

ROOTSTOCK

ISSUE #33

JUL - AUG 2019

The Official Newsletter of the **Belfast Co-op**

PERSPECTIVES *and* **RETROSPECTIVES** **FROM THE DESK OF THE GM**

In early June I travelled with two members of the Co-op's Board of Directors to Durham, NC, host city for the 63rd annual Consumer Cooperative Management Association (CCMA) conference (see the Board's report on the conference on page 3). This event brings together workers, directors, managers, and industry professionals to reflect on and learn from our positions within consumer cooperatives. The theme this year was **Cooperative Tapestry: Fostering Democracy and Equity in Our Communities**, a nod to the impact that the textile industry has had historically on Eastern North Carolina's economy. CCMA exists as not only an unparalleled education and development opportunity, but also as a yearly celebration of the individuals that work so tirelessly to build strength and vitality into the cooperative movement.

This year I participated in the conversation as an attendee and I was also honored to be able to share our Belfast Co-op story in a breakout session titled **Renew, Review, Repeat: Creating a Culture of Continual Improvement at the Belfast Co-op**. Together with Brittany Baird, a cooperative management consultant with Columinate (formerly CDS Consulting Co-op) and former Interim General Manager at our co-op, I presented on the history and conditions that led to our culture of innovation and improvement.

In preparing for the session I was once again reminded of how far our co-op has come in its 40+ year evolution and how our current successes stand as a testament to the passion and determination of those who came before. We began the story with Belfast's transition from shipbuilding to poultry to the arts and how the path that the Co-op has taken is reflective of the community.

I chose to attend sessions that focused on strategies for advancing our expansion project, including **Out of the Box Financing Strategies: Creative Thinking about Debt and Cash Flow** hosted by representatives from several cooperative lenders and the Board President from Green Top Grocery, a startup co-op in Illinois, and **Thinking Strategically About Expansion Opportunities** hosted by National Co-op Grocers professionals working in the development field. Both of these sessions offered cautionary tales about the realities of taking on an expansion project and the potential fiscal jeopardy that comes from not being strategic about taking on debt, however they also demonstrated the danger of not reinvesting in your co-op, "hunkering down" when times are tough rather than moving forward.

....cont'd page 2...

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67 Lower Main Street, 1985



123 High St, 2019



BELFAST.COOP 123 HIGH STREET BELFAST, MAINE 04915 207.338.2532

....cont'd from page 1....

I will be bringing these new concepts and perspectives to our expansion committee discussions (see page 6). In addition to looking toward expansion, I also attended a session hosted by the Boise Co-op on communication strategies that gave me some insight into how well we are doing with our internal communications and some tips and strategies to improve.

Overall my experience at CCMA this year was one of deep nostalgia for the co-ops of the past coupled with an acknowledgment that the world has changed and co-ops must be prepared for and given the tools for reinvention. This past year saw the passing of co-op pioneer Bill Gessner, whose contributions to the system have been innumerable and invaluable. Additionally, it was announced just prior to the conference that the Cooperative Grocers Network, a trade organization which pooled resources and best practices for food co-ops, is closing it's operation and shifting it's intellectual assets to another organization at the end of the year.

It felt like the end of an era, where the cooperative leaders of the past were passing along their legacy. It is said that you want to leave the world a better place than you came into for future generations, but what cooperative world have our co-op parents left behind for us?

With rising costs, shrinking margins, and increased competition closing in from all directions, it is harder than ever to meet the needs and aspirations of our cooperative communities. So many of our icons of the past mention how difficult it is now for co-ops to survive, but despite all the challenges I am confident that what was true back then is still true today:

Cooperatives make the world a better place, and I am grateful that *all of us* are able to play a part in that.



Doug Johnson General Manager

Founded in 1976, Belfast Co-op is Maine's oldest democratically owned and operated grocery store and cafe. Offering a wide selection of products that are organically produced and locally-sourced, at reasonable prices, to support healthy lifestyles. All are welcome.

who we are:

CURRENT OWNERS:

4217

STAFF:

70+

GENERAL MANAGER

Doug Johnson

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Shannon Grimes, Outgoing President
Andrew Watkins, Vice President
Ernie Cooper, Treasurer
David Gibson, Secretary
Alessandra Martinelli
Betsy Garrold
David Balicki
Heather Selin
Annie Bussiere
Crystal Howard-Doliber
Edward Sheridan
Evans Goff, Staff Representative

BOARD COMMITTEES

Finance:

boardfinance@belfast.coop

Owner Engagement:

boardowners@belfast.coop

Board Development:

boarddevelopment@belfast.coop

Expansion:

expansion@belfast.coop

Who is the Board?

The Co-op's board of directors is elected by the ownership and is made up of owners just like you. The entire group has a legal responsibility to ensure the Co-op's well-being. Board members work to keep the Co-op accountable to cooperative principles, adhere to the Bylaws and make sure that the Co-op remains a sustainable business. The Board supervises the General Manager of the store, who is responsible for carrying out Board policies.

**we're always looking
for more people to join
our board of director's
committees.**

**To find out more,
please email:**

board@belfast.coop

A cooperative is an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social, and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly-owned and democratically-controlled enterprise.

why we're here:

THE BELFAST CO-OP EXISTS SO THAT
OUR OWNERS AND OUR COMMUNITY WILL HAVE:

A thriving, just, and sustainable local food economy

A source of healthy, nutritious, affordable food, and water

An efficiently managed, democratically governed inclusive cooperative retail store

A greater understanding of health, food systems, cooperatives and economic and environmental sustainability

An invested, engaged, and empowered staff that thrive in a safe, respectful, inclusive, and equitable workplace

2019 CCMA CONFERENCE (CONSUMER COOPERATIVE MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION)

On the first weekend of June, two directors and the GM attended the annual Conference of the Consumer Cooperative Management Association to connect with directors, managers, and consultants for three days of informative instruction, dialogue, and collaboration. The time was filled with breakout sessions, local tours, keynote addresses, recognition of work, and fun. We attended tours to surrounding cooperative enterprises whose missions were to enhance the local food movement through entrepreneurial activities, retail and wholesale trades. We came out of those tours with increased understandings of how co-ops have helped build a vibrant local food economy in Durham, NC.

Some takeaways:

•**The grocery industry is highly complex.** We are trying to do a social good in a challenging world that is only getting more competitive. Those of us in the cooperative food economy will need to continue innovating and developing novel approaches in the retail landscape to disrupt the larger players. Listening to our community and following its needs will move us into a more competitive position and position us for continued service to our local cooperative economy. The Board is always trying to find new ways to engage with the community, and we are planning summer events—like an ice cream social and maybe a recipe swap—to create more opportunities for connections.

•**Bias will always need to be addressed.** One of the first challenges to this is recognizing when we have bias—whether it's in how we run meetings, what we assume about people, or other expectations. This is an important area of growth for co-ops, as it is vital to our success as a social enterprise. Beyond our regular working agreements at board meetings, we are exploring how to dive in further to this work, such as through bias trainings offered by other cooperative groups.

•**All co-ops have a common language.** Although our communities that are such a part of our identity are distinct and we are very different in size, scope, and more, we found the peer support from interacting with other directors enormously helpful. Many co-ops have similar challenges with policy governance, officer and board transitions, or have been through or are exploring growth. Together, we can work to overcome these barriers, and tackle longer-term and more systemic issues. The Board will continue to reach out to boards of other co-ops, and participate in future opportunities like the “Co-op Cafés” held annually in the autumn. Our inquiries with co-op consultants will also help us learn the latest developments in building cooperative economies. Through all these interactions we will continue to develop better ways to provide governance, and reach out to owners and members.

Overall, it was an invigorating and informative few days. We are grateful for the educational opportunities provided to us as volunteers for this organization, and hope that they enable us to better serve you. We look forward to hearing more from you, seeing you at a board meeting, and taking all our lessons forward in our work for the Belfast Co-op.



COOPERATIVE TAPESTRY

Fostering Democracy and Equity in Our Communities



Board Directors Andrew and Shannon
touring Weaver's Way Co-op Bakery
Durham, NC

5/28/2019



Dear Belfast Coop Owners,

We are Zoe and Hazel Badgett and we are 8 and 7 years old. We live in Belfast and we are homeschooled. We love the Belfast Coop. We love the local food, the bulk section, the kombucha in glass bottles, the cookies, the dried mango, the Explorers Fruit, and the cloth produce bags. We love how nice and kind the people are who work at the Coop. And we love seeing all our friends shopping at the Coop too.

We are concerned about the plastic produce bags we see people use when they shop at the Coop. We care about plastic waste because plastic gets into rivers, lakes and oceans, and harms animals and people. Also, plastic is made out of fossil fuels which are non-renewable and contribute to climate change. Plastic produce bags are not accepted at the Belfast Transfer Station and usually end up in the trash when people are done with them.

We bring cloth produce bags, cloth flour bags, and glass canning jars when we shop at the Coop. We've even made our own woven and cloth produce bags. Here is a picture of Zoe with a bag she made:

All Belfast Coop Owners together could keep a lot of plastic out of the landfill by using cloth produce bags and other reusable containers.

Thank you for supporting the Belfast Coop.

Sincerely,

Zoe

Hazel

Zoe and Hazel Badgett

HELP US SAVE THE CO-OP'S HISTORY

The Co-op Board's Owner Engagement Committee (OEC) is collecting materials and stories that document the glorious, tumultuous, and steadfast history of the Co-op. We need your help to do this! If you have saved materials (documents, photos, etc.) from the Co-op's past, have stories and experiences to share, and/or might like to work on this history project (we need your involvement!), Please contact OEC committee member:

Kate Hanson

hkate827@gmail.com





JULY

AUGUST

COME BOATING! Our mission is to create educational boating-related programs that preserve and broaden the maritime heritage shared by the Belfast area community and strengthen our connection to the sea. Come Boating! is a volunteer-run organization that is dedicated to bringing people together to enjoy and celebrate boats and boating on beautiful Belfast Harbor and the Passagassawaukeag River. No matter what your skill level or experience is, we offer boating opportunities for fun, exercise, and learning.

During the summer we offer free community rowing daily in our 32-foot, six-oar wooden Cornish pilot gigs Malcolm G., Selkie and Belle Fast. No experience is required. Check the website or Facebook for schedules.

More info at www.comeboating.org/

FRIENDS OF SEARS ISLAND (FOSI)'s mission is to support permanent protection of Sears Island's environmental and cultural resources; preserve its marine, shoreland, and forest ecosystems; and encourage educational and low-impact recreational uses of the island. FOSI became incorporated and received 501(C)3 non-profit status in 2006

At the head of Penobscot Bay one island, accessible to the public, reveals the richness of natural resources shared by the off-shore islands that have given our bay its world acclaimed reputation for unusual beauty. There are sandy and cobbled beaches, dunes, rugged cliffs and ledges, diverse forests and wetlands, streams and gullies, abundant plants and animals, and beyond all that, a rich cultural heritage dating back thousands of years.

More info at friendsofsearsisland.org/

ROUND UP AT THE REGISTER in support of worthy causes - each month at #yourbelfastcoop

In April, our community donated \$2,058.68 to Belfast Bay Watershed Coalition.

In May, Co-op shoppers donated \$3,852.85 to Restorative Justice Project of the Midcoast.

At time of printing (June 27), our community donated \$3,560.73 to Belfast Area Childcare Services.

UPCOMING EDUCATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

watch our bulletin boards & facebook for more info

Classes are free to attend, please register in advance, space is limited.

**ALL CLASSES
HELD AT:
Unitarian
Universalist Church,
37 Miller St. Belfast**

If you are interested in registering, please call the Co-op @ 338-2532
Additional questions: jamie@belfast.coop



**WEDNESDAY
JULY 10 6PM**

**Summer Gardening:
Learning from the Spring
and Ensuring the Harvest**

a discussion with
Heron Breen of Fedco



**WEDNESDAY
AUGUST 7 6PM**

**Behind the Label:
Organic, GMO,
and More**

a discussion with
Heather Omand of MOFGA



**WEDNESDAY
AUGUST 21 6PM**

**Easy Vegetarian:
Quick Meals for
Everyone**

a cooking class with
**Lisa Monteith of
Belfast Co-op Deli**

WHAT'S GOING ON WITH CO-OP EXPANSION?

We are currently in the midst of Stage One of our expansion project. Stage One is about Feasibility and is the longest of the four stages of expansion as laid out in *The Expansion Toolbox: A Tool for Expanding and Relocating Co-ops* by Bill Gessner. At the annual meeting in March and in the March-April issue of Rootstock, Doug (Co-op GM) discussed the proforma analysis that was done and the financial feasibility of an expansion project. Since then, meetings have been held with site engineers, design firms, development consultants, and others for the purpose of information gathering. The bulk of this research has been based around these three potentialities of Co-op expansion:



- **Renovating and expanding our current building**
- **Building a new store on our property**
- **Building a new store on our property with housing above it**



Though we have not ruled out the possibility of relocating were an ideal location to present itself, we have heard a strong desire for the Co-op to stay in downtown Belfast. At this point, in Stage One, everything is still a possibility with the exception of closing the store and doing nothing to change the store.

For more information, look for future updates in Rootstock and notices of upcoming owner forums. Expansion Committee also gives reports at each board meeting which can be heard in person or read in the Board Meeting minutes. We are also working to revamp the Expansion Wall in the cafe to provide new information as it comes available.

Expansion Committee would love to hear from you. If you have questions or comments please utilize the Expansion comment card box located in the cafe seating area or send us an e-mail:

expansion@belfast.coop



*All current Directors at
Annual Board retreat, May 2019*



Lessons learned over recent decades apply to food co-ops of all sizes and to projects of all types: expanding the current store, expanding through relocation, and expanding through adding additional stores.

For an established food co-op, there are four stages of an expansion project:

- Stage 1: Assessing feasibility**
(3 mo.–3 yrs.+)
- Stage 2: Preparing for construction
(2–12 mo., commonly 4–6 mo.)
- Stage 3: Construction
(2–12 mo., commonly 4–6 mo.)
- Stage 4: Preparing for opening
(1–2 mo., commonly 1 mo.)

*From: Getting Started with Expansion Planning
By Bill Gessner
columinate.coop*

changes

As we are putting this newsletter together, two projects are in the works.



We're making it happen! We've heard you and we're adding a 2nd customer bathroom!



We're adding more space to be outside! We'll be providing some activities and events to the space as the season progresses. Stay tuned!

Thanks to Hammond Lumber, Coast of Maine, and Villageside Farm for donating all the materials!

Goodbye, for now

I have had the pleasure of serving on the board of the Belfast Co-op for the past two years. Life, however, is drawing me elsewhere at this juncture, and I am moving away from Belfast and departing from the board to attend graduate school out west. Although a short period, my board work has been extraordinarily fruitful—for myself personally and, I hope, for the Co-op too. I have considered the time, energy, and thought I contribute to this enterprise to be an investment in a cooperative future I hope to see, and at the same time, the Co-op has invested in me.

The time it takes to be an effective director varies. The most important role we have is monitoring the organization as a whole, which can mean reading between five and fifty pages before each meeting, and paying attention to what we hear outside of our reports as well. Directors are also charged with other work, accomplished largely through committees—assessing their own competencies, engaging owners, recruiting new board members (side note: maybe you could be our next new director!), and planning more broadly for the long-term future of the co-op. And not only do we need to do all this, but we need to do it together, to build agreement and consensus among many personalities.



In striving to accomplish these ongoing goals, I have also received an education. The Co-op benefits from the diverse levels of expertise (such as financial prowess) among board members, and invests in their growth to support that of the Co-op, such as sponsoring directors to attend co-op-to-co-op conferences and gatherings. My leadership skills and grocery knowledge have magnified as I have built my understanding of our processes and business. As I move on to continue other elements of my education, I will be taking forward what I have learned from the Belfast Co-op, and I hope to continue contributing to the larger cooperative world.

It is now time for others to take on more of this work in Belfast, and I and the rest of the Board have been working to plan for officer succession, to transfer knowledge and responsibilities to future leaders. We will confirm this transition at the next board meeting, on June 27 at 6pm (owners are always welcome to attend and of course we also welcome feedback at board@belfast.coop). We are lucky to have members of the board who volunteer so much of their time to the Co-op's ongoing success. We are in many ways even more lucky to have the energetic, talented, and compassionate general manager we do. And we are lucky to have each of you coming into the Co-op, shopping and voting and reading and talking. Thank you for your investment in this enterprise, and as a result, investing in me. I will look forward to supporting the Belfast Co-op, and other co-ops too, into a new future.

*Yours,
Shannon*

Shannon Grimes
Outgoing Board President

BOARD MEETINGS

July 25
August 22

6pm Social Time, 6:15pm Meeting
Unitarian Universalist
Church of Belfast
37 Miller St.

love local day

@ Belfast co+op
love • local • food

everyone
saves 10%
ALL DAY
on all local items

SAVE THE DATE

Sunday, August 4th

SUMMER JAM

our annual party in the parking lot
with special guests

Gawler Family Band



CARLA RENZI
CO-OP OWNERSHIP
ADMINISTRATOR

questions?
carla@belfast.coop

237 NEW OWNERS IN 2019

APRIL 42

MAY 55

AS OF JUNE 26TH 48
26 DURING JUNE OAW ALONE!

69 FULLY VESTED OWNERS

AS OF JUNE 26TH 2019

(Since the change in equity of
January 2019, owners may choose
to pay full equity of \$200: no more
annual installments and better
financial health of the Co-op)

CO+OP CALENDAR

- 7/3.....New Sales Cycle
- 7/4.....Fourth of July -open all day
- 7/6-7.....Arts in the Park
- 7/10.....Co-op Class
Fedco - Summer Gardening Tips
- 7/17.....New Sales Cycle
- 7/19-21.....Celtic Festival
- 7/25.....Co-op Board Meeting,
6pm at the Unitarian Universalist Church
- 7/26.....Love Local Day - Demo TBD
- 7/26.....Belfast Art Walk
- 7/31.....New Sales Cycle
- 8/4.....Co-op Summer Jam
w/ Gawler Family Band
- 8/5.....Belfast Street Party
- 8/7.....Co-op Class
Behind the Label w/ MOFGA
- 8/14.....New Sales Cycle (3 week)
- 8/16-18.....Harbor Fest
- 8/18...Co-op Owner Ice Cream Social
- 8/21.....Co-op Cooking Class
Easy Vegetarian Meals
- 8/22.....Co-op Board Meeting,
6pm at the Unitarian Universalist Church
- 8/23.....Belfast Art Walk
- 8/30.....Love Local Day - Demo TBD
- 9/02.....Labor Day -open all day

for more community info: ourtownbelfast.org