

CGN Plans Ahead, Calls for Board Election

BY ELLEN MICHEL



Whenever cooperators congregate, it's a gathering of the tribe that generates the joy of mutual recognition. Such was the case at the 2017 Up & Coming food co-op conference. Held for the first time in Milwaukee (where the conference will take place again in 2018), Outpost Natural Foods was our generous and inspiring co-op host, offering tours of two of its stores.

The Cooperative Grocer Network (CGN) board was there, too, holding a retreat on Thursday and Friday and attending sessions and social events. Meeting in person gave us time to work together to create a growth plan, a double-sided Plan on a Page. Working together proved so valuable that we extended our retreat several additional hours, "working backwards" to anticipate our strategies for the upcoming year.

Inspired by Up & Coming 2017

It's impossible to attend Up & Coming and not come away with motivation and resolve. Whatever challenges confound new and existing co-ops, the energy that comes from startup groups is inspiring. The case studies they offer emphasize lessons learned, sometimes the hard way. A landlord who puts up obstacles after a lease is signed. The ever-present issue of parking. Changes in competition, funding, or product mix. These groups learn to be flexible, to place calls to trusted advisors, and to own up to error in order to quickly move ahead.

CGN exists to facilitate the kind of connections that take place at these gatherings and to make our retail co-op sector visible across the U.S. and even abroad. We want to help all of us identify what's out there in our common scavenger hunt to assemble resources and carry our efforts into an invigorating future.

A call to board service

I came to my role with CGN after a good deal of experience serving on boards of directors. For me, board work has been an invaluable professional development opportunity, a chance to participate in problem solving while providing support to an organization. Our co-ops do significant work in the realm of democratic member participation, and we model that for other

organizations, too.

Each year Cooperative Grocer Network holds a board election, and we are now announcing our 2017 call for candidates. There are two open spots on our seven-person board, with one incumbent, Allison Hermes, running for election. We are saying goodbye to longstanding board member Dan Gillotte (general manager of Wheatsville Co-op in Austin, Texas), with many thanks for his loyal years of service to CGN.

One thing we did at our retreat was to consider whom we hope to attract to our board. We want to maintain a strong well-functioning board that represents the vitality of our co-ops. Are you someone who has never served on a board before? That's not a problem. We hope to attract someone from the startup co-op community who can speak to the needs of that population. We want a board that reflects diversity and inclusion. We know that there are young people who are eager to step up their co-op skill set, and there are elders with years of experience to contribute. A CGN board member should have an interest in co-op communications, in both print and digital formats.

Find a board packet about the CGN board election, including details about eligibility, meetings, and governance style, in the online collaborative platform. Feel free to reach out directly, too! □

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CGN Board of Directors

Annie Hoy – serving through 2019, president (Ashland Food Co-op, Ashland, Ore.)

Zafra Whitcomb – 2018, vice president (Belfast Co-op, Belfast, Me.)

Martha Whitman – 2018, treasurer (CDS Consulting Co-op)

Eric Struve – 2019 (Outpost Natural Foods Co-op, Milwaukee, Wisc.)

Erika Gavin – 2019 (Hanover Co-op Food Stores, Hanover, N.H., and Lebanon, Vt.)

Allison Hermes – 2017 (Principle Six Cooperative Trade Movement)

Dan Gillotte – secretary, retiring 2017 (Wheatsville Food Co-op, Austin, Texas)

Correction: In the previous issue, Blain Snipstall, the keynote speaker for the Domestic Fair Trade Association (www.thedfta.org) pictured on p. 8, was misidentified. We regret the error.