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## STORE HOURS

9:00 am - 7:00 pm  
Every Day

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# THE COMPOST

Vol. 42, Number 3 Holiday 2020

## Co-op Scoop Alice Rubin

**The saga of change and reinvention** continues here at the Co-op! Since our reopening in June, we have increased our store hours, increased the number of people we let into the store at any given time, and we have increased the number of cash register lanes in operation. Pre Orders are happening again too. As a result of all of these changes, our sales have also increased! We are in a good spot.

I think that most people are feeling comfortable shopping at the Co-op. It is not always a perfect shopping experience, but for the most part, shoppers are respectful of the safety measures we have put in place.

The thing we are asked the most is - When will we allow people to bring in their own containers to refill in the bulk department? We have looked at this issue from many angles, trying very hard to create a system that would work for all of us. We haven't found it yet, but we are dedicated to keep trying to find a way to refill people's containers. It is just not as simple as it might seem.

Our Curbside orders continue to come in. Obviously less of them now that we are open, but it is clearly still an important option for some people.

As we head toward the Holidays and Winter, we are doing everything we can to be ahead of the game – ready for whatever happens next.

We have heard that there will be some supply issues, so we are stocking up on the products we have been told will be in short supply. Fortunately we have both the space and the cash that allows us to do this. Well, the space not as much, but we are making it work.

We have also made the decision to set up a real online co-op! You will be able to shop online with pictures and prices, sale prices and current availability information. See page 2 for more information.

All of this is so that the Co-op can do everything we can to keep the food flowing – from local growers and producers, to anyone who wants to shop at the Co-op, or to purchase the goods that we sell. We all need to eat!

## Expansion Update

You might be wondering about the Co-op's project across the street. I am too! I feel that our first priority must be to ensure that our food co-op remains healthy and able to maintain our operation no matter what our future has in store. I don't want to commit to a project and the expenses that come with expansion at a time when we aren't sure what will happen next. Will we need to shut down again? Will more of our business shift to online, impacting our financial bottom line? So, we will wait and see what the Winter brings, and hope for a clear path come Spring.

Thanks for your patience.

While nothing is happening on our lot, right around the time the pan-

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# Improved Online Shopping at the Co-op

**Patty Smith**

**First, we want to send out** a huge THANK YOU!!! to all of our Curbside Co-op customers. We know it wasn't easy transitioning to shopping from memory when the store closed during the lockdown earlier this year. We appreciate your patience and support as we figured out a way for you to shop at the co-op from home. It was a steep learning curve all around!

## **Things will be getting better soon!**

We can't speak for the rest of the world, but online shopping at the Co-op is getting easier and more fun. By the time you read this, we will have launched our new online store, complete with item photos, prices, and a powerful search function.

## **Why did it take us so long?**

E-Commerce is costly and complex, and we wanted to do our homework before making the investment on behalf of members, to ensure that it would add value for shoppers. In the past, there has not been much demand for e-commerce at the Co-op. However, with the onset of the pandemic, the demand for online shopping at the Co-op has increased dramatically, and we believe now is the right time to make this move. Our platform is integrated with our Point of Sale (POS) system, so almost every item we carry in the store will be available to browse and purchase. We have been working for the past several weeks, cleaning up our inventory database, loading item photos, and testing settings and functionality in order to provide as seamless and enjoyable a shopping experience as possible.

## **What's changing?**

1. You will log into the Co-op's online store with your member info, where you can reference your shopping history, create shopping lists, and update your contact info. If you have a senior or working member discount, it will be reflected in your shopping cart.
2. You can browse the Co-op's inventory easily, adding items to your shopping cart as you go, on a fully-functional website with instructions, product photos, sale prices, and powerful search capabilities.
3. You can bookmark the store site [willifoodcoop.storebyweb.com/s/1000-1/](http://willifoodcoop.storebyweb.com/s/1000-1/) in your browser, or navigate to it from [willimanticfood.coop](http://willimanticfood.coop) on your Mac, PC, or mobile

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## Online Shopping *continued from page 2*

device.

4. No more typing, copying, and pasting your shopping list into an order form. Just point and click to add things to your shopping cart. You'll also be able to save, replicate, and edit past orders, or you can start fresh each time.
5. Curbside pick up works about the same as before – the wait time is generally 24-48 hours, you'll be notified via text or call when your order is ready, and we'll bring your purchases out to your car when you arrive at the store.

“*The Co-op has almost 10,000 unique items in inventory, with new items coming in and old items being discontinued all the time...*”

### It's a work-in-progress

We've been busy building our site, cleaning our database, testing, and setting things up to make the transition as seamless as possible. However, there's always room for improvement, and we'll be tweaking things as we learn what works best. The Co-op has almost 10,000 unique items in inventory, with new items coming in and old items being discontinued all the time, packaging and UPC changes, and promotional sales rotating bi-monthly. It's an ongoing effort to keep things accurate and up-to-date – but we're constantly working to make it the best it can be. Constructive feedback from shoppers is really helpful, so please use the Contact Us form at [willimanticfood.coop](http://willimanticfood.coop) to tell us about your experience. We also appreciate

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## HOLIDAY TABLES

I am sorry to say that we won't be hosting our wonderful community of makers this holiday season. We will miss having them at the Co-op, and all that they bring to our holiday shopping.



Alice



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## Food Review *Winky Gordon*

**On review this time:** Make It GF potato cheddar pierogi (\$6.49/ 10 piece package); Colgan Farm Heirloom 1881 Marinara (\$7.99 25 oz. jar); variety (\$4.49 / 8 oz. container).

First on my list is the potato-cheddar Pierogi from Make It GF, made right here in Connecticut. Make It GF produces several gluten and grain free foods in their nut and gluten free kitchen in Avon. I actually don't have a lot to say about these pierogis and I'm thinking this may be a testament to their goodness. I am not a pierogi connoisseur but my inclination is that what matters most about pierogis is what you put on top of them. (I absolutely stand to be corrected.)

What I can say is that they are mild, satisfying, and free of the "chewy factor" that is so often intrinsic to gluten free foods. They hold together while cooked in boiling water – also sometimes a problem with gluten free foods. These pierogis are created with Make It GF's flour blend of white bean, potato and tapioca starches, xanthan gum, mixed with vinegar and water, and filled with potato, cheddar cheese, shallots, garlic and salt. Mostly you taste the potato and a hint of cheddar. Frying them after the boiling water stage – as is often done with pierogis - would add another layer of flavor and



texture for sure. I ate them with the tomato sauce I'll report on next. A serving of 3 Make It GF potato-cheddar pierogis contains 4 grams of protein, but who eats just three? Yes, I would gladly eat Make It GF food again, perhaps also trying their other products we carry, found in the frozen food section. Total bonus: Willimantic Food Co-op is listed right there on their web site as one of the stores where their products are sold. Look, look – we're famous!

When I asked Co-op staffer Carrie to recommend an item for this food review, she immediately took me to the Colgan Farm pasta sauce, made in New Haven from vegetables grown in Lebanon. That's local! Not being a big fan of tomato sauce, I was reluctant but decided to live wild and give it a

try. Colgan Farm's Heirloom 1881 Marinara has caused me to revise my lukewarm opinion of tomato sauce, recognizing that there's a wide spectrum of freshness and pizzazz. This sauce has the fresh and the pizzazz. The combination of their heirloom tomatoes, tomato paste, bell peppers, onions, basil, with olive oil, salt and pepper yields the just right amount of sweet and tangy and is delightfully chunky. I didn't experience the too acidic taste that is typical of pasta sauce in a jar. Must be the heirloom

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## Food Review *continued from page 4*



tomatoes. And it was the perfect topping for those pierogis from Avon. We carry a few varieties of Colgan Farm marinara, right next to another locally made marinara that I have yet to review. Carrie can show you where.

Hope Hummus's sea salt and olive oil is the best commercially made hummus I have ever tasted. What makes it stand out? Extra virgin olive oil is the second ingredient – a good start. It does not hit you over the head with salt – a great next step. And it's got a hint of rosemary, moving it right along. This hummus is creamy but has texture. It's great on toast and even enlivens bland old rice cakes. The Hope web site describes the use of cold pressure processing (vs heat and preservatives) as responsible for "fresh, peak flavor, and wonderful texture." I am in love.

I was touched when I opened the hummus container and found "We're in this together" on the foil layer. I read it as "this" being the chaos and hardship of Covid 19 and was warmly surprised. While that may be a part of the intention, the text also includes the phrase "It's OK to not be OK," referring to the challenges of living

with a mental health condition, and outlines Hope's partnership with an organization "committed to breaking the silence on mental health." This is not nearly as sexy a cause as saving the rainforest or ending hunger – both honorable aspirations. I appreciate the ordinariness and importance of taking on this particular issue as part of their business culture. Go Hope! They are based in Colorado, make their foods from

organic, locally sourced ingredients when possible. We carry several varieties, found in the cheese cooler.

A friend recently shared a description of this complicated, confusing, stressful time as being like a seven-layer dip – many factors, distinct but related, messy. The trick, if we are to avoid sinking into despair, is to find the "resilience chips" to go with the dip. So, my friends; where do you find or make your resilience chips? Mine are shaped by the mutual support of friendships, love of the natural world, purposeful inventory of what is good in my life, and seizing any opportunity to have a good laugh. Until next time: be kind – to yourselves and to one another. 🌱



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## Co-op Scoop *continued from page 1*

demic began, the construction of the Senior/Community Center began. They have made a lot of progress and the walls are mostly up!

Sometimes I go out to watch the building being built on my lunch break. It is always interesting to me, how they build buildings - all of the equipment involved and the skills required to operate them.

I am a little sad to see that some of the view we have enjoyed from the co-op's garden is disappearing. But I am also glad that there will be this new resource in our community.

How will this new Senior/Community Center impact the Co-op? My hope is that we will become more visible to people who don't usually come downtown, and a convenient place to shop while you are waiting for your kid's swim practice to end, or Gramma's Pilates class to be over. I can imagine that our neighborhood will be a busy one, in the not too distant future! 🥕



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## HOLIDAY DONATIONS

While this year is unlike any other and the future is somewhat uncertain, we still would like to make some donations to local Non Profits. We need your input into how to divide up the pot! Our wooden nickel bins will be here for the month of December. Each time you shop you will get a wooden nickel. Put it in the bin of your choice. We'll divide our donation based on your votes.

Thanks for all you each do to support our Community members in need!



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## Member Opinion *Winky Gordon*

Where have all the recycled containers gone, long time passing? It grieves me to not be able to bring my own reused containers and bags to fill with bulk laundry soap, honey, rice, and so on. Dang. For this first time in I don't know how long, I recently bought a brand new package of dish soap rather than filling up the container I brought in for that purpose. It was painful. The ability to buy in bulk, minimizing my contribution to the waste stream is, for me, a major reason for shopping at the Co-op.

For seven months, our capable staff have been filling our orders for ½ cup of this, small bag of that, and whatever other specific requests we've had for products we used to help ourselves to. Covid 19 has required extraordinary feats of flexibility and rapid reorganizing. Thank you Co-op staff for all the ways you've kept the show going, providing us with the foods and groceries we depend on.

And....I hope we can soon return to using our own containers for bulk shopping. I understand there is discussion about how to do this in the safest way possible, minimizing exposure for both staff and customers. The considerations are many. I encourage the staff to persist with brainstorming solutions and the chutzpah required to take on this kind of an experiment. When you've designed and implemented your plan, you will hear loud cheers of gratitude from many a customer, I'm sure! Thank you for continuing to show up and for helping our Co-op remain accessible and safe.

Winky Gordon, card and recycled container carrying member since 1985. 🥕

## Online Shopping *continued from page 3*

your patience, support, and cooperation as we navigate the new territory of e-commerce.

### Payment Options

Making this service available to shoppers while minimizing the financial impacts on the Co-op involves carefully considering the payment options we will offer with online shopping. Processing card payments through an online store incurs fees that are 2-3 times higher than regular in-store card processing fees, potentially costing the co-op over \$10,000 more per year in credit card fees. Therefore, we have decided not to offer integrated online payment processing at this time. The following payment options are available, listed in order of preference for the Co-op, based on the cost:

1. Pay at Pickup. Use cash, check, or card (credit, debit, SNAP) when you pick up your order. If you prefer not to come into the store, Co-op staff will come out to your car to retrieve payment.
2. Card on File. Keep your card on file at the Co-op (debit or credit, not available for SNAP). Many curbside shoppers are currently using this convenient and secure option.
3. Gift Cards on File. Buy a gift card and keep it on file at the Co-op to pay for your purchases. Many curbside shoppers are currently using this convenient and secure option.
4. E-Gift Cards. Coming soon! 🥕

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## ***Our Holiday Gift to You!***

**Every Member-Owner who has paid their \$120 equity in full or is up to date on their payments will receive a coupon for 5% off any one shopping trip of their choice.**

**On December 1st, this coupon will be programmed into our Point of Sale System.**

**All you have to do is tell your cashier that you would like to use your coupon!**

**Many thanks and much appreciation to all of our Member-Owners!**



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