

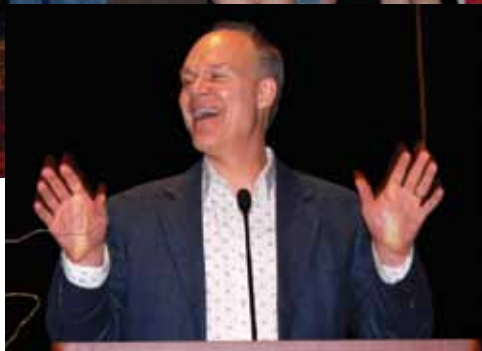
Deep in the Heart of Co-ops

CCMA conference sees record participation, strong prospects

BY DAVE GUTKNECHT



The Wheatsville Co-op contingent was well represented by board and staff members (above, with Board Service Award-winner Rose Marie Klee) and in a hilarious monologue by Steven Tomlinson (right).



Silent auction items arrayed for the Bowers Fund. About \$43,000 was raised for the Fund, exceeding the previous year's total.

The 2013 Consumer Cooperative Management Association (CCMA) conference on June 6–8 brought 450 cooperators to Austin, Texas, for training and speakers, friendship and celebration. Many of the food co-op sector's new and veteran leaders were there to share accomplishments, honor special contributors, and wrestle with challenges and opportunities.

Local sponsor Wheatsville Co-op showed off its outstanding store and friendly staff, as well as its planned second site. In warm outdoor conditions, conference attendees sampled the local co-op landscape plus the music and cuisine of Austin, along with its downtown green waterfront paths and swarming bat colony spectacle.

With participants from Seattle to Minneapolis to Atlanta, from California to Vermont, the conference theme of “Deep in the Heart of Co-ops” captured the spirit of camaraderie and dedication among the managers, directors, trainers, and others present. Attendees represented an impressive 140 co-ops and related organizations, the broadest participation in the

57 years of CCMA.

Passionate dedication to cooperative values and professional improvement by such leaders has helped these co-ops mature over many years, leading to the current major wave of expanding stores and new co-op formations. Workshops and speakers presented the best of current practices, while describing challenges to the continuing growth of our stores and community-based cooperatives.

Sponsors and speakers

Primary sponsors of CCMA are the National Cooperative Business Association (NCBA CLUSA) and conference planner Prof. Ann Hoyt, working with Heather Cooper and Libby Bestul at the University of Wisconsin-Madison. A dozen other co-ops, corporations, and nonprofit institutions contributed additional sponsor support, and 35 scholarships for conference attendees were provided through the Howard Bowers Fund and through Prof. Hoyt's program, the U.W. Urban Cooperative Initiative.

During the two-and-a-half days of activities, the Bowers Fund conducted fund raising

for future food co-op training scholarships. Through special events and a silent auction of popular co-op quilts and many contributed items, the Fund raised about \$43,000—exceeding the previous year's contributions. Thanks to Ellen Quinn and the Bowers Fund trustees and to all who contributed!

Austin Mayor Pro Tem Sheryl Cole, the first African-American Austin City Council member, greeted the crowd. Cole endorsed cooperatives as well as the diversity conveyed in the unofficial slogan, “Keep Austin Weird.”

Attendees also heard from **Kristen Christian**, whose cooperative values led her to launch the 2011 “Bank Transfer Day” through social media. That call to action received remarkable support, and the campaign led to a few million people opening new credit union accounts. Her message for the conference crowd: Speak up. Keep moving forward. Reach out.

Another keynote speaker was **Mark Winne**, who has worked since the 1970s with dozens of organizations on issues around food access and community food security. With that background, his review of some of food co-ops' ►



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◀ accomplishments also included pointed observations and questions about the current political climate and co-ops' part in achieving a more just food system, from farmworkers to consumers.

Lunchtime presentations included remarks by **Michael Beall**, president and CEO of NCBA CLUSA, who arrived at his current position in 2012 from a background of leadership in credit union associations. Beall joined the enthusiasm present and urged his audience to more vigorously pursue collaboration across different co-op business sectors.

Awards banquet formalities were interrupted by the Italian Grocers Caucus, whose mission is to keep CCMA weird. This uncountable and unaccountable group made recommendations such as a social media platform of In-Your-Facebook; contributions to the Howard Vowels Fund for those wanting a name that sounds more Italian; and a three-part BIG direction—sell more groceries; make more money; go home early.

Behind the scenes

The CCMA program and events were complemented by meetings among leading co-op organizations. A landmark half-day food co-op



Above: A centerpiece on each table reminded attendees what it takes to start a food co-op.



Right: Marilyn Scholl of CDS Consulting Co-op summarized development goals.

development Summit, organized by Food Co-op Initiative, attracted strong interest and brought together 65 leading managers, directors, trainers, and funders for a look at trends in current and future cooperative growth. Food co-ops are presently expanding more strongly than at any time since the 1970s, and that looks likely to continue. Yet we still face formidable barriers,

including low public recognition and understanding of cooperatives. (The Austin Co-op Development Summit is discussed further in "The Editor Notes," page 4).

The leading food co-op training group, CDS Consulting Co-op, held its annual retreat just prior to the Summit. CDS CC is playing a key role not only through its work with individual ▶

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Co-op Milestones

The CCMA conference also honors Co-op Milestones, highlighting existing cooperatives from the youngest to the oldest. Milestones ranging from 10 to 40 to 110 years were announced, and many of the co-ops that were honored had representatives present. Here is this year's list, with the date of the co-op's storefront opening:

2003

Alberta Cooperative Grocer (Portland, Ore.)
Eastside Food Co-op (Minneapolis, Minn.)

1973

Amazing Grains Food Co-op (Grand Forks, N.D.)
East Dakotah Food Co-op (Sioux Falls, S.D.)
Hampden Park Food Co-op (St. Paul, Minn.)
Keweenaw Food Co-op (Houghton, Mich.)
North Coast Cooperative (Arcata, Calif.)
Oryana Food Co-op (Traverse City, Mich.)
Park Slope Food Co-op (Brooklyn, N.Y.)
Potsdam Consumer Co-op (Potsdam, N.Y.)
Sacramento Natural Foods Co-op (Sacramento, Calif.)
Syracuse Real Food Co-op (Syracuse, N.Y.)
Whole Earth Co-op (River Falls, Wis.)
Willy Street Co-op (Madison, Wis.)

1943

Niskayuna Food Co-op (Niskayuna, N.Y.)

1913

Finland Cooperative Market (Finland, Minn.)
Rudyard Grocery Co-op (Rudyard, Mich.)

1903

Co-op Sampo (Menahga, Minn.)



Above: Steve Maviglio of Sacramento Natural Foods Co-op received a Cooperative Board Service award, presented by fellow director Sonny Egoigbe.



Right: Ann Hoyt (center) and staff celebrated another successful CCMA conference.



◀ co-ops but also by organizing strategic planning sessions that are broadening the conversations around growth. National Cooperative Grocers Association is supporting these strategic discussions, a series with four regional gatherings held in 2012, six sessions scheduled in 2013, and eight planned for 2014.

Conference attendees had workshop options and the annual meeting to learn about improvements at Cooperative Grocer Network (CGN), the renamed cooperative resulting from the merger of the present publication and its archives with the numerous online resources previously generated through the Cooperative Grocers' Information Network. After the conference, the CGN board and its executive director, Dan Nordley, met to advance their plans for enhanced website services. See Nordley's column on page 13, and join the conversations at cooperativegrocer.coop.

Looking ahead to 2014, Prof. Hoyt at UW-Madison will be planning her 25th CCMA conference, marking another outstanding contribution. She has secured the support of Willy Street Co-op as lead local hosts for what is sure to be another memorable CCMA: June 12-14, 2014, in Madison, Wis.

Award winners

Leading contributors to food cooperatives, nominated by their peers and chosen by previous award winners, are honored each year. In Austin, at the CCMA Awards Banquet and Co-op Development Celebration, we gave recognition to these leaders and co-ops:

For Cooperative Excellence in a retail society, this year we honored **Lexington Co-op Market** in Buffalo, N.Y., led by General Manager Tim Bartlett. Lexington Co-op is modeling and spreading cooperative business in its

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Board and staff of Monadnock Co-op, Keene, N.H., received the newly created award for Food Co-op Startup of the Year. More on Monadnock, pages 14–15.

cooperative boards of directors and continues to lead a dynamic, multistakeholder, multi-store cooperative that is an anchor in its local community.

Special recognition for Cooperative Board Service went to Wheatsville President **Rose Marie Klee**, an award strongly supported by that co-op's other directors. Klee also is a member of CDS Consulting Co-op, and in both local and national co-op networks she has contributed knowledgeable and enthusiastic leadership and supported stronger collaboration among diverse new and established co-ops. Her well-earned recognition was introduced through a brilliant and amusing monologue from Wheatsville Co-op Treasurer (and U.T. economics professor) Steven Tomlinson.

A second award for Cooperative Board Service went to Sacramento Natural Foods Co-op President **Steve Maviglio**, who was introduced by fellow director Sonny Eboigbe. Maviglio has chaired the co-op's board for six years, presiding in a very fair, transparent, and professional manner during several important transitions, including a boycott controversy within the co-op's membership, and in current planning to relocate and expand the co-op. His considerable experience in state and national politics were critical in obtaining passage of a new California statute allowing cooperatives to issue nonvoting shares, greatly strengthening co-ops' self-financing capacity.

Since last year's announcement of newly opened storefront food co-ops, another eight have been added. Stuart Reid of Food Co-op Initiative announced a new award, sponsored by CDS Consulting Co-op: Food Co-op Startup of the Year. Its first recipient is **Monadnock Food Co-op** in Keene, N.H. The newbies, and some of the exciting stories behind them, are reported by Reid on page 14. ■

Rustbelt city. In introducing the award, Marilyn Scholl and Bill Gessner (both of CDS Consulting Co-op) offered their best comedy routine to highlight the co-op's amazing operating performance over the past 10 years, growing from \$1M annual sales to \$10M, all under Bartlett's steady leadership.

The award for Cooperative Service went to **Ruffin Slater**, general manager of Weaver Street Market in Carrboro, N.C. His long list of contributions to cooperatives, summarized by Hanover Co-op General Manager Terry Appleby, began in North Carolina at the People's Intergalactic Food Conspiracy #1—followed by co-founding Weaver Street Market in 1988. He has served on key national

CGN Wants Your Cognitive Surplus

At the CGN (Cooperative Grocer Network) annual meeting held during the CCMA conference, board and staff lauded the progress the organization had made in the last year. We are looking forward to the next several months as we implement more of the major reset plan.

At cooperativegrocer.coop, we're building a rich and diverse array of resources on all aspects of food co-ops. Besides fully assimilating *Cooperative Grocer* magazine into the many online resources collected over the past years, a key element of the reset that has just launched is the social networking platform. This is designed to foster a more personal online community of food cooperators, who can then have richer discussions about best, worst, and anywhere-in-between practices.

During a CCMA workshop, we introduced internet guru Clay Shirkey's concept of "cognitive surplus"—basically the notion that people are genetically disposed to generously share their surplus time to help make the world a better place. Social networking platforms now give us huge tools for this kind of collaboration.

Our idea at CGN is that co-op people are especially inclined to share (it's one of our principles, after all), and if we can build an online CCMA-like networking platform, we will better capture and use our "CGNitive" surplus to build a more cooperative world.

Come on and join us!

—Dan Nordley



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