

Staying Open

Notes on renovating your store and running it at the same time

BY DOUG WALTER

Shutting your doors on customers and members doesn't sound like a great idea. But staying open while swapping out all your shelves and most of your cases doesn't sound very good either.

The Davis Food Co-op has gone through a prolonged interior renovation since fall 2007; we should finish this summer. [Editor's note: For the design firm's perspective and a glance at the impact on department sales, see the March–April *Cooperative Grocer*.] Our deli closed early on a few evenings, and the store closed at 9:00 instead of 10:00 p.m. once. But we've had customers in the store every day except December 25. Even when the exit door was dismantled to bring in new dairy cases, cashiers were ringing out customers.

Continued sales are, of course, a big reason to stay open. There certainly has been some negative feedback, but members have largely seen the construction—and our efforts to mitigate its impact on their shopping—as a service, not an imposition. Continued and focused communication—about what is happening now, what will happen later, and the benefits these changes will bring—keeps members involved and generally happy. It also is a good strategy for maintaining sales and highlighting new offerings.

Closing the store would have meant labor savings, but it would have increased staff turnover, an important negative consequence, according to General Manager Eric Stromberg. “We had to increase labor some days specifically



to help shoppers cope with construction,” he notes, “but the extra customer service helped our sales to some extent.”

Stromberg is very happy with the process and results, but, he says, “of course, we learned a lot.” Managers made many trips around Northern California, especially into the San Francisco Bay area, looking at stores and talking to staff. “Now I know that we should have asked employees more about how a particular display case is to work with,” he says, “and whether they had ever worked with another type. I'm happy with our choices,” he continued, “but we didn't realize how much our vertical produce cases would change how we work.” Davis now displays and sells more product but uses more labor for stocking because of the quicker replenishment cycle.

“It's obvious you're going to want to watch your labor hours,” says Stromberg. “Your customers are going to want hand-holding as products change locations, so we put a lot of effort into customer service. But you do want to dial back, as your new floor plan becomes familiar.” He adds, “Make sure staff are being trained and encouraged to use the new equipment.” ■



earthy



florally



berry



toasty



peacecoffee.com

minneapolis, mn

Cooperative Grocer

FOR RETAILERS AND COOPERATORS

IN FUTURE ISSUES...

- Co-op awards, conference report
- Store merchandising policy
- Small budget marketing
- Organic prospects and problems
- Governance perspectives
- Defying the depression