

ever Green



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A Open Letter from General Manager Bruce Brandfon

As the new General Manager of the Co-Op Market, I feel compelled to address the 26,000 + member/owners who are facing a difficult decision these next few weeks. The Co-Op has been a part of Hyde Park longer than most people have been alive. Its roots were founded in the midst of the Great Depression and nurtured with high community ideals. Our country and community has seen many changes over these past 75 years. We have experienced the pain of several wars, the shrinking of the world through transportation and communication growth, and advances in medicine which had a profound impact on life expectancy – just to name a few. The Co-Op likewise has experienced significant ups and downs. In this changing world, the Co-Op's role and vision has had to also change with the times. So now we are faced with a decision as to the fate and relevancy of this age-old institution – one whose first store opened the year Mount Rushmore was dedicated.

There are clearly two opposing camps concerning this decision. Both sides are equally opinionated and passionate. One side supports the University proposed buy-out thus allowing the Co-Op a “dignified death.” I have read numerous letters to the editor and blogs which slam the Co-Op for everything including rotten produce, high prices, and empty shelves, to unfriendly employees. I have met many customers (the Co-Op has over 22,000 per week) over the past several months and some have expressed similar concerns. Clearly the Co-Op has not lived up to expectations at all times. But what are reasonable expectations? You know the old axiom “the grass is always greener on the other side.” Every other store option also has its good and bad points. If one was perfect then they would be doing all the business and obviously no one is. The second camp supports the effort to save the Co-Op. They have been called die-hards. Many

of this group has shopped the Co-Op for generations. They have grown up with it and take a proud and proprietary view of it versus succumbing to the chain mentality. I believe they see the shortcomings of the Co-Op but still have hope that things will be better.

“Will things be better”? That is in reality the \$100 million question. It is the issue that should rise above all else. All the passion and emotion should be set aside. When I am faced with an employee disciplinary issue which could lead to two possible conclusions – one of termination (a dignified death) or one of giving another chance (die-hard supporter), I first ask one question. What is different today than in the past that would lead me to believe that the employee's situation/behavior is going to create a different result? If I can not get comfortable that the circumstances and tangible/measurable change exists then I would proceed with the termination. There would be no reason to postpone the inevitable. However, if I became convinced that there was in reality a significant change and that change provided me with hope that the end results would be different, then I would give this employee another chance. You see, I have a lot invested in this employee and even though he/she is not perfect, I do know what I have versus someone completely new.

When I first arrived at the Co-Op, I gave a series of interviews in which I stated that my primary goal was to make the Co-Op a place where most people liked to shop and filled their needs. Notice that I said most, not all. No one store can satisfy every customer's total needs. That is why there are multiple stores in every business. Anyone could find fault at every shopping option. You have a right to expect a clean store with fresh, quality products at a competitive price. I believe if you have shopped at the Co-Op during the past three months that is exactly what you would have found. In addressing the comments

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and complaints of the past, I was not here, therefore I have no direct knowledge. However, I would tend to believe that some of them were valid. Many people have heard me address the current state of business and the changes at the Co-Op during the annual meeting and at last week's town hall meeting. For those who have not heard my comments let me bring you up-to-date.

Currently our produce is of the highest quality with a very broad array of organic items to supplement conventional produce – all at extremely competitive prices. The grocery/dairy/frozen shelves and displays have been very well stocked every day. We have significantly reduced thousands of prices and are very competitive on all the best-selling everyday items. We carry the finest meat you can buy – Certified Angus Beef – exclusive at the Co-Op. Our Seafood, Deli, and Bakery departments carry the majority of your needs and then some, all fresh and priced competitively. Our revamped weekly advertising is easy to read and is full of your everyday items at prices as good as anywhere. We are committed to improving our customer service and strive to have no more than three people in a line at any time. Additionally, there are some undeniable facts. This store is physically only 32,000 sq. ft. No matter who operates it, it can not be as large or have departments as big as a full-sized Jewel or Dominick's or for that matter Whole Foods. The Co-Op has been a profitable business over the years and can and will be with the unburdening of the 47th store lease. With a return to historic profitability, the Co-Op will be able to reinvest and modernize. The Co-Op is involved locally both in supporting community organizations and events as well as carrying products from local businesses. We offer shut-in service as well as local delivery. Most chain stores do not.

Even though many people have stopped shopping at the Co-Op over the years for one reason or another, we are privileged to have over 22,000 customers a week who still find value and support this unique shopping experience. I invite everyone to please come to the Co-Op during the next couple of weeks and see for yourself the changes and improvements that I have been talking about. I urge you to make an educated decision based on current facts and conditions not on past experience. The employees of the Co-Op are committed to deliver a store where quality, value, and community service are an everyday experience.