



2019 BOARD CANDIDATES



1.) Why do you want to be on the Co-op Board of Directors?

Tami Bennett

I want to be in the Co-op Board of Directors because I love the diversity and culture the Co-op brings to a community!

Jace Denton

I have enjoyed working on various cooperative committees within my community, including the Procession of the Species and Eco-planning Committee at the Co-op. Co-ops are formed to meet the specific and changing needs of our workers and members. I want to be on the Board because I want to hear more about our members and Working Members' needs. I believe in the wide diversity of people who use the Co-op and I believe the diverseness of our Board should reflect this in the Board members, the communities, and the voices they represent. I want to be a Board member to help bring more representation of queer people and voices of the community I am a part of to the Board.

Jon "Eppo" Epstein

Just looking to serve my community. I'm an original member from 1977 and have never served on the Board to date.

Linda Myers

I moved to Olympia four years ago and found 'my people' at the Olympia Food Co-op. I soon joined and then signed up to be a Working Member Cashier. I've served two-and-a-half years on the Member Relations Committee, a Board Committee. Through these experiences I've learned much about the culture and community of the Co-op. The Board of Directors holds ultimate legal responsibility for the operations and actions of the Co-op and I am ready to step up to the plate and help take on that responsibility.

John O'Brien

My reasons for requesting consideration for a board position include but are limited to the following: My wife Maia and I have been Co-op members since moving to Olympia about 15 years ago. This in no small part because at that time it was the one and only go-to place of organic groceries. I also have more than one late-onset food intolerance. I know from personal experience the challenges of medically necessary food restrictions. The Co-op has been instrumental in my ability to survive and I daresay thrive in Thurston County. Survival of the Co-op I consider to be personally a shared reality inextricably linked to my own. My most significant chronic health challenges are manageable only by strict dietary restriction. I am a living example of Hippocrates' admonition, "Let your food be your medicine and your medicine be your food."

Cristina Rodriguez

Food systems has been my lifelong passion since I was a teenager working as volunteer Community Health Lay Leader (Promotora) serving the Washington farm workers providing food on our tables. This community work took place at community health centers as well as at rural migrant labor camps throughout Washington. It was my exposure to the fieldwork, learning about farm worker malnutrition, stepping onto their labor sites, and visiting their substandard housing conditions that left a lasting impression on my conscience, ultimately shedding light on the complexities behind our food system. Agricultural labor planted the seeds of knowledge in my mind and over time, my understanding branched out to focus on the diverse aspects of our food system: nutrition, health, environment, local foods, seed sovereignty, socio-economic abilities, labor, etc. Eventually, I incorporated agriculture and food sovereignty into my undergraduate and graduate research pursuits.

Trudy Springer

As a Co-op member for over twenty years, witnessing growth and challenges, and as a Working Member for over four years, working with the friendly, dedicated Staff, I want to be more involved in helping the Co-op continue to grow, expand and serve our growing membership. Through fifty years in the work force, I have a deep understanding of the strength diversity in staff and membership brings to an organization.

Bruce Wilkinson

The Co-op helped me fall in love with Olympia. I want it to thrive and now I have the time to give back in a way that I am capable. I graduated from Evergreen with a focus in political economics, ecology and Latin America studies. I have been on the board of several nonprofits and a member of grassroots organizations locally that the Co-op has generously supported. I am a big supporter of the cooperative model. I understand some of the difficult challenges the Co-op faces in terms of growth, community engagement, worker solidarity and more. I feel I can help bridge some of these challenges going forward on a path toward the vision.

2.) What general abilities and skills would you bring to the Board?

Tami Bennett

My general abilities include leadership, teaching, and accomplishing set goals, and providing safe environment. I am creative and enthusiastic about social services and environmental potentials.

Jace Denton

I have a background in graphic design, website design and management, marketing, social media marketing, and entrepreneurship. I have used these skills as part of my work with local organizations such as Peace, Love & Raw and The Procession of the Species, and I will bring these to the Board. I also feel that having younger people on the Board would breathe new life into the Co-op and the Board. My personal goal is to be the youngest person to sit on the Board to date. I am passionate and hard worker in everything I do. In addition, I will bring my great customer service to the Board to build a stronger link of communication between the Board and our members.

Jon "Eppo" Epstein

I have relevant skills and abilities gained from experience serving on other non-profit boards including Evergreen State College Alumni Association, Sustaining Fund, Traditional Arts Council of Olympia, and the Thurston County Fair.

Linda Myers

Prior to moving to Olympia I was the Business Manager of an independent elementary school in New Jersey. While working there for 25 years I learned all aspects of the school's business office, such as: preparing budgets; accounts payable; accounts receivable; bookkeeping; insurance and payroll & benefits. I believe this skillset would serve the Co-op Board well in critically reviewing budgets and other financial aspects of running the organization. I was also a very involved volunteer in the Property Owners' Association where I lived, sharing responsibility for overseeing and maintaining the community's many common properties and for offering activities for the residents. During my fifteen-year tenure as a Board member I served on many committees, as well as three years as Treasurer and three years as Board President.

John O'Brien

I bring to the Board my life experiences including a four plus decade career as a Physician's Assistant. As a teenager, I was deeply sensitized to the power and value of biodynamically-grown organic herbs from direct contact on a farm in my home state of Rhode Island. Prior to moving to Olympia, I spent a years' internship on a biodynamic farm in Australia. I managed to hold my own in areas essential to farm operation including metalwork, welding, forestry, small and large equipment operation maintenance and repair many not considered part of farming.

Cristina Rodriguez

My education, leadership, and career history demonstrate the many leadership roles that I have had the pleasure to navigate into present day. The nature of this Co-op Board position requires many skills to responsibly promote a healthy, community-based local food system environment. My experience supervising, training, directing, and delegating tasks for a team have helped me learn to balance responsibilities and hone in on the skills each individual has within an organization. Decolonized leadership includes lifting people up and empowering them into harmonized synchronicity, where each individual's unique quality is appreciated and utilized. I remain conscious about our societal reality that we, human beings, work in a system that inevitably values production over well-being. Whether it be internal or external Co-op labor, I would focus on providing each person's contribution the acknowledgement and appreciation that is deserved.

Trudy Springer

I would bring to the Board my experience as a community organizer, including strong communication skills and success in working with diverse groups. Strengths in planning, drafting agendas, brainstorming and conflict resolution.

Bruce Wilkinson

I've experience in navigating consensus based decision making models and feel comfortable with respect for great process. These skills come from over a decade of grassroots organization training in meeting process, nonviolent communication, anti-oppression and more have found that I am skilled in personal flexibility when it comes to figuring out and doing what's needed. Professionally, I have a strong background in communications work, marketing and campaign management. Currently I work as an arborist. I'd be happy to trim the trees for health but my other skills are more applicable. All of the Board committees sound interesting to me. I am a thoughtful person of principal who puts in the work to make things right for consensus decisions. However I am also willing to roll up my sleeves and solve issues directly if that is what is called for.

3.) What vision do you have for the Co-op?**Tami Bennett**

The vision I have for the coop is to provide a safe, educational, supportive fun place, where a community can come and enjoy not only shopping but learn about resources that provide knowledge on how to participate in self sustainability and renewable resources, health and wellness, community life skills and life skills in general. Having people in the community coming to the coop all year round for the seasonal forums, classes or events. To build a stronger more dependable community of resources and knowledge for the people in our community.

Jace Denton

We are seeing a shift towards a more ecological mindset, both in Olympia and within our society as a whole. With eco-friendly businesses growing throughout Olympia, my vision for the co-op includes following these other businesses in supporting plant based living, as well as plastic free. This includes educating our members on how to live a more eco friendly lifestyle, making veganism and zero waste accessible to everyone. I believe in supporting and networking with other businesses that align with the values of our co-op, including bringing more good food to more people, supporting local production, and maintaining and ecological mindset. I recently went to the Mount Vernon Co-op, which also has a separate bakery and restaurant. My hope for our Co-op is that we can expand into having our own restaurant and bakery, continuing our mission of bringing more sustainable food to more people.

Jon "Eppo" Epstein

To have the business remain financially sound in order to provide good jobs, support local farms, provide healthy food choices for customers, and contribute to a thriving local community.

Linda Myers

I envision the Co-op continuing to be a thriving community hub and great resource for "providing wholesome foods and other goods and services," as noted in our Mission Statement. In order to provide top notch services to our members and greater workplace safety for our Staff, I believe we must strive to find a new location with more floor space, ample room for a large kitchen and deli, adequate warehouse space, produce prep area and comfortable staff restrooms and rest areas. By creating a safe and inviting work environment for all of our workers everyone will benefit.

John O'Brien

My vision for the Co-op involves acknowledgement of the evolution of the marketplace to include the inevitable dilution and pushback against organic certification by monetary and political dynamics. I would like to see the Co-op ride the crest of the wave of acceptance with expansion of its role as community leader by example of cooperative vs. competitive business model and expansion of its educational role as the value of to sustainable equitable distribution of food to an informed community which regards farmers as teachers and healers. I am also deeply concerned that the coop is aware of and directly addresses maintaining relevance in the rapidly expanding food landscape. We should planning for and addressing meeting the educational, ethical, environmental and moral imperatives of healthy sustainable food for people the planet and all its' inhabitants.

Cristina Rodriguez

As consumers completely dependent on food for survival, we need to envision what a Utopian society looks like where we have a say in the way our food system is managed. We are reaching a point in this current political climate where human beings are essential to this symbiotic relationship with Mother Earth. Our responsibilities are to protect the environment and engage in food sovereignty as a collective community taking part in the food system. Food is much more complex than sustenance - it is a pathway into community, resilience, culture, and survival. The Olympia Food Co-op has taken tremendous steps toward food sovereignty. My holistic vision can add another perspective so that we can move forward and make the next generations proud of their ecological inheritance.

Trudy Springer

I bring a commitment to improve communication and transparency with the Staff, Board and Working Members to strengthen those relationships. I can help develop strong, healthy interpersonal relationships to help us meet the challenges of growth and community commitments.

Bruce Wilkinson

I imagine the Olympia Food Co-op growing the cooperative movement in our area, across the country and the world. That our vision should be to beat large grocery chains as a core part of maintaining and growing our depth of commitment to local food, the workers, our members and the bio-region. That we should be aggressive in this pursuit out of respect for the challenges of our times that include preeminently climate chaos, wealth inequality, oppression, food insecurity, mass extinction and militarism. The focus of maximizing local food growth and distribution supports building the power in our communities to confront all the despairing trials and tribulations before us.

4.) What else would you like to share?**Jace Denton**

I want to become a member of the board because I am interested in learning more about how co-ops are run, specifically from this position. I am looking to better round out my understandings of co-operatives and help grow up other co-ops in the future.

Jon "Eppo" Epstein

I've been a working member since the Co-op opened on Columbia Street in downtown Olympia in 1977. I volunteered as a cheese-packager until the Co-op moved to their Westside location around 1980 where I served as a cashier until 2007. Since then I've volunteered staffing the Free Store.

Linda Myers

My most profound life experience was spending 12 years of my 20's and 30's living in community at The Farm, a large commune in Tennessee. During the first 10 years it was truly communal – no private money and we held all things in common. “We” built a village with limited resources. Our babies were delivered at home by our midwives & our kids attended our own school. We lived in buses and tents until we built houses. We put up water towers and dug water lines. We grew most of the food to feed ourselves; we were vegan. I worked with the farming crew, tending to vegetables in the fields. I helped in our canning & freezing facility, putting up food for the winter. I managed our store, purchasing the items we couldn't grow or make ourselves. I helped manage our produce market in town, selling our excess produce. The Community grew too large (from 250 to 1,300+ people) and with much consternation, the community agreed to change from a communal structure to a collective, with each adult responsible for their share of the expenses. The Farm Community is still thriving today and I would love to bring these skills and experiences to the Board to help our Co-op community thrive and grow.

Cristina Rodriguez

Agriculture is in my blood and food has been at the forefront of my mind since my early upbringing. I can trace agriculture back to my roots in Guatemala. My father comes from a long line of farmers who practices traditional stewardship of the Central American land along the Pacific Ocean. My father went to a private agricultural boarding school to master agrarian skills. He eventually became an agronomist after university in Guatemala. His reality led to enduring the Guatemalan civil war and in order to survive, he immigrated to the U.S. and started his American education journey from ground zero. He eventually became a Pacific Northwest Fish and Wildlife Biologist for the federal government. Conversations about nutrition, land restoration, indigenous land rights, seed sovereignty, etc. were all dinner table conversations during my childhood and early adulthood. This passion continued throughout my education and into my career where I work in the agricultural public policy and labor standards fields.

Trudy Springer

I believe my work at the Martin Luther King Ecumenical Center and the Pierce County AIDS Foundation in Tacoma has given me training and skills that will greatly benefit leadership development and cultural sensitivity

Bruce Wilkinson

I have weathered many storms in my life and I don't run from challenges. I am a rock when people need it. I am guided by my heart but I think things through. I like strategy games like chess and Catan. I like opening space to creative people and diversity. I forgive. I turn the other cheek. I apologize when I am wrong. I think about the needs of others. I have a desire to serve the common good. I could easily be described as a socialist but people have put all sorts of labels on me for right or wrong.