

# BUILDING OUR TEAM

by Rochelle Prunty, General Manager

## HAPPY SPRING!



I'm grateful to report that our food co-op is doing really well as we approach our store's 4<sup>th</sup> birthday on April 30<sup>th</sup>. During the start-up process we had faith that opening a food co-op in Northampton was an important thing to do... then just as we opened in 2008, the economy hit tough times. Fortunately, we opened just in time to be able to help support local farmers and vendors with an added source of revenue through their sales to the co-op and we've continued to grow our local purchases every year.

We are on track to exceed \$14 million in sales for our 4<sup>th</sup> year, which is well above the \$13 million level we had projected for our 10<sup>th</sup> year. Our membership has grown to include more than 5,000 area families, building our democratic ownership base ever wider. We have nearly 100 employees, we've increased our compensation levels, and are closing in on hitting the financial targets that we set to make added wage scale increases feasible this year.

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### Cooler Expansion Project

Financially, we built up enough capital last year to invest in much-needed additional refrigeration equipment. We started this \$250,000 project in late August and completed it shortly after Thanksgiving within budget. This equipment has helped us to be able to work more efficiently. This year our financial goal is to reach a 1% net profit. At the six month mark (12/31/11), we showed a year-to-date net of .87%, and things are going better than ever.



Cooler construction, fall 2011. A steel beam passes through a prep area.

### Open Book Management



Open book management "huddle" in the Meat Department

One of our major initiatives for the year is to develop our open book management program to improve both teamwork and store performance.

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I want to thank everyone on the staff for the effort to learn a new system and integrate into their regular work processes. We started with a one-hour storewide weekly "huddle," open to everyone, regularly seeing twenty to thirty participants. This practice had an immediate impact on how we worked together, but the system was still mysterious to those who didn't participate.

In January, three of us visited Wheatsville food co-op in Austin, Texas for three days to observe their open book management system in action, and to help us learn how to take our program to the next stage—the departmental level. This involves a substantially larger number of staff directly in the program. We were inspired by what we observed and also saw how doable it was for us. By March, all our departments had implemented weekly "huddles." This system focuses on measuring numerical results, but it isn't really about the numbers, it is about the story behind the numbers and it shows everyone how important their role in the story is.

We are still in the pilot stage of this program but we are already seeing positive results in both teamwork and store performance. As I'm writing this article, we

are getting ready to have a staff appreciation party—a reward for setting and meeting a really high sales goal using the open book management system.

### Welcome to the United Food and Commercial Workers Union

On February 10<sup>th</sup>, we welcomed the UFCW Local 1459 as our new partner in the workplace. Now, not only are we a progressive and pro-labor business, we are a union business.

The big project for the coming year is to develop an employment contract. We're engaging the support of Greg Leifer, a collective bargaining specialist with many years experience working as the UFCW representative for employees in another food co-op where they use a collective bargaining style called interest-based bargaining. Interest-based bargaining frames negotiation as joint problem-solving to resolve each party's underlying issues, needs, and concerns. It assumes that mutual gain is possible, that solutions which satisfy mutual interests are more durable; and that the parties should help each other achieve a positive result. We've seen this model work very successfully in another food co-op with the UFCW and we will strive to emulate that success for our own, newly unionized co-op. It seems like a good fit with our open book management system and workplace culture.

*"In four years of working at the co-op, I have had many glimpses of impressive brains, talent, and creativity among my fellow staff members. But since we started using open book management, people are showing new sides of themselves and bringing their gifts and talents more fully to work. I believe that being more integrated, or being "ourselves" at work makes for a happier work force—and we're starting to reap the benefits."*  
—Loran, Marketing Department

With May Day coming with its dual springtime and labor movement celebrations we can all take some extra pride in the many successes of our food co-op.

Thank you for your support!



Lil' Orphans Cajun Express heats up Mardi Gras at the Garden House 2012, our fundraiser for Monadnock Community Market, opening soon in Keene, NH