

## STORE HOURS

**8:00 am - 8:00 pm**

*Every Day*

## A Collective Perspective

*Patty Smith*

**I love podcasts and listen** to many on a variety of topics, from particle physics and economics to politics and pop culture. These are all for fun, but I also listen to my fair share of pods on work-related topics, like team-building, leadership, and organizational development. I know: Nerd Alert!

Recently, after listening to a great interview on a topic of particular interest to me – team collaboration – I ordered a book called *The Collective Edge: Unlocking the Secret Power of Groups*, by Colin M. Fisher. The book is all about group dynamics and how well-constructed, well-functioning teams are more than the sum of their parts. Fisher describes groups with this kind of “synergy” as having a collective perspective. While the target audience of his work seems to be managers who are seeking to improve collaboration in the workplace – and I am definitely a member of that audience – I also love the phrase “collective perspective” as a description of cooperative enterprise.

Cooperatives are businesses that are owned collectively (the members), controlled through representative democracy (the board of directors), and run day-to-day by an operational team (the workers). It’s an effort by people, with people, and for people.

The benefits generated by this collaborative endeavor (the goods, services, and profits) are directed back to those who own and run the co-op, and via the seventh Cooperative Principle – Concern For Community – also distributed more widely to the community at large. Collective perspective, indeed.

As I was reading through each submission to this issue of the Compost, I was again impressed by how the various efforts of our member-owners, board directors, staff, and community members continue to collectively build our successful grass-roots organization that is both a strong business and a vibrant association of people. At their core, cooperatives are both, and the intersection of the two makes co-ops inherently more than the sum of their parts. Our amazing Willimantic Food Co-op is no exception.

Matthew’s board update reflects on both the board’s procedural work of monthly policy monitoring as well as the more transformational activities that directors have access to through regional and national peer networking with other co-ops. Our participation in November’s Co-op Café event gave us the

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### *The Collective Edge*



"An eye-opening guide to making teams more than the sum of their individual parts. Essential reading!"  
—DANIEL H. PINK, author of *Drive* and *The Power of Regret*

**Unlocking the Secret Power of Groups**

**Colin M. Fisher**

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## WILLIMANTIC FOOD CO-OP

### General Manager

Patricia Smith

### Management Team

Kara Croce

Wellness Manager

Corry Elm

Rebecca Figueroa

Assistant Front-end Managers

Wendy Jakoboski

Produce Manager

Kathy Leddy

Financial Manager

Marissa Ocegueda

Front-end Manager

Matthew Woodward

Grocery Manager

### Staff

Michelle Aguayo Castro

Kate Abbatemarco

Jessie Bance

Gabi Lopez Barreto

Shydel Boyd

Maxwell Calverly

James Cashmore-Everton

Susan Chasin

Olivia Martinez Chavez

Willow Cordy

Bridget Curry

Ailin Cuevas Gonzales

Tom DeWolfe

Chad Dunnack

Dani Finnerty

Kathe Gable

Mark Giangrave

GG Gonzales Aleluya

Kate Greenwell

Catherine Hahn

Bob Jennette

Brandon Johnson Nickson

Andy Kish

Christine Klaben

Kasia Korwek

Brianna Lopez Garcia

Richard Mann

Nancy McMerriman

Sarah Medeiros

Gabrielle Nedweden

Karla Negron-Rodriguez

Vanessa Ortiz

Levi Quakenbush

Melissa Robichaux

Steve Scanlon

Ninoshka Robles Solano

Richelle Strimple

Christopher Swift

Julio Velez

### Board of Directors

Brock Alosky

Matthew Coolbeth

Kathe Gable (staff director)

Katherine Gavin

Tomasyn Goode

Peter W. Kirk

Hannah Moore

Stephanie White

### Manager Representative

Patricia Smith

### Newsletter

Amy Kalisher

Patricia Smith



## Building on Bulk

Maxwell Calverly

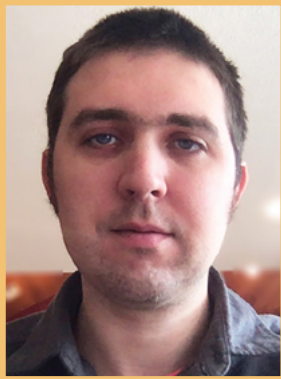
**When I first worked at the Co-op** and saw the bulk department for the first time, I honestly never knew such a thing existed. Having experienced only typical grocery stores, their shelves mainly filled with row upon row of packaging, imagine my surprise witnessing a veritable cornucopia of raw ingredients, spices, and tasty treats laid bare for people to pick and choose for themselves. It was different, exciting, and honestly, just a smidge overwhelming.

After a great amount of work, practice, and guidance, I've had the privilege of being the head of the bulk department for the last two years, and my appreciation for this strange, uniquely co-op-style staple has only grown. This department gives us the opportunity to pass along to customers the bulk-price savings from our distributors. It also allows our customers to pick any amount of any product they desire, completely packaging free. You just need a couple cups of lentils and a few tablespoons of curry powder for tonight's recipe? Sure, go for it. Gotten the fresh baked bread bug and want to preorder 50 pounds of rye flour? Of course; and members get a 15% discount on top of it!

Thankfully, most of you have found your own reasons for using our bulk department, and I'm glad to say it's been going strong. You may also have already heard that the bulk department will be getting a brand-new remodeling quite soon. Needless to say, I for one am excited for it, and I hope that many of you are too. While fancy new things will always hold a sort of innate appeal and luster, I believe that this decision to build upon and invest in our bulk department says a bit more. While other stores appear to be shrinking or cutting their bulk departments entirely, following solely profit-driven trends and moving toward more packaged goods, the Co-op has instead chosen to build upon it even more. We believe in the importance of holding onto it for our customers and for our mission – for passing along savings, for using less packaging, for helping customers find staples they can't find anywhere else – each and every reason is valid.

The bulk department is a strange, unique department that helps give the Co-op some of its undeniable individuality. And I hope you all enjoy its new look soon. 🥕





## Board Doings

*Matthew Coolbeth, Board Chair*

**Our new(ish) Board, with three** new directors elected in May, has really come together over the summer - our standing committees are fully staffed and everyone is increasingly confident and efficient in our new roles.

The all-important, never-ending task of policy monitoring continues according to its annual schedule. In recent months the Board has monitored the General Manager's compliance with:

- B.1 Staff Treatment & Compensation
- B.3 Financial Condition & Activities (Q2)
- B.5 Communication & Council to the Board
- B.9 Board Logistical Support

The Board has also evaluated its own compliance with:

- D.1 Governing Style
- D.2 The Board's Job
- D.3 Agenda Planning

We held our annual Board Retreat in September and spent a day focused on how the Board can help the Co-op build and maintain a strategic plan in support of its mission over the coming years. Many of us attended the Co-op Café on November 1, one of a series of events run by Columinate (a consulting cooperative for mission-driven organizations) for people involved in food cooperatives.

These events bring together directors, staff, and consumer-owners to connect and share with peers from other co-ops and engage in conversations around themes relevant to co-ops, such as governance, cooperative principles, equity, and collaboration. The theme of this event was Stronger Together: Balancing Autonomy and Collective Power, and it was the first ever Co-op Café held in Connecticut, hosted by the Willimantic Food Co-op in conjunction with Fiddleheads, our sister co-op in New London, CT. It was a great experience - everyone in our Willimantic contingent got to meet folks from a variety of other co-ops in the region, including Urban Greens in Providence, Dorchester Food Co-op in Boston, High Falls Food Co-op in New York, and Farmington River Co-op, a start-up co-op in New Hartford, Connecticut. It was a day spent building solidarity and a shared vision of how cooperatives throughout the region can work together to better serve our communities.

In October, we held the year's first "meet & greet" where co-op members interested in serving on the board or any of its committees can come and learn more. As always, if you are interested in the Board's work, please feel free to attend a meeting or reach out with questions or feedback. Use the "Contact Us" link on the web page, or leave your name and contact info at the store, and we will be in touch! ***[willimanticfood.coop/about-the-co-op/our-board](http://willimanticfood.coop/about-the-co-op/our-board)*** Board Meetings are on the ***first Thursday*** of each month from ***6-8 pm***. 🌱

**WFC board and staff members mingle with other regional cooperators at the Co-op Cafe event.**



## STAFF SPOTLIGHT: MEET Kathe Gable, a.k.a. the Co-op Frog

### What is your favorite thing about the Co-op?

What I really love about the Co-op is that we are a member owned community market that doesn't report to any corporation or shareholders. The community comes first! We give back to the community and we give back to our members after we take care of our business expenses. And that's just beautiful! In this day and age, we need more cooperatives. The structure of co-ops is something that I feel really positive about being part of. I do love a lot of things about the Co-op besides that: the produce is unbelievable; I love the bulk; I love that we have gluten-free options. I love helping people who come in. For people who are looking for something to meet their special dietary needs, we have not only one item, but we have several items!

### What is your favorite product?

I love the bulk department. I love the bulk nuts and the variety we have. I do a lot of roasting of pumpkin seeds!

### What made you want to become a staff director on the Co-op's board?

Oh, that's a very good question! Well, currently since I only work part-time and I'm in semi-retirement, I have time. The Co-op has been so good to me, and I wanted to give back. I also have been on boards before. I appreciate what happens at that level, and I wanted to learn more about our structure and how our board works.

### What have you learned being on the board as a staff member?

Well, the policy governance model is really amazing, and I've taken some trainings with Columinate consulting cooperative and appreciate that their support is available to us. I love that our meetings are very structured and that we have an agenda that we address. We are also always willing to hear each other's different perspectives, and we keep an open mind. We're working on some great things to help our co-op grow.

### What are some of your goals holding the staff seat on the board?

I want to participate as a good director. I think I do have some things to offer because I can share information about individuals who might be



able to benefit from our services. I can share information with the board about the store from my firsthand experience at the register, and I can share the enthusiasm for being involved with the board to encourage my coworkers to consider running for the board in the future. The board spends a lot of time thinking about us and working to support us. I'm so appreciative of being involved with that!

### If you had to wear a character costume for work, what character would you be?

I would be the frog! It might be a little visually and physically challenging, but it would definitely be the frog.

### Who do you want to see coming in the Co-op?

Some of my favorite experiences at the register are with people who have recently moved to town and have just found out about us. I love welcoming them, whether they're a new faculty member or they've relocated. I love when it's their first time coming in and they're just blown away and excited. That's who I want to see coming in, more first timers so that they can experience the greatness that we have.

### What did you do before the Co-op?

I've done a lot of different things. I was a Therapeutic Recreation Specialist, I did some fundraising and alumni community relations, communications, different things. I also worked in public relations and left the job after about 20 years for health reasons. After getting healthy again I was very happy to find a part-time job here at the Co-op after first being a working member. 🌱



*interviewed by Melissa Robichaux*



## Who Owns the Store? We Do!

### INTRODUCING CO-OWNER / MEMBER: **Ida Millman**



***The food we buy should be simple and natural: "less processed, more honest."***

**Ida Millman** was raised as a “nice Jewish girl, brought up in a conservative synagogue.” She is a graduate of the Rhode Island School of Design (RISD), mother of 6 children, former owner of a designer furniture store and, until 2002, was a life-long Rhode Islander. She declares now, “I am a dues paying member of the Democratic Socialists of America.”

I met with Ida in the spring, in her bright, plant-filled apartment at Colebrook Village in Hebron for a lively conversation about her life and her thoughts about the Co-op. Ida has been a Co-op member since 2002, when she moved to the area to live with her daughter and later at Glen Ridge housing co-op in Mansfield. Ida now relies on her family to do her Co-op shopping but has been seen stocking, cleaning, and counting at inventory in her role as a working member. She has warm memories of the Co-op, including sitting in the corner of the café with Randy McMahon and Mark Svetz, discussing world and local events. She says, “It was always interesting.” (Author’s note: And often passionate! The café continues to be a place for meeting, plotting, planning.)

Ida describes her time at RISD as formative in developing “an understanding of the need for personal flexibility.” An example of her non-conformist beliefs is found in her response to the medicalization of childbirth. The birth of her first child left her unhappy with the standard procedures of the time. She determined that the next birth would be “as simple and natural as possible.” Breaking with practice-as-usual, Ida brought a labor nurse with her to the next birth,

something that doctors were not accustomed to. She reports that one of her children was born at home. At that time, and within the dominant culture, these were likely radical acts. Ida is not bound by convention.

As with birth, Ida feels the food we buy should be simple and natural: “less processed, more honest.” When living in Providence, Ida belonged to a food co-op sponsored by Brown University. After her move to Connecticut, she found the Willimantic Food Co-op was a place for community and friendship: “It became a really important piece of my life.” Other fond memories include chatting with Loretta Wrobel (interviewed for a previous edition of this newsletter), and seeing then-manager Alice come out of the office and visit with staff and customers.

What would Ida like to see for the future of the Co-op? A garden that also sells plants. A food service area with outdoor seating. A garden roof. Tchotchkes for sale. She recognizes the Co-op as a “rich, inclusive community” – a great endorsement from the lived experience of a free-thinking elder.

On Ida’s shopping list: the teeny weeny chocolate peanut butter cups, black peppercorns, maple syrup, and white chocolate.

Ida had her 99th birthday on October 20th. 🌱

*interviewed by Winky Gordon*





## GARDEN UPDATE: Some Global Winners - Right Outside the Co-op

*Roman Pawluk*

**In case you missed it we had** (and maybe continue to have?) two interesting horticulture events in the Co-op garden in the last few weeks, and I happened to capture the images to share here.



The world's most expensive spice, ounce for ounce, was just feet away (...not unlike standing in front of V. Gogh's *The Night Café* at the Yale Art Gallery. A piece worth upwards of \$200 million, and you can still stand three feet away, no glass) below the bay window; Crocus sativus or Saffron Crocus.



And there they were... the three wily red stigmas (top female part) per flower that give the plant world fame for color, flavor and aroma. You can imagine the weight of those threads when dry, so you need a lot of flowers (150-170/g), and I guess you might say, a lot of micro harvesting, to get some spice.



I didn't even know there was crocus in fall, but here it is, a true crocus evidenced by the thin blade-like leaves at the same time as the flowers, and three stamens, like all crocus have.

Planted in late August, it is a fast bloomer so you will have blossoms in October. However, the corms strengthen over years, producing only one or two flowers the first year. Buying the largest grade corms will give more blossoms to start.

**Sidebar:** And by the way, there may be confusion because there is another similar-looking flower (that we do not have in the Co-op garden) that goes by common name 'Autumn Crocus. But beware, that crocus-looking flower on steroids that started blooming a month ago is the plant *Colchicum autumnale*, from the Iris family. The plant has its own distinction in my mind – the leaves come up in early spring and fade away – then 6-9" blossoms burst from the soil on naked stems months later in September (colloquially 'naked ladies' or naked boys'!) and open 3" wide pink and lavender crocus-looking blooms. They have six orange stamens. And just to add some drama - this one is highly toxic to humans, dogs, cats and horses.



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## Garden Update *continued from page 6*

Have a penchant for certain spiced Mediterranean dishes or natural yellow dye? *Better Homes and Gardens* says you can get a tablespoon of your own saffron from planting about 50 corms. In this renaissance of the home-grown and home-made, that seems like a cool project. I mean how exciting can garlic be every year?

Lastly we had a cool visitor from the South who has put out one large papery yellow blossom nearly each sunny day for over a week. With a name from some far-away novel, *Abelmoschus manihot* (a-bel-MOS-kus MAN-ee-hoat!), commonly called Sunset hibiscus, is a colonizing plant of stream banks and disturbed areas originally in Southeast Asia and New Zealand. In the southern U.S. it is an herbaceous (non-woody) perennial but here in the cooler Northeast, it is an annual. And it is not just a pretty face. Related to okra, the leaves and flowers are edible, and because of the high vitamin and iron content as well as extreme 12% protein content by weight, it has been called the most nutritious leafy vegetable in the world.

So there you have it, some 'autumn oddities' usually found only in catalogs or in the exotic gardens of our plant-loving brothers and sisters across the globe, thriving on our humble postage stamp of reclaimed land at the Coop garden. Walk slowly and look closely – many species still blooming! 🌱

**End Note:** Would really like to know if anyone has a lead on the variety of rose we have blooming in front of the bay window. It is a stunner- color, feel and fragrance. Please write [coopgardener@rome.fastmail.net](mailto:coopgardener@rome.fastmail.net).



## Member Holiday Discount

***Stock Up  
and Save!***

**Members can  
share in the Co-op's  
success this year  
with a 10% discount  
on one shopping trip  
of your choice in the  
month of December.  
Discount coupon  
will automatically  
be added to the ac-  
counts of eligible  
members Dec. 1st\*.**

**\*Members must be in good  
standing and be up to date  
with equity payments.  
Some restrictions apply.  
See cashier for details.**



## SNAP To It

*Katherine Gavin, Board Member & Social Worker*

**Many of you are likely** aware of the recent withholding of funds to current SNAP recipients starting in November. The recent attention to this program has sparked conversation and confusion. As a social worker who previously worked in

food justice – and as a former SNAP recipient myself – I jumped at the opportunity to contribute to the conversation and provide context for our members.

Starting off, let's clarify exactly what SNAP is and how it came to be. Food Stamps, now known as SNAP (Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program), was formulated as part of the New Deal to aid the country's recovery from the Great Depression, with the explicit goal of boosting the economy. However, this first iteration only lasted for four years and was not revitalized until the mid-1960s. In 1964 the Food Stamp Act was passed as part of President Lyndon Johnson's Great Society Program, and it was then that it became a permanent social service. This policy has evolved significantly since its inception. Originally, Food Stamps were purchased through the Food and Agriculture Act, but in 1977 that requirement was eliminated, and a national standard for program eligibility was established. Other significant changes to the program included the move from stamps to an electronic benefit transfer card that looks similar to a credit card, making it less conspicuous to use SNAP benefits. Subsequently, in 2008, the name of the program changed from food stamps to SNAP, following a significant rise in program recipients in the early 2000s.

All these years later SNAP continues to be a source for boosting the economy. The USDA reports that one dollar in SNAP benefits generates \$1.50 in economic activity. With the U.S. spending about \$8 billion a month on SNAP benefits, this multiplier effect means that SNAP benefits could have an economic impact of \$12 billion a month, according to the Center for Poverty Research at the University of Kentucky. This money flows to grocers such as the Co-op and also frees up funds for people to spend in other areas, since they can use SNAP benefits to cover their groceries. Additionally, it is estimated that SNAP benefits help lift five million Americans out of poverty each year. They also help support more than 388,000 jobs and generate \$20 billion in wages and \$4.5 billion in tax revenue. Importantly, SNAP also provides access to nutrition for its recipients. In Connecticut, more than 53% of SNAP participants are in families with children. Some research shows that fresh fruit and vegetable consumption is higher in households who receive SNAP compared to families of similar income levels without SNAP.

Whether it is the uncertainty regarding SNAP benefits in November and beyond or higher food costs in general, it is increasingly challenging for everyone – especially those who rely on SNAP – to stretch their monthly allotment: the average SNAP benefits for each household member per month is \$190. Therefore, as a community oriented organization I'm sure Co-op members are asking "What can I do?" Luckily the Coop has provided several avenues through which we can support our community members; ask at the register when you check out! I have also included several community resources that support people struggling with food insecurity. These organizations are in current need of donations. Financial contributions typically

go farther than food item donations, as food pantries are able to purchase directly from distributors, thus stretching a dollar farther than we can at the store.


### **Willimantic:**

- Covenant Soup Kitchen [covenantsoupkitchen.org](http://covenantsoupkitchen.org)
- Access Community Action Agency Emergency Food Pantry [accessagency.org](http://accessagency.org)
- Willimantic Community Fridge [windhamfood.org/community-fridge](http://windhamfood.org/community-fridge)

### **Mansfield:**

- Natchaug Food Pantry [natchaug.org/giving/food-pantry](http://natchaug.org/giving/food-pantry)
- Storrs Congregational Church [storrscongchurch.org/reaching-out/hunger-food-justice-ministries](http://storrscongchurch.org/reaching-out/hunger-food-justice-ministries)

### **Statewide:**

- [ctfoodshare.org](http://ctfoodshare.org) 



**USDA**  
**Supplemental**  
**Nutrition**  
**Assistance**  
**Program**

**Putting Healthy Food**  
**Within Reach**



## HELPING OUR NEIGHBORS IN NEED

First, we want to thank our shoppers and members who have rounded up, bought Co-op gift cards to donate, or purchased food items for the Covenant Soup Kitchen over the past several weeks. The Co-op has supplemented your generous contributions with a \$5000 cash donation to the Soup Kitchen in early November. We are stronger together. If you are continuing to look for ways to support our neighbors in need, consider the following.

### 1. Food Donations: the Covenant Soup Kitchen is in desperate need of:

- Canned and dried fruits and vegetables
- Shelf-stable proteins (canned tuna/chicken, beans, peanut butter)
- Pasta, rice, cereal, oatmeal
- Fresh produce
- Fresh or frozen meats-chicken, beef, ground beef or poultry, ham, pork roast/chops
- Deli meats and cheeses for our Sunday sandwich lunches
- Soups and ready-to-heat meals like canned pasta meals
- Baby food and kid-friendly items for school lunches
- Diapers, wipes, shampoo, soap, toothpaste, deodorant and period supplies

***You can leave shelf-stable donations in the Co-op's café or drop off perishable items at the Soup Kitchen.***

Also consider a monetary donation directly to the Soup Kitchen. Donate here:

[covenantsoupkitchen.org/donation.htm](https://covenantsoupkitchen.org/donation.htm)

Or mail a check to:

Covenant Soup Kitchen  
220 Valley St  
Willimantic, CT 06226

### 2. Community Assistance Gift Cards

You can donate any amount at the register to help fund Co-op gift cards for families in need. They will be distributed directly back into our community.

### 3. Pay-It-Forward Coffee and Tea

Make someone's day by purchasing a Pay-it-Forward coffee/tea for someone who is having a tough time. Let us know if you'd like to purchase one at the register.

***If you need support now or are looking for other ways to help, here are some resources:***

- Willimantic Covenant Soup Kitchen: [covenantsoupkitchen.org](https://covenantsoupkitchen.org)
- Access Community Action Agency: [accessagency.org](https://accessagency.org)
- Windham Community Food Network: [windhamfood.org](https://windhamfood.org)
- Connecticut Foodshare: [ctfoodshare.org](https://ctfoodshare.org)
- 211ct.org or dial 2-1-1 to connect to a 24/7 support specialist

Thank you for your continued support and generosity. In this age of abundance, we believe that no one should go hungry. Together we can help make sure that everyone has access to what they need.

## Collective Perspective

*continued from page 1*

chance to engage in rich conversation with other cooperators around the topic of the intersection between the fourth and sixth cooperative principles, Autonomy and Independence and Cooperation Among Cooperatives. <https://ica.coop/en/cooperatives/cooperative-identity>

Maxwell's piece on our famous bulk department emphasizes the importance of this cornerstone of the food co-op movement as well as Maxwell's own journey in learning how to both appreciate and develop our bulk department as an ongoing benefit for people and the planet. Likewise, Helen's whimsical product reviews remind us that so many of the products we carry are not only delicious and good for us but are also sourced from small, local producers and companies built on the values of environmental sustainability and social justice.

I really appreciate the spotlights on member-owner Ida Millman (thanks, Winky!) and cashier/staff director Kathe Gable (thanks Mell!) because they demonstrate the longevity, dedication, independent thought, and joy that help characterize our Co-op community. And of course, thanks to our gardener extraordinaire, Roman, for keeping our eyes directed to the gorgeous garden out front, which reminds us to slow down and take solace in the sensitive chaos and beauty of nature amidst the seeming indifference of the powers that be in the human realm. All (including the crocuses!) are superstars.

Lastly, thanks to board member Katherine for contributing such a thoughtful and informative piece on the current SNAP crisis that is affecting so many in our community. I hope it will encourage people to take action in support of reducing hunger and food insecurity for our fellow citizens and Co-op members. See elsewhere in this newsletter for guidance on how to help.

As the world around us becomes increasingly divided, our Co-op continues to work toward mutual aid, community reinvestment, and equity for all. Thank you for the individual part that you play in our "collective perspective." 🌱

**Patty Smith**





## Holiday Extravaganza *Helen Scanlon*

### Greetings, my dear Co-ops!

My goodness gracious, I had way too much fun with my new review items. I think I gained about twenty pounds, too. I did this for you guys. You're welcome. It's a tough job but someone has to do it. And I must state for the record that it was

### WORTH IT.

The holidays are peeking just around the corner, and these new items are perfect for stuffing in a stocking or for serving at the holiday get-together. Or, just get these lovelies for your beautiful self. Why not? Okay, on with the reviews!

Our Wellness department has some shining stars for skin care. Why do we want to take care of our skin? Because our skin works hard to protect us every day! Treat it with the love and respect it deserves.

#### Weleda Skin Food

This mighty moisturizer has been around since 1926 and is a beloved favorite because it contains extracts of pansy, calendula, rosemary, and chamomile, infused with almond and sunflower oils. It is super-thick so a little goes a long way – use on hands, elbows, feet, and neck; pat gently around your eyes to smooth away lines and lighten up the dark circles. Weleda Skin Food creates a very effective moisture barrier to protect skin from external irritants and toxins. Weleda Skin Food is a serious skin cream for seriously dry skin – it may even be a tad too thick for some! The dense formula makes it challenging to apply, but stick with it – the results are worth it. There is a good reason why Weleda Skin Food has been around for nearly a hundred years. It's a perfect gift for the person who is always complaining about dry winter skin! They will be sure to quit their whining once they get their chapped mitts on this product. Cruelty-free with zero parabens and phthalates. [weleda.com](http://weleda.com) to find out more.

#### Booda Butter Purely Naked Eco Balm

I have reviewed Booda Butter before, and you may remember how much I love the stuff. It is one of the most moisturizing products on the planet, thanks to that amazing shea butter! Now it is available in a sustainably packaged paper tube of awesomeness. I promise, it will be your new favorite lip balm. Portable, and ZERO PLASTIC (hooray!). I love this product and this earth-loving company. A perfect stocking stuffer – and as always, get one (or two) tubes of this for yourself. Winter is merciless with its dry air, but Booda Butter says “Feh! Bring it on, winter!” Be prepared with this humble little skincare workhorse. [boodaorganics.com](http://boodaorganics.com)

#### Ayeya African Black Soap, Peace (lavender)

This soap smells lovely, is hydrating without leaving a soapy film on your skin (perfect for the face), and uses pure and simple ingredients such as lavender and ylang ylang. It also features 50% shea butter for superior moisturizing. It has a

subtle earthy scent that comes to life in a steamy shower, and it has a slight grit that gently exfoliates. It is an extremely delicate soap, however – keep out of a direct water stream, and remove it from the shower after use. Place it on a self-draining soap dish, and let it dry between uses – otherwise it will fall apart and disappear well before its time. Treat this soap with care! Ayeya is an environmentally responsible, socially conscious company that is dedicated to supporting communities in West Africa. It's a great new product on the Co-op's shelves! Go here to learn more about Ayeya products and their sustainable business practices: [ayeya.com](http://ayeya.com).

Now, on to the food!

#### Navad Bakers Cinnamon Rugelach and Chocolate Babka

Navad Bakers are based East Providence, Rhode Island and officially opened for business in 2020. The quote “be so excellent that you can't be ignored” applies here in a big way. Head baker Guy is obviously passionate about baking, and he has an interesting story: “[Guy] traveled the world baking, learning, and experiencing, and he eventually landed in Providence, RI by way of Johnson and Wales University” ([navad.co](http://navad.co)).

I am trying hard to find the right words to describe how utterly delicious these baked goodies are. They flake apart and sprout gossamer wings of butter, cinnamon, and chocolate on your taste buds. You think I am kidding with this silly prose? Okay, try them for yourself and tell me I am wrong. You won't even be able to speak when you are sampling Navad's cinnamon rugelach because you will be transported to a buttery little dreamland. Go ahead, take a slice of Navad's chocolate babka and try to describe the magic that just left you speechless. Bring these beauties to the office holiday party and the family dinner and become everyone's new best friend. Oh heck, just go right ahead and get an extra box for you to enjoy with your favorite holiday beverage, hot or cold (Mountain Dairy egg nog or Lake Champlain hot chocolate, perhaps?). Try not to bust into it on the way home – keep your eyes on the road! Go here, now—to learn more about Guy's story and Navad's amazingly, blissfully, beautifully delectable baked goods: [navad.co](http://navad.co)

#### Mountain Dairy Egg Nog

This is only the best egg nog you will ever taste. Full stop. Expertly blended, it looks gorgeous in a clear glass with a



*continued on page 11*



## Helen's Reviews *continued from page 10*

sprinkle of nutmeg or cinnamon on top. Mountain Dairy egg nog is a golden-ivory holiday beverage that contains only all-natural ingredients and joyful memories. Sip slowly, propose a toast to those you love, and savor. Check out Mountain Dairy's holiday-themed glass bottles, too! Based in Mansfield, Connecticut, the Stearns family of Mountain Dairy has provided delicious, pure, wholesome milk and dairy products since 1871. Their happy and healthy cows are never given artificial growth hormones and are treated like family, as it should be. Mountain Dairy egg nog is a staple in my home. It doesn't feel like the holidays without it! As it states on their website, "one farm, one family." Thank you to Stearns family for their commitment and passion for high-quality dairy products. Go here to read more about this local, family-owned farm: [mountaindairy.com](http://mountaindairy.com)



## Lake Champlain Traditional Hot Chocolate

Is the adjective "creamy" overused? I don't care, I am using it. Lake Champlain Traditional Hot Chocolate is creamy and delightful and has that true, soul-lifting chocolate flavor. Perfect for snuggling in front of the fire. You make it with milk (hello again, Mountain Dairy!) on the stove top. This is the ONLY hot chocolate that matters. Throw the packets of chemical-laden mix away and don't look back. Become a hot chocolate purist – trust me on this. One little taste of this enchanting creation and – POOF! – you won't even dare to dream of mindlessly throwing a packeted mix in your mug ever again.

Based in Vermont, Lake Champlain uses gourmet-quality, non-GMO, locally-sourced chocolate. The company is also passionate about sustainable farming and building communities. Learn more about Lake Champlain chocolate here: [lakechamplainchocolates.com/hot-cocoa](http://lakechamplainchocolates.com/hot-cocoa)

Whew, that was a lot of great stuff! How lucky are we to have such an amazing food co-op? Many thanks as always to the hardworking, compassionate, and knowledgeable staff. The Willimantic Food Co-op is more than a place to get groceries—it's a community. A family. Everyone is invited!

I wish you all a wonderful holiday – and feel free to celebrate the first snowflake of the season! I usually stand at the window and let out a somewhat alarming high-pitched squeal of delight as the flakes flutter outside. Go for it. Living joyfully is something to do without apology or explanation. Spread love and kindness for this season – and every season.

Until next time! 🥕

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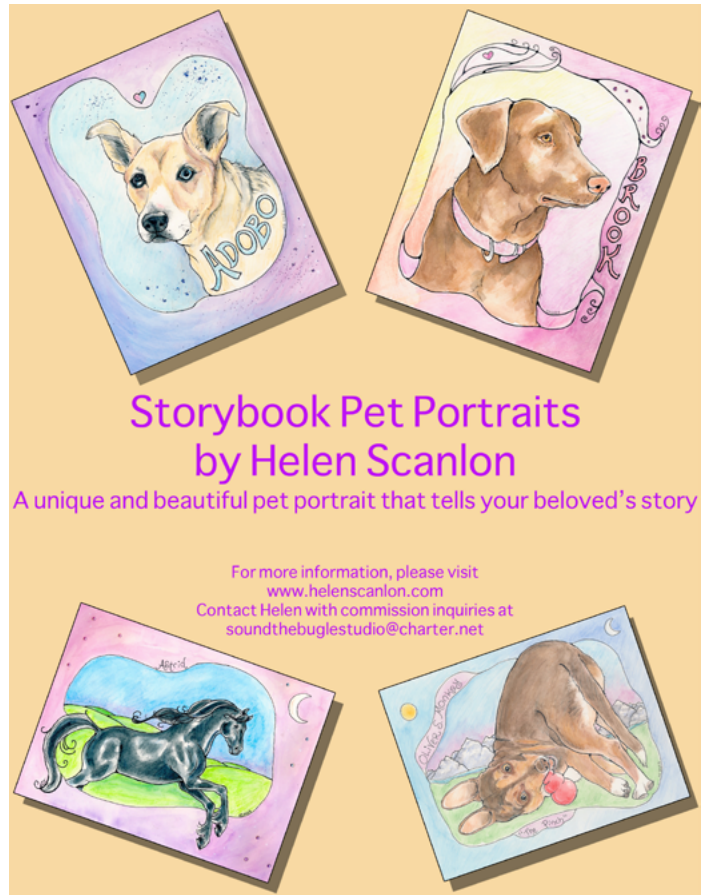
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