

# ROOTSTOCK

the official newsletter of the BELFAST CO-OP



## GROWING STRONGER TOGETHER



[www.belfast.coop](http://www.belfast.coop)

### GM CORNER

by Doug Johnson  
Belfast Co-op General Manager



The word growth carries a unique stigma in the cooperative world. Depending on the circles you run in, the concept of cooperative growth is either corporate corruption weeding its way into our perfect utopian democracy or it is lauded as the saving grace for humanity. My opinion most certainly falls in the latter category. Cooperatives as an economic model stand as a stark alternative to consumer capitalism, one where the owners and users have a voice in how the organization is governed, the values it upholds, and the ends that it strives to meet. The greater the impact that co-ops are able to make in the market, the more they are able to give voice to the will of the people they serve and allow co-op owners the ability to choose the course of their shared enterprise.

So what does this mean for our little co-op in Belfast, Maine? In our recent history we have had periods of unprecedented growth as we took steps to better meet the needs of our community. We saw quarter after quarter of double digit sales growth following our acceptance into the National Cooperative Grocers (NCG), a co-op of co-ops that allowed us to offer more competitive prices through group contracts and negotiations. At the time, and even still today, the idea of our independent co-op joining other co-ops in a larger group working towards similar ends was seen by some as heresy, of Belfast getting “too big,” of us losing our autonomy. Now we see the value of those cooperative alliances, as across the country we see cooperatives being pushed out of their communities as new competition floods the natural foods marketplace. For co-ops to survive, it is not enough that we are principled and have a shared set of values that guide our decisions. For us to survive we must be better grocers, a shock to the sensibilities of many long-time co-operators that never saw what they were participating in as simply “selling groceries.” The complex reality is that we must be both.

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123 HIGH STREET

BELFAST, ME

207.338.2532

7:30AM–8:00PM



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CONSUMER RECYCLED PAPER BY

We are no longer in the days of double digit sales growth, in fact our first quarter sales growth was just shy of 1%, but we still exist in an economy that is expanding every day. Personnel costs continue to rise as the cost of benefits grows exponentially and we work towards offering a livable wage for all of our workers. It states in our Ends that we exist to provide "...a thriving, just, and sustainable local food economy" and that "sustainable" piece is tricky to maintain as the world grows around you. If we make a conscious effort not to grow, to remain as we are, where does that leave the workers? If the costs of goods, utilities, and personnel continue to increase we must be willing to take steps to increase sales. Alternatively we could offset those increases by raising prices, however that would not allow many of our customers to meet their needs and would ultimately lead to the coop's failure. Whether we want to compete with conventional grocers and online retailers or not, many of the services and products that we provide are not unique, and therefore what differentiates us is our structure, our connection to our community, and the values and principles on which we are founded.

It does sometimes feel like a Catch-22, but if the end result of having to compete head-on with capitalism is cooperatives having a larger piece of the pie, I say that is a noble fight that we should embrace. I want my children to grow up in a world where the values of honesty, openness, social responsibility and caring for others still have a place in their grocery cart. I want them to thrive in a community where solidarity is valued over isolationism. I want the Belfast Co-op to continue to grow in the years ahead to meet the needs of its community, every member

of its community, and to serve as a symbol of what an alternative economy could look like. You can do your part by continuing to choose to meet your consumer needs at the Co-op and by taking part in cooperative democracy by voting or running for our Board of Directors. Every investment that you make in your Co-op is an investment in the continuation and growth of a stronger and more cooperative world.

## GENERAL MANAGER

Doug Johnson

## BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Alessandra Martinelli, President  
Ron Braybrook, Vice President  
Zafra Whitcomb, Secretary  
Lindsey Schortz, Treasurer

Andrew Watkins  
Bindy Pendleton  
Betsy Garrold  
Justin Howard, staff rep.

## BOARD COMMITTEES

Finance Committee  
boardfinance@belfast.coop

Membership Committee  
boardmembership@belfast.coop

Board Development Committee  
boarddevelopment@belfast.coop

Bylaws Committee  
Ad hoc



for the next meetings of the

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

**March 23**  
**April 27**



# BOARD CORNER

by Alessandra Martinelli  
BOARD PRESIDENT

## *Restorative Justice Update*

Hello fine people of the Belfast Coop world. I am writing to continue reporting on our experience with the Restorative Justice Program we initially wrote about in the May-June 2016 issue of Rootstock. A now-former employee was arraigned in the court and plead guilty to a felony charge for stealing money from the Coop and its owners. At the request of the Co-op and the District Attorney's office, the judge agreed to employ the Restorative Justice system to support the individual and help heal the community members that were victimized. At the completion of the program and once all parties involved are satisfied that justice has been served, the offender can once again go before the court and plead guilty to a misdemeanor charge. Those harmed, including representatives from the Co-op management and the board as well as several of the individual owners, were asked to take part in a community circle. The purpose of the circle is to offer victims and offenders the opportunity to discuss the events that brought them to this place, as well as to

come up with an agreement on how to repair the damage done, also known as the "repair agreement".

The circle recently reconvened to assess the completion of the agreed upon repair agreement. The list of items in the repair agreement, were created by the victims and the perpetrator in order to rehabilitate and reintegrate the offender back into the community. Throughout the process, the offender met weekly with a volunteer mentor as well as professional counselors to repair some of the causes that led to their unlawful actions. The former employee presented the circle with their progress, including good deeds done in the community. Each victim was able to voice how this made them feel, and if they believed the individual held up their end of the deal in repairing the damage they had done. Many answers were heartfelt and the gravity of the situation was certainly revealed. Going through hard times is easier with support and accountability from the greater community. The circle agreed unanimously that the individual followed and fulfilled the repair agreement. Obstacles are inevitable, but building strong relationships in our community and staying true to the cooperative values of self-help, self-responsibility, honesty, openness, social responsibility, and caring for others will help us overcome those challenges.



Join the Belfast Co-op's Board of Directors for this year's Annual Meeting Sunday, March 19 at the Waldo County Shrine Club from 2-5pm, doors open at 1:30. The Annual Meeting will kick off elections, and the BOD and the General Manager will provide board, operational, and financial updates. Refreshments provided!



# BOARD OF DIRECTORS 2017 CANDIDATES

Owners will vote on Board of Directors candidates at the Annual Meeting.

Meet our candidates!



**Betsy Garrold** has served on the BOD since 2012. Betsy is a strong and passionate activist who believes that cooperatives are a radical economic model that is desperately needed in these tumultuous times. She is seeking another term on the BOD to be a voice of resistance against mainstreaming and corporatization that is the current trend in the cooperative world. Betsy served for three years as the state party co-chair for the Maine Green Independent Party, she currently serves on the board of Food for Maine's Future, is a member of MOFGA's El Salvador Sistering Committee, and a worker-owner at Fedco Seeds.

**David Balicki** has worked in the financial industry for over 25 years, holding various positions in management, education, project teams, etc, and would bring his skills in problem solving and interpersonal team building to the Belfast Co-op's BOD. David would like to see the Co-op maintain its focus on the local community while incorporating best practices that will keep the Co-op healthy and successful. Aside from his current occupation as a corporate facilitator, David is a family man who was raised on "you are what you eat" and values the Co-op as a place that helps him raise his own children with the same principles.



**Violet Jastram** is a spirited community activist with a background in social policy and environmental science. Her passion for the Co-op stems from her pursuit of community resilience and social justice through local food systems. If granted a seat on the BOD, Violet will be a voice for the needs of members, as well as an advocate for increased sustainability and localization of the organization. Violet is currently homesteading in Belfast with her husband where they are working on planting fruit and nut trees.

**Alessandra Martinelli** has served on the BOD for the past three years and is currently the Board President. She is seeking another term on the BOD because she is dedicated to ensuring a future for the Co-op. The Co-op found a place in Alessandra's heart by bringing together people and food, it is the embodiment of her long-held belief that food is community glue. In addition to serving on the Co-op's BOD, she also helped to start the Water Street Learning Center and has served on its BOD for two years. Alessandra also is the shepherdess of Spring Fed Farm in Northport and mother of four.



**Shannon Grimes** manages nutrition incentive programming at Maine Farmland Trust, helping to increase access to local food. She came to Maine for College, after growing up in New Zealand and Montana, and has now lived in the Midcoast for about 3 years. She loves cooking, dancing, and being outside, and is always looking for more delicious vegetable recipes. She's excited to have an opportunity to contribute more to the Belfast community and the Co-op's mission.

## CAST YOUR VOTE, MARCH 19TH





Rani, with Crosby the Co-op Cat.

## A Tribute to Rani

*by Hannah Kreitzer*

Any frequent Co-op shopper has probably met, and remembered, our longtime worker-owner Rani Howe. Her distinctive white braid and fiery spirit have been a fixture of the herbal health and beauty aisles, where she's steered many seekers with her sage advice (which always came salted with wisdom and wit). That guidance will be sorely missed as she steps onto another well-earned road: retirement and a rekindling of creative spirit.

Rani's Co-op career started in 1985 at the original Main St location. Already a member for five years, she became one of only three employees who ran the store. Even after moving to their second site, it was still just eight staff members and a crew of volunteers who were bagging raisins, stocking crowded shelves, cleaning, and carrying out all the odd jobs that kept the store afloat. Rani ran the register 40 hours a week while also ordering produce, herbs, and a small selection of wine. Following the move to our current Co-op location in 1993, she became produce manager and sole employee of the department for four years.

After eleven and a half total years of Co-op employment, Rani left to pursue her growing zeal for herblore and holistic wellness. That passion blossomed into a multifaceted business, offering classes and apprenticeships, dried herbs by wholesale and mail order, herbal consults, and a presence at fairs and trade shows. That path reached a fork when a shift in her home life required Rani seek further income, at which point the Co-op asked if she'd be interested in rejoining their staff. Ever since, she's been a beacon for pilgrims on the road to healing in Waldo County and beyond.

Rani was the listening ear into which so many poured their hopes and fears. Constrained by the legal boundaries of what advice she could dispense in a retail setting, and pitted against frequent frenzies of Dr. Oz-type hype, she nonetheless brought compassion and grace to a demanding role. She worked hard to live up to the words of Helen and Scott Nearing: "Do the best you can in the place where you are and be kind."

Never one to idle, Rani recently took up spinning and has been immersing herself in many facets of creative practice. Her family's Christmas tree operation, Skyscraper Hill Farm, and the steady demands of a spring garden ensure that she'll never be at a loss for things to do outdoors. A self-described "gardening freak" who is also "crazy for cooking," she'll spend many days ahead nourishing her loved ones and the earth that answers her devotion with equal measure. We wish her many happy days with wool and wheel, home and harvest. May your garden rows and spirit flourish with equal zest, Rani! We will miss you.



Time for a rest.

# *What's* *@ your coop!*

## DAIRY

We're proud to feature a new cream cheese from The Milkhouse, of Monmouth, Maine! Their luxurious cream cheese is made with local, organic jersey cow milk and cream, and Maine sea salt. Find it in our dairy case!

## MEMBERSHIP

We've redesigned our Owner's Corner by Customer Service! The newly updated area is much more visible, less cramped, and full of useful information for Owners on the governance of your Co-op. Check it out!

## DELI

The Deli is introducing new salads! Be sure to try out our Catalina Bean and Penne Salad, now available by the pound in our Deli!

## PRODUCE

Local seeds from FEDCO and organic seeds from High Mowing are now in! Find them on the seed rack in Produce.

## CAUTION: AWESOMENESS UNDER CONSTRUCTION

Things are getting exciting in the Center Store Department this March as we enter the next phase of our reset project. **March 26–28** we will be installing new shelving in the center store, allowing us to widen the shopping aisles and make for a better shopping experience. Not only will the renovation improve your experience of the store, it will also help us with our ordering and with keeping the shelves stocked.

We will be working overnight during construction, so look for big changes when you come in for your morning coffee. Also bear with us as we work throughout the day to stock the shelves and put the store back together.

– Judith, Center Store Manager

Meeting your needs. Making a difference. Working together. It's what we do!

# JUST PICKED



HI! MY NAME IS **Karla** & I WORK IN THE  
**Deli** HERE AT THE CO-OP.

I JUST PICKED **Wonderfully Raw Organic Coco-Roons** BECAUSE  
They are totally delicious!  
Plus, they're vegan and  
cane sugar free...  
Just like me!



**march**  
**FRIENDS OF BELFAST**  
**PARKS**

**april**  
**VEGGIES FOR ALL**

We will be voting on 2018 Common Cents recipients at the Annual Meeting, on **March 19th!**

## YOUR VOICE counts

Your customer comments and Belfast Co-op Management responses

*"Can we look into sprucing up the restroom for the new year?"*

A top priority!

-Jeremy  
Operations Manager

*"Hello! Would love if the Co-op carried plaintain chips cooked in coconut oil."*

Thanks for writing in! We're currently reevaluating what is stocked on our shelves for an up and coming reset. We'll certainly look into whether this and many other product suggestions will fit into our new mix.

-Evans  
Asst. Center Store Manager

*"Thank you so much for the any-day-of-the-week Senior Discount!"*

Thank you so much for the comment! As with any change, we try to do our due diligence and make the choice that will have the greatest positive impact on our community, but you can never be sure until after the fact. I sincerely appreciate the feedback and I look forward to seeing you in the store!

-Doug  
General Manager

*"I would like to find bulk Star Anise at the Co-op."*

We are resetting our bulk spice counter very soon! We will take your comment into consideration - we will have room for additional options! Thank you for your feedback!

-Evans  
Asst. Center Store Manager

*thank you for your cooperation!*





## *Tiny House Panel Discussion*

**Tuesday, March 14, 6:30pm @ The Belfast Free Library**

Join panelists Autumn Cassity, Jim Bahoosh, Jensen Sheafe, and Brendan Browne to discuss aspects of tiny house building and dwelling.

This event is free to the public and will be held in the Abbott Room of the Belfast Free Library.

**Free event - Sign up at the registers.  
Everyone Welcome**

For more information about this event please call the  
Belfast Free Library at 338-3884 ext.10 or the Belfast Co-op at 338.2532.

### **MARCH**

**Common Cents: Friends of the Belfast Parks**

**Artist of the month: Johnn Noomyenooneam**

March 1-7 - **Owner Appreciation Week**, Owners save 10% off one transaction of their choosing.

March 14 - **Tiny House Panel Discussion** Tuesday 6:30pm, Abbott Room, Belfast Free Library, 106 High St.

**March 19 - Annual Meeting, 2 - 5 pm at the Belfast Shrine Club, 85 Northport Ave.**

March 23 - **Board Meeting** Thurs. 6pm social time, 6:30pm meeting, Waterfall Arts, 256 High St.

March 31 - **Love Local Day**, featured vendor TBD. 10% off all local products, all day long.

### **APRIL**

**Common Cents: Veggies for All**

**Artist of the month: Broadreach Family & Community Services**

April 12 - **Owner Social** Wednesday, 6pm - 8pm, location TBD

April 27 - **Board Meeting** Thurs. 6pm social time, 6:30pm meeting, Waterfall Arts, 256 High St.

April 28 - **Love Local Day**, featured vendor Grandy Oats. 10% off all local products, all day long.