hill turnips, Crossroads Farm parsnips and a bounty of potatoes from Crown of Maine. Another note of interest is the Co-op made a big stride in our commitment to local agriculture and dropped our margin by half on local produce in order to make it more affordable and to try and increase sales. So far it is a success. We will continue with the same low margin on local produce so come and enjoy! For more information on produce pricing and organic cer-

tification see the Produce Information signs at the end of the produce cooler.

What's the upshot of winter produce? Well, since we live in Maine we are lucky to have a fabulous selection of local, MOFGA certified organic potatoes. They have traveled only from Aroostook County to Hancock County and with our local produce pricing, are a deal at \$1.20/pound. We currently have six varieties: Yukon Gold, Red, Russet, German Butterball, Shepody and All Blue. According to Crown of Maine (the middle women who help provide such a great price) they should be in good supply all winter! So while the Cal-organic leeks may be \$8 a bunch, the potatoes are more than affordable. Soon enough we will have seeds on sale, including leeks, and next winter you can have all the leeks you want under your backyard low-tunnel for about \$2 and a little time.

We have another upshot on winter produce, this time on the produce from away. Our food from away is expensive in part, because it goes through so many middle-men, each with their own markup. To avoid this, I have begun sourcing directly from the farmers. So far, we have started a relationship with Pinner Creek Organics in Hilo, Hawaii. Pinner Creek is a small family farm and the owner, Dean, has been growing organic turmeric, ginger, and kava kava for over 30 years. With his wife, son and daughter he claims to have grown over 1 million pounds of ginger. Pinner Creek is certified organic by the Hawaii Organic Farmers Association and grows, processes and ships all their organic roots themselves. Not only are they a great farm to support but so far our ginger has stayed the same price while dramatically increasing in quality and our turmeric has dropped in price from \$18.99 a pound to \$10 a pound! When we have to buy from away, it is great to continue to have the same direct relationships with farmers. At the moment we are buying their turmeric and hope to buy their ginger beginning next season when they have more in stock.



WHAT'S NEW IN BULK?

amy coppage
BULK DEPT. MANAGER

- Organic Masa Harina! I've been looking for organic masa for years - thank you to Fiddler's Green Farms! The pasta is now bagged, as we eliminated the pasta shelf-unit to open up the space and add to the overall shopping experience in the co-op. Enjoy the flow!
- Baker's Blend flour mix - also from Fiddler's Green; a custom blend of Maine-grown organic wheat flour from Aurora Mills in Linneus ME, and high quality organic white flour from Natural Way Mills. The result is a flour that is wholesome, 50% Maine grown, and very versatile.
- OG Green peppercorns - we've had lots of requests for these 'piquant and fresh' peppercorns
- Organic Urban Black Decaf Tea from Blackberry Pond; this is a Nirgili black tea (decaffeinated with the

Co2 process), a nice alternative to Earl Grey decaf.

- Also note that our bulk Hemp seed is now organic!

Also - a thank you from the bulk department to working owner David Vandiver for reinforcing the shelves in the bulk storage closet!

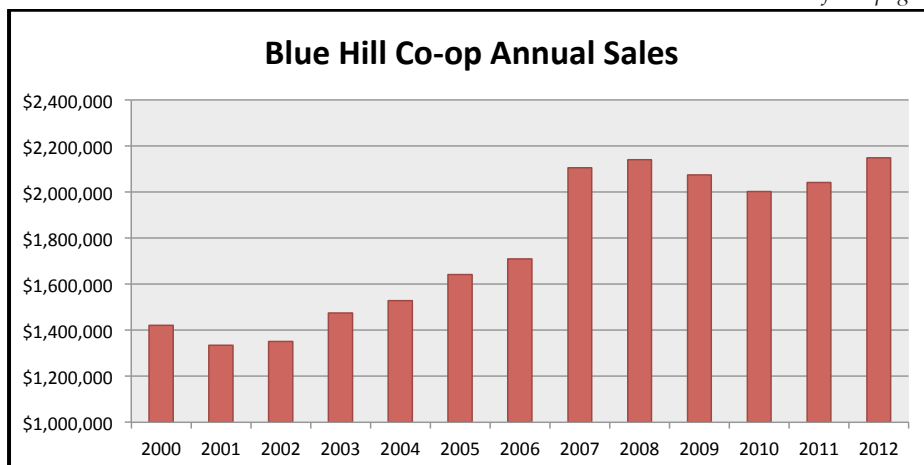
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Manager's Report

Laura Livingston, Terry Mason, Bob Marville, Marge May, Isla Miller, John Miller, Sally Mills, Richard Paget, Jim Picariello, Chris Ramsay, Mia Strong, Bob Sullivan, Allison Watters, and the Co-op staff. Thank you for all that you have done and for all that you will be asked to do in the coming months.

Mark Deeny
General Manager

Note: The large sales increase in 2007 corresponds with a change in the store layout and the purchase of a new cash register system.



BOARDS' VOICES



Dear fellow owners,

I wanted to put a quick word out to you about the upcoming election and annual meeting. Instead of a September election this year we will be voting in May with our annual meeting occurring on May 21st. You will see ballots appearing in your mailboxes in April.

Since the election will be several months early this year, the Board Development Committee is already busy looking for new potential Board members. Are you interested in joining our dynamic group? Given all that is happening with relocation, it's a very exciting time to get involved. Wouldn't you like to be a part of the Board that guides the Co-op into its new location?

We are seeking committed, community-minded individuals who have a wish to help foster the growth and sustainability of the Co-op into the future. Among other perks, you get to hang out with a fun bunch of people and enjoy a 10% discount at the Co-op.

Please give it some thought and consider talking with a current Board member today or contacting me.

Best,

*Allison Watters
Chair of the Board Development Committee
awatters@bluehill.coop*

OUTREACH COMMITTEE HAPPENINGS

The Outreach Committee meets on the first and third Thursdays each month. To make this committee accessible to as many folks as possible, the meeting times alternate: Meetings on the first Thursday will be at 10:00 am at Mia Strong's home at 7 Rope Ferry Road in Sedgwick. The third Thursday meetings will be at 6:00 pm at the BHPL.

Slated events for this year include:

Sponsored Talks

- Ergonomics & Farming for a Lifetime, by ME AgrAbility 12-1pm March 23rd at the Local Food Exchange (Mainescape glass house farmer's market)

Ongoing

- Farm Tours in Cooperation with BHHT
- Movies on Monday nights @ BHPL February 25th: "American Meat" 6:00 pm

Major New Event

- Grilled Sweet Corn on the Cob booth at the Blue Hill Fair

Please join the Outreach Committee meetings and pitch your ideas and pitch in your skills to help manifest a more meaningful presence of the Co-op in the community.

Contact: Jesse Holloway, Marketing and Outreach by email, marketing@bluehill.coop, if you have questions. Owners can attend a meeting, anytime.



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SURVEY TIME!

The Blue Hill Co-op last surveyed our shoppers in 2009. In light of exciting possible transitions, we would very much like to get some feedback now.

Fill out the survey, fold it up, tape it closed, and drop it in the mail! Or bring it in to the Co-op!



1. What aspects of shopping in the Co-op do you enjoy? (Please check all that apply)

- ☐ Supporting co-operative principles
- ☐ Variety of organic food choices
- ☐ Quality and freshness of produce
- ☐ Customer Service
- ☐ Fair pricing
- ☐ Location
- ☐ Bulk products
- ☐ Supporting local producers
- ☐ Vitamins and supplement selection
- ☐ Café food, coffee, and tea
- ☐ Sale programs: Co-op Deals, Bonus Buys, and Full Moon Sale.
- ☐ Social aspect of seeing friends and 'community feeling'
- ☐ Other _____

2. For what reasons do you shop elsewhere? (Check all that apply)

- ☐ Hours of operation
- ☐ Prices
- ☐ Specific products
- ☐ Convenient location
- ☐ More variety of products
- ☐ Higher quality of products
- ☐ Familiarity or ease of use inside the store
- ☐ Parking
- ☐ Other _____

3. What products do you regularly purchase at the Co-op? (Check all that apply)

- ☐ Packaged grocery
- ☐ Dairy products
- ☐ Frozen grocery
- ☐ Meat
- ☐ Fresh bread
- ☐ Produce
- ☐ Bulk
- ☐ Health and beauty products
- ☐ Vitamins and supplements
- ☐ Cheese
- ☐ Beer and wine
- ☐ Cleaning supplies and paper products
- ☐ Pet supplies
- ☐ Café or deli items
- ☐ Gifts and cards
- ☐ Other _____

4. What do you buy elsewhere that you would prefer to buy at the Co-op? (Check all that apply)

☐ Grocery specify: _____
☐ Dairy specify: _____
☐ Pet products specify: _____
☐ Frozen specify: _____
☐ Paper/Household specify: _____
☐ Produce specify: _____
☐ Beer/Wine specify: _____
☐ Bulk specify: _____
☐ Vitamins/supplements specify: _____
☐ Gifts specify: _____
☐ Fair Trade items specify: _____
☐ Café specify: _____
☐ Meat specify: _____
☐ Fish specify: _____
☐ Housewares specify: _____
☐ Events/Classes specify: _____
☐ Drinking Water
☐ Other _____

5. I feel the Co-op staff is readily available to answer questions and offer assistance.

☐ Agree ☐ Somewhat Agree ☐ Disagree

6. How important is it that the Co-op expands our selection of products?

☐ Very important
☐ Somewhat important
☐ Not important

7. How often do you purchase items from the Café?

☐ Daily ☐ Weekly ☐ Monthly
☐ Seldom ☐ Never

8. How often do you use the Café seating area?

☐ Daily ☐ Weekly ☐ Monthly
☐ Seldom ☐ Never

9. What features would you like to see at a newly built Co-op building? (Check all that apply)

☐ Customer Service desk
☐ Root cellar/storage area for local root crops
☐ Onsite composting
☐ Home for the Blue Hill Farmers' Market
☐ Space for classes/workshops/events
☐ Live entertainment
☐ Grain silo / bulk feed depot
☐ Other _____

10. Do you support the Co-op sharing the site or building with any of the following types of businesses?

Credit Union	<input type="checkbox"/> yes	<input type="checkbox"/> no
Farmers' Market	<input type="checkbox"/> yes	<input type="checkbox"/> no
Holistic health center	<input type="checkbox"/> yes	<input type="checkbox"/> no
Grain/Feed Depot	<input type="checkbox"/> yes	<input type="checkbox"/> no

11. How important is it that a new Co-op building be energy efficient (LEED Certified)? Please consider the following:

1) There may be more up-front construction cost.
2) The value of the building will be enhanced and long term cost savings will be realized by the reduction of operating costs through energy efficiency, and overall environmental health.

☐ Very important
☐ Somewhat important
☐ Not important

12. How likely is it that you would contribute money to this project?

☐ Very likely
☐ Somewhat likely
☐ Unlikely

13. How likely is it that you would contribute to the funding of this project in the form of a loan that would be paid back over time?

☐ Very likely
☐ Somewhat likely
☐ Unlikely

14. In Maine, and 31 other states, legislation is being drafted to mandate labeling of GMO's/genetically engineered ingredients in food. Would you purchase an item if it were labeled as containing GMO's?

- ☐ Absolutley not
☐ I don't know
☐ Yes, I would buy food containing GMO's

15. How important is it that items you purchase are certified organic?

- ☐ Very important
☐ Somewhat important
☐ Not important

16. How important is it that items you purchase are locally grown or made?

- ☐ Very important
☐ Somewhat important
☐ Not important

17. How important is it that items you purchase use limited or recyclable packaging?

- ☐ Very important
☐ Somewhat important
☐ Not important

18. What percentage of your grocery shopping do you do at the Blue Hill Co-op?

- ☐ Less than 25%
☐ 26-50%
☐ 51-75%
☐ 76-100%

19. What is your age?

- ☐ Under 18
☐ 18-24
☐ 25-32
☐ 33-45
☐ 46-64
☐ 65 and older

20. What is your annual household income range?

- ☐ < \$20,000
☐ \$20,000 - \$40,000
☐ \$40,000 - \$60,000
☐ \$60,000 - \$100,000
☐ > \$100,000

21. Where do you live?

- ☐ Blue Hill ☐ Brooklin ☐ Brooksville
☐ Bucksport ☐ Castine ☐ Deer Isle
☐ Ellsworth ☐ MDI ☐ Orland
☐ Sargentville ☐ Sedgwick ☐ Stonington
☐ Surry ☐ Other _____

22. ☐ Yes, I am a Co-op member

☐ No, I am not a Co-op member

YES! ☐ Contact me! I would like to help!

Name _____

Phone Number _____

Additional Thoughts:

We thank you for your participation!

Blue Hill Co-op
PO BOX 1133
Blue Hill, ME 04614

fold

fold

fold

Natural Flavors – Marketing an Illusion

Andrew Traub

We are all duped as “The consumption of flavorings is one of the modern era’s most profound collective acts of submission to illusion,” Raffi Khatchadourian pointedly illuminated in the Nov.23, 2009 issue of *The New Yorker*. When we buy a product containing “natural flavors” and think we are ingesting anything in the spirit of the word “natural,” this is not the case, and a few select clandestine billion-dollar businesses are betting you won’t catch on to the scam. But as Joel Salatin, the farming pioneer, suggests, a paradigm can only be overturned after it has become so rigid and entrenched as to render its actions absurd. In looking into the world of natural flavors and the flavoring industry as a whole, I discovered their manifestation in all our foods has really become absurd. As processed, packaged food has become the norm around the world over the last fifty years, food has moved from the kitchen into the chemistry laboratory in its synthesis. Products are expected to travel long distances, languish undiminished on shelves, and then come back into action to deliver flavor months later on your plate. Flavor scientists have been working to transform road-weary, processed foods into not only palatable food-stuffs, but pleasurable taste experiences that leave you craving more.

Today the food flavoring industry is a billion-dollar-a-year industry whose clients are confidential and whose chemical constituents have lax oversight from any governing bodies. And food flavor additives are not just for TV dinners anymore—they are everywhere (and everywhere includes the shelves of the Co-op). My wife couldn’t believe our favorite Knudsen organic berry juice had natural flavors listed as an ingredient. She called the company: “How can you say it is 100% juice when you are adding something that is not juice?” The representative replied, “The flavoring just gives you that great juice taste you want.” My wife retorted, “Well, we just want to taste the fruit itself—that’s why we’re buying juice.”

Keep your eyes open around the Co-op. As already mentioned, juices are often loaded with natural flavors. They can also be found in frozen entrees, canned soups, flavored tofu and meats, crackers, cereals, cookies and chocolates. Flavored oils and vinegars may have them. Prepared

sauces, stocks, unsweetened nut milks, and condiments also have them. Gum, toothpastes and vitamins can’t seem to do without. And my personal favorite, in beer, to give it those aromatic autumnal notes of strolling through leaves with pumpkin stuck to your boot... The more you look, the more you will find.

In the world of food-flavoring chemistry one of the chief illusions perpetrated on the consumer is that there is an inherent difference between natural and artificial flavoring. For natural flavors to be listed as an ingredient by law they must be distilled or extracted from living matter. So if the scientists have determined that trans-2-octenol is a component in something tasting like ripe strawberries, they will search to find that compound in nature—they may isolate it from strawberries, or they may get it from apples or pears because they are cheaper (true). But the point is, at the end of the extraction process you have pure trans-2-octenol—it is a pure compound. An artificial flavor just uses a different, non-living source for the compound (in most cases, old compressed geologic plant matter called oil). And at the end of the extraction process for artificial flavors you also get pure trans-2-octenol. No difference whatsoever from its twin, the “natural” flavor.

But the flavor scientists are more sophisticated than just ripe strawberries. They work to develop taste pleasure that leaves you wanting more. A relative of ours described how she really loved Trader Joe’s variety of Strawberry-Banana juice. She couldn’t get enough of it. Upon examining the label, sure enough, we found “natural flavors” prominently listed. And the fact that the flavor tapers off rapidly after consumption is quite intentional. If you were satisfied, you wouldn’t consume more. A taste scientist for Givaudan, the world’s largest flavoring company, admitted in a 60 Minutes interview, “You don’t want a long linger

because you’re not going to eat more of it if it lingers.”

A company recently perfected a slurry of starch, oil and salt and solicited Givaudan to develop this product into guacamole. Coming soon: guacamole that doesn’t brown or spoil and has all natural guacamole flavoring. It will have an “organic” variety as well. It contains no avocado.

And what’s next on the food flavoring horizon in the 21st century is stripping down foods of their salt and fat then flavoring them up with fake saltiness

and fake fattiness. The sad irony is that the flavoring industry has been creating salty, fatty, addictive foods that have gotten us to our current un-healthy state. And they think they can now engineer our way back to a healthy society.

Here’s what you can do instead. Obviously, read the labels, and as Co-op proprietors we all do. But now, don’t be duped by natural flavors listed as an ingredient. Know that they are all made in labs by sophisticated multi-nationals and really look hard in your Co-op consciousness mirror now and say, would I be buying this product if it listed artificial flavors as an ingredient, because I know chemically they are identical to “natural” flavors? Then tell the companies that you are not happy about this—call them, e-mail, give feedback however you can.

And remember, it’s only an illusion if everyone agrees to accept it.

References:

- The New Yorker, “The Taste Makers” by Raffi Khatchadourian, Nov.23, 2009.
- 60 Minutes, “The Flavorists” CBS News, Nov.27, 2011.
- The Sun, “Sowing Dissent : An interview with Joel Salatin” by Tracy Frisch, Oct., 2012.



Recognizing Caren McCourtney

This past December, Caren McCourtney, a long-time owner-member of the Blue Hill Co-op, died at home after a long negotiation with the effects of cancer.

Caren served six years on the Co-op's board, and she consented to be President in her final year. Her basis for leadership by example was as a stalwart team player and as a truth-teller. Courageous when necessary and confident when she found it reasonable to be so, she would tell friends and others her own impressions with respect and interest in others' responses. And she'd keep asking about something if she didn't understand. She showed up for meetings prepared from reading anything we had to discuss, with her questions and concerns ready to be spoken.

As President, Caren was low-key and matter-of-fact, with a wry, dry humor at times. Although principled and devoted, she was not driven by fantasies. She showed a lot of sobriety in how she thought about the Co-op. She focused on the organization overall, rather than primarily on the store.

On the board, Caren didn't push her own agenda, if she happened to have one, but tested any suggestion against objections and risks that might arise. She encouraged others to think things through. She spoke up to make sure all concerns or doubts were getting aired.

Caren didn't seem to need to feel she was "right" in her own positions, but she would explain them in plain and simple language, open to other ideas. Often her own position might remain unstated quite a while. She listened carefully to different points of view and diverse ways of expressing them, and she demonstrated a willingness to change her mind. She appreciated others' humor when it cropped up, and she'd praise someone else's work in a frank, light way.

Caren studied up on what was involved in policy governance and how to read financial reports in order to perform effectively on the board. She served for years during and after board tenure on a Finances Committee that met regularly with the General Manager to review, evaluate and advise the GM and the Board on financial decisions and oversight. She functioned as emotional support and as a thought-reflecting resource to one or more board presidents after she left the board.

Also after completing her maximum term on the board, she partnered Gail Bartlett in an ad hoc committee tasked with analyzing, formulating, and proposing revisions to many board policies. They worked through each policy sentence by sentence to reach a mutual consensus before presenting their recommendations for the full board's consideration.

Caren didn't mind policy work and took it seriously, asking hard questions in a neutral manner and admitting what she didn't know. She tried not to agree to any choice until she was sure she understood it and unable to find anything wrong with it. When a sensitive and troubling employee grievance with management came to a head and required special efforts to address it, Caren volunteered, participating crucially in interviews, research, and negotiations to try to resolve the issues as fairly and effectively as possible.

Able to complete superb hands-on construction work without training, drawing from manuals and advice, Caren helped out painting and in other remodeling tasks as the Co-op grew physically. She brought the same down-to-earth pragmatic approach to policy revision or board decision-making. As customer, she and her partner of nearly twenty-five years, Gabrielle Wellman, used to bring twenty or thirty empty jars in at a time to fill from the bulk department,

Continued on page 11

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creating a compelling impression that others might want to follow.

I feel I learned how to be functional and how to survive on the board through my attention to Caren, my first couple years as a director. Without that background, I don't know that I could have served as secretary there as long or as thoroughly as I did. I am grateful for this perhaps inadvertent gift to me.

Steve Benson

with support from Gail Bartlett, Lora Moore, and Deborah Wiggs



THE BENEFITS OF OWNERSHIP

Deirdre McGrath, Ownership Coordinator

The Full Moon Sale is a wonderful benefit we like to offer to our Owners. 10% off your total purchase once a month is hard to come by at other businesses, including other co-ops. It's one of the little ways we like to say "thank you for your support!" Check out the dates below for upcoming sales!

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Thursday, September 19th

Friday, October 18th

Sunday, November 17th

Tuesday, December 17th



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ON THE WALL AT THE CO-OP CAFÉ

february

Alice Wilkenson,
Photographs

march

Co-op Staff Show,
Mixed Media

april TBA

may

Phil Sultz, *Painting*

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