Annual General Membership Meeting and Election

Dear Ypsi Food Co-op Members,

Are you ready for one of the best nights of the year at the co-op? We sure are! That's why we're excited to invite you to our annual meeting and potluck, taking place on May 25th at 6:00 p.m. in the cozy confines of our very own café.

As you know, the Ypsi Food Co-op is more than just a grocery store — it's a hub for foodies, a gathering place for friends and neighbors, and a beacon of hope for those who believe in the power of community-owned businesses. And this year's annual meeting promises to be our best yet!

We'll be sharing updates on all the exciting things happening at the co-op, including a review of 2022 highlights, completing current board elections, and our initiatives for the remainder of the year.

But the real star of the show is the potluck! We encourage everyone to bring a dish to share and show off your culinary skills. There's nothing quite like enjoying a meal together to build community and camaraderie.

So mark your calendars, set a reminder, and come join us on Thursday, May 25th at 6:00 p.m. in our café. We can't wait to see what delicious creations you all bring to the table! (Please bring a list of the ingredients to share.)

We are also holding a Meet Your Board Candidates at the co-op, on Tuesday, May 23 at 5:30 pm. With two days left to get your vote in, you will have the opportunity to check out the ideas the candidates have and ask questions. We will have all four candidates at tables for you to be able to talk to them. The board meeting will follow at 6:30, which is open to member-owners.

Yours in food and community, your Co-op staff and board

- We are celebrating 48 years in Ypsilanti as a community owned grocery store!
- In 2022 sales grew % growth to $2,313,261.00!
- We completed the renovations and additions to our space, while coming out of the pandemic healthier and stronger!
2023 Voting Information

The democratic principle of cooperatives includes one member, one vote, and how we follow this is regulated by our bylaws. To elect our board of directors, we look to our bylaws, which includes that our board will consist of 7 board members. Every odd year, like 2023, 3 of the seats are up for election. This year we have 4 candidates for those seats.

The board’s job is to understand the co-op’s role in the community and how to help keep the Co-op relevant as the world changes. As the keepers of the mission and ends of our cooperative, they assure that we continue to reflect the needs of our member-owners, while staying financially viable. They hire a General Manager and hold them accountable through Policy Governance. The board of directors make the big decisions on changes that keep us moving forward.

Voting for people you think will bring about the best positive changes while maintaining a strong, sustainable business, is one of the powers of our member-owners. The statements and answers to questions posed to each candidate are available on our website and printed for review in the store.

How to Vote

1. Please complete the ballot to vote for up to Three [3] candidates.
   
   If you lose this ballot, you can get a blank one at the store.

2. Put your ballot in an envelope with your name on the front (to verify membership).
   
   If an envelope is received without a member’s name on it, the vote will NOT be counted.

3. Place envelopes in the collection box in the store beginning May 18th through May 25, 2023
   
   Or, Mail your ballot to 312 N. River Street, Ypsilanti, MI 48198.

Board election committee members will verify membership on each envelope, then in a separate transaction will remove the ballots from the envelopes, and count the votes after they’re separated from the names so that the names are not connected with specific ballots.

You must be an active member by May 18th in order to vote.

The results will be announced at the Annual meeting on May 25th

2023 Board of Directors
(Vote for up to 3)

☐ Susan Carter

☐ Brian Puchala

☐ Mandy McCarty

☐ Sean Philips

Learn about the candidates May 23 at 5:30 in the store or on the website!
Ypsilanti is celebrating 200 years! As part of Ypsilanti’s bicentennial celebration, a publication is planned that will highlight the last 50 years of Ypsilanti’s history (the first 150 years of history were written about for the centennial and sesquicentennial celebrations). The Food Co-op is uniquely part of that history and was invited to write our story. Here is the story as written by board member Rodolfo Alvarado and general manager Corinne Sikorski.

A History of the Ypsilanti Food Cooperative

The Humble Origins of a Movement

Since the 1800s, thousands of Co-ops have sprouted up around the world to combat food insecurity, food safety, high food prices, and other consumer needs. Although the Ypsilanti community has history with cooperatives dating back to the 1930s, the Ypsilanti Food Co-op officially incorporated in 1975. Its mission: to provide high-quality food and goods, produced ecologically and sustainably, while practicing cooperative economics. The roots of this mission can be traced to the 1960s and 1970s, decades wherein people banded together to not only purchase natural foods that were not available elsewhere in the marketplace, but to ground itself in the community by providing healthy food options, people with jobs, farmers with a market, all while being owned by the shoppers using the store.

Prior to incorporation, the Ypsi Food Co-op grew out of a bag co-op which ran in the early 1970’s. Orders of fresh produce, cider or cheese, along with money, were dropped off at a member’s house. The member tallied the money, prepared a shopping list, then drove to the Eastern Market in Detroit where goods were bought. An old orange refrigerator would be moved to various local churches in Ypsilanti, where the food would be distributed to members.

From Bag to Storefront

The transition from a bag co-op to a storefront co-op occurred on April 11, 1975, when members of the bag co-op formed a non-profit corporation called the Ypsilanti Cooperative Initiative (YCI). Under the articles of incorporation, the membership was empowered to not only supply high quality food at the lowest possible prices, but also to “organize and support community efforts aimed at improving the quality of life.” These activities could include health, childcare, education, recycling, non-polluting energy systems and cultural development. The storefront Co-op, which was located at 955 Sheridan, was loosely organized, had no paid staff, and was run by volunteers. Bulk food was offered from five-gallon buckets displayed on milk crates and a three-door glass cooler, along with the Co-op’s original orange refrigerator, displayed perishable items. Granola was made at Faz’s Pizza, a local pizza shop. When the time came to check out, if a volunteer was not available, customers paid by the honor system.

After firmly establishing itself as part of the Ypsilanti community, three years later YFC was forced to close when the Sheridan building was sold. But by September of the same year, the store reopened at 308 Perrin, just across the street, and down the block, from Eastern Michigan University (EMU). Aside from the goods that met mission standards, the store also carried whole grain breads that were baked by the worker collective at the Wildflour Bakery in Ann Arbor. The bakery was one of a whole community of cooperatives in Ann Arbor that joined other co-ops like us, to set up the Michigan Federation of Food Co-ops. The federation owned a warehouse which served the food co-ops around the state, with products from around the country.

Co-op shoppers 1978 at the store on Perrin Street

Being near EMU, YFC became stable, and since most members consisted of university students, YFC became a student organization. Being a non-profit in the state of Michigan made YFC eligible for this distinction. The only method of advertising an organization allowed on campus was to hold bagel sales. Unlike today, at the time there were no fast food or coffee franchises on campus, so student organizations were allowed to set up a table at Mark Jefferson or Pray-Harold. Taking advantage of this opportunity co-op volunteers sold bagels, muffins, and fair-trade coffee. More importantly, the Co-op’s association with EMU brought stability and greater recognition throughout Ypsilanti and Ann Arbor.

Stability and a New Home

Next came the challenge of establishing a framework for growth and stability. The challenge was addressed in 1982 when a General Membership Meeting was held, and the member-owners charged the Board of Directors with developing a Five-Year Plan. Once instituted, long range plans resulted in changes. One of the most significant was the implementation of a one-person management system. The system replaced the collective structure which had become cum-
Aside from managerial reorganization, a capitalization plan was developed to raise money through the system of member-owner Fair Shares, which made members actual owners. The final measure recommended by the Board was securing a new site for the store due to the fact that the rented space in the Perrin Street building had fallen into poor condition.

A new location was found in Depot Town and in February 1984 the Co-op moved to the Mill Works at 312 North River Street. Built in 1840, the building originally housed the Ypsilanti Machine Works, a foundry that manufactured grinders for flour mills. In 1850, a building resembling the machine works was constructed at 308 N. River. The two buildings were soon joined in the middle, and the middle section was given the address 310 N. River. Aside from flour mill grinders, over the next hundred years, the foundry also produced corn-shellers, elevator heads, boots with pulleys, scalpers, centrifugal reels for sugar refining, and a special reel for separating salt for use by the Diamond Crystal Salt Company of St. Claire, Michigan.

The building was in poor condition and there was a plumbing shop next door in 310, and an auto repair shop with a garage door in the façade of the building in 308. Nevertheless, YFC made repairs to their section and before long were once again achieving their mission of not only providing healthy and organic food but being fully invested in the community.

Two years after moving into the Mill Works, the building came up for sale. A group of concerned member-owners formed the Mill Works Partnership. They bought the building with the goal of guaranteeing affordable rent to the Co-op and to assure the Co-op’s continued use of the space. The purchase was completed by 1989, and the Co-op was able to expand into the adjoining space at 310. Arches separating the spaces were cleared of bricks. Renovations, which included rectifying the now condemned areas of the building, were undertaken.

Simultaneously, the Wildflour Bakery of Ann Arbor opened the Depot Town Sourdough Community Bakery and built a brick oven. When the bakery failed, YFC took over the bakery business and it has been running successfully ever since. Continuous additions and renovations were made to the spaces including laying linoleum tiles, installing double hung, modern windows to replace the steel casement windows, brick tuck pointing, painting, replacing the metal iron front door with a wooden door, and adding an awning over the front entry.

By 2000, the Mill Works Partnership renovated spaces on the first and second floor into offices. They removed the garage door and added a stairway leading to the second floor, an area of the building that had no electricity or usable space. They also built two new apartments above the bakery, both with an art deco styling, which kept much of the brick work visible.

Mill Works building 1800’s

**A Sustainable Future**

Long term plans met and exceeded, the coming years were met by one accomplishment after another. The YFC became the Ypsi Food Co-op, and in 2002 joined ten co-op stores to form the Great Lakes Grocers Association; in 2004, it became a member of the National Co-op Grocers Association. These organizations work cooperatively to build stronger independent organizations through both individual and collective efforts.

In 2005, solar panels were installed for the bakery. In 2008, the Co-op obtained a liquor license and began to carry beer and wine, focusing on local and organic brews. In 2010, staff offices moved into a vacated second floor space to allow the Co-op to expand into the entire ground-floor footprint of the Mill Works building.

In the same year, the Co-op founded a demonstration beekeeping effort called the Local Honey Project. Each year, up to thirty volunteers devote hundreds of hours of their time to increase survivor populations of honeybees, maintain hives, harvest urban honey, and enhance this critical aspect of our local food system.

Showing its commitment to a sustainable future for the local economy, in 2011, the Co-op underwent further building renovations and expansion. Materials recycling was implemented, and in-line heated hot water was installed, as were high-efficiency heat and light fixtures. Additional solar panels were installed which allowed the Co-op Bakery to be 100% renewably powered, while contributing a portion of its power to operate the store.

While the challenges overcome by the Co-op have been significant, none prepared it for the COVID pandemic and the unexpected success that would come with it. On March 13, 2020, just three days before the country went into shutdown, the Co-op had its largest day in sales ever and sales for the rest of the year were up thirty-one percent. With the increase in sales, employee wages were raised, and the Co-op moved ahead with plans to add a cafe. Completed in 2022, the cafe has a fully functioning kitchen, serving counter, restrooms, and sitting area. It is located on the south side of the Mill Works Building, which means that it took the Co-op a little over thirty-eight years to fill the structure's entire
The old adage says that you cannot go back in time, but that is not true, because a stroll through the Ypsi Food Co-op is exactly that. More importantly, a stroll through the Co-op is proof positive that its founding mission has never waned: Shelves are filled with organic produce and locally sourced products; bakery goods are handmade and its operation self-sufficient, and the cafe is a source of healthy foods and a welcoming atmosphere.

No one knows what the future will bring, but one thing is for certain, the Ypsi Food Co-op will continue to fulfill its commitment to provide high quality food in an economically
Ypsilanti Food Co-op

312 N River, Ypsilanti MI
48198
734-483-1520

Current Store Hours
Sunday to Saturday
9 am to 8 pm

Enjoy our sensory Free Hour
every morning 9 to 10 am

General Manager:
Corinne Sikorski
Corinne@ypsifoodcoop.org

Curbside pickup service:
Pickup@ypsifoodcoop.org

Our website:
Ypsifoodcoop.org

Tuesday, May 23, 2023
Meet the Board Candidates
@ 5:30 – 6:30 pm at the Co-op

♦ Meet each of the 4 board candidates
   and share your thoughts and questions

Thursday, May 25th 2023
Annual General Membership
Meeting
@ 6 pm at the Co-op

♦ Learn about the past, present and
  future of the co-op
♦ Meet your 2023 Current and
  Elected Board of Directors

We are having a Co-op potluck dinner,
after the meeting, so bring a dish to
pass. We will provide coffee and tea
and tableware.

May 18th through 25th
Vote for the 2023 Board
of Directors
Your ballot is on page 2