



*Want to know more about the MNFC Board? Check out the Board of Directors' page on the MNFC website at [www.middleburycoop.com](http://www.middleburycoop.com).*

## Introducing the 2014 Election Candidates

### Questions to the 2014 candidates:

*Why are you interested in serving on the board of Directors?*

*Briefly describe any experience you have had with cooperatives and not-for-profit organizations.*

*What has been your experience working with groups and what is your approach to group dynamics?*

*Is there anything else you would like the membership to know about you?*

This year **four seats are open** on the MNFC Board of Directors. The election ballot is located on the back page of the Newsletter.



### R.J. Adler Middlebury

A strong community is building block of any success story. A strong connection between people makes a local economy more efficient. The Middlebury Natural Foods Co-op is in a unique spot to support the town of

Middlebury in the 21st century. Everybody needs food and the Co-op allows people to, "Vote with their fork," to quote Michael Pollan while they keep their money working here in Vermont. I am interested in serving on the board of directors because I want to continue the work that the Co-op has already done to make our community stronger.

I decided to re-settle in Middlebury because of my connections with Camp Keewaydin and the Champlain Valley Unitarian Universalist Society. Before moving back to Middlebury I worked in Seattle, WA, with a company called Tangerine Power to set up the Edmunds Community Solar Cooperative. Through this co-op I worked with homeowners to set up a community-owned and operated solar array. I also taught high school in Jackson, WY at the Journeys School, where I taught History, English, and Psychology. While teaching my students and I worked with the Yellowstone Teton Clean Energy Coalition to support their You Can Be Idle Free campaign. My current day job is with SunCommon, a Benefit Corporation.

grown frozen corn, green beans, blueberries and broccoli at our regional co-ops. Vermont's *Sunrise Orchard* stored and delivered these products. This coming year, we will be partnering with *Deep Root Co-op* (organic Vermont growers), using a USDA grant award, to explore future possibilities of providing local foods.

- ◇ Food-for-All. Partnering with *Hunger Free Vermont*, we have been spreading the word about *Food-For-All* programs (supporting people with low income). Recently, several co-ops have announced they will also be starting *Food-For-All* programs in their stores: Hardwick, Brattleboro, and Putney in Vermont, Hanover and Keene in New Hampshire, and Franklin in Massachusetts.
- ◇ Helping start-up cooperatives in the region with technical assistance.
- ◇ Partnering with the *New England Farmers' Union* to strengthen the voice of New England's family farmers and fishermen.
- ◇ Co-op Seminar. Partnering with the University of Massachusetts to develop a senior seminar course on cooperatives and an introduction to a course in cooperative economics. Our hope is that this curriculum will spread to other colleges in our region.

### 3. Setting up a Solar Energy Farm

In the Board's letter last fall to the editor of the *Addison Independent*, Board President Jay Leshinsky wrote,

*For the past several years the MNFC Board of Directors has developed a long term vision for the future of the Co-op. One specific outcome is "an environmentally sustainable and energy efficient" operation of our store. To realize that vision, we want to move as quickly as possible to renewable energy as our source for power. The natural gas pipeline does not fit into that vision.*

Toward that end, our big project this year is to complete a collaborative 150kW solar farm. In March, the Public Service Board approved our net metering project with *Misty Knoll Farm* being the "host", the Co-op being the "customer" and Encore Redevelopment being the "owner" of the equipment connected to Green Mountain Power's distribution network. We appreciate the support of ACORN to help bring this project to fruition. Additionally this year, we hope to hire a consultant to review our store equipment and operations for further energy efficiency savings, and possibly plan a future solar project above our existing buildings.

Looks like an exciting year ahead!

Hope to see many of you at the Annual Meeting.

Cooperatively yours,

*Glenn Lower, General Manager*



## General Manager's Report 2014 by Glenn Lower

The Co-op had another good year. Compared to the previous year, sales have grown by 5.7%. Net profit is about 3%, which equals three pennies of profit per dollar that a customer spends. That money is being saved for future projects. Sales of local products remain strong at 25% of total store sales, peaking at

30% during October through December.

**Here are three key projects started last year and to be continued this coming year:**

### 1. Long Range Planning Process: *Envisioning the Co-op's Future.*

We are planning for the Co-op's future. In order to find out what our member-ship values, we have organized three phases of listening and responding to our member-owners:

*Phase 1* (March — May) saw 17 small discussion group meetings in Middlebury and its surrounding communities. These meetings were attended by close to two hundred members who contributed valuable insights about our Co-op and its future ambitions. Phase I will culminate at the Annual Meeting, when several local growers and producers will weigh in on the discussion.

During the *Phase 2* (June — August), we will develop a long range plan for the Co-op, which, during *Phase 3* (September — November), will be shared back to our members, with the question: *How did we do? Did we get it right?*

As always, we ask you, Middlebury Co-op's member owners, to support our community-owned store, which in turn supports some 230 local food growers and producers in Vermont.

Please join the conversation any time: Read our conversation blog and post your comment at [co-opconversation.blogspot.com](http://co-opconversation.blogspot.com), e-mail me at [gm@middleburycoop.com](mailto:gm@middleburycoop.com), talk to our staff, or come to the Annual Meeting to hear the voices of our Co-op!

### 2. Neighboring Food Co-op Association (NFCA).

The NFCA is a collaborative of 30 existing and start-up food cooperatives in Vermont, New Hampshire, Massachusetts, and Connecticut. For the past three years, I have been serving as the NFCA board chair. Here are some exciting projects the *Neighboring Food Co-op* is working on:

♦ The Frozen Food Project. We have sold close to 13,000 pounds of locally

My experience with groups started on day one when I was born into a family as the sixth child. My work at Keewaydin, Journeys School, and SunCommon has all been group oriented. I think it is important for a group to listen to all ideas, no matter how outlandish, and decide which is the best course of action.

I graduated Middlebury College class of 2011.5, and I am a member of Middlebury's 2011 Solar Decathlon Team. I work at a solar installer and I have a keen interest and passion in sustainable living, and it's role as the building block of a community.



## Ilaria Brancoli Busdraghi (Incumbent) Middlebury

I moved to Middlebury from Rome, Italy, almost 20 years ago now and from the beginning the Coop has been an important place for me. It reminds me of a Roman neighborhood market, a place where the social aspects are as important as the food we buy, and where there is a strong connection with the community. More than a Roman market, though, the Coop is concerned with having a positive impact on that community, from all points of view, as it is stated in its Ends statement: *Healthy Foods, Vibrant Local Economy, Environmentally Sustainable and Energy-Efficient Practices, and Cooperative Democratic Ownership.* I find this important and exciting.

I have served on the MNFC Board during the last six years, and it has been a rich and beautiful experience. The Coop has a very committed and diverse Board of Directors and it is always exciting to be in a room with people who have different perspectives, but who all care so much about a store that is much more than a store. I feel lucky every time I walk in the Coop (which happens often!) and being on the Board has allowed me to be a better and more proactive citizen of this community. It has encouraged me to look at issues that relate to food with a new and deepened awareness. It has also allowed me to give something back to a place that means so much to my family and me.

I truly enjoy working within a group and finding common ground all the while respecting a multitude of ideas and points of view. I relish (pun intended) the collaborative thinking that generates new ideas about the choices that we as a community make about our food.





## Ross Conrad (Incumbent) East Middlebury

I am running for another term on the Board of Directors since according to some historians, this may be the first time in American history

where we are truly up against the political-economic and ecological limits of our system. This makes it a really important time in our history. I believe the MNFC will play an important role in helping our community face the challenges ahead both as an example of community owned wealth that is working to create a more just and fair workplace, and as an important player in the continued development of our local food system.

My co-op experience began as a member of Recreation Equipment Inc. (REI), and I was a working member of the Onion River Food Co-op in 1988. I became a member of MNFC when I moved to Middlebury in December 1988, and worked at the Co-op between 1989-1992. I have also been a long-time Co-op vendor having provided honey and bee products in past years. I expect to provide organic log-grown shiitake mushrooms to the Co-op this season. I have spent about 18 years serving as a member of the MNFC Board of Directors since 1989 when I was first elected to the Board as the Co-op's employee board representative. There were a couple times over the years that I stepped down from the board when other commitments and time constraints prevented my carrying out my board responsibilities to my fullest potential. During the past three years have I served as the Board's Vice President and currently serve as the board Treasurer.

I believe that group decision making works best when all members get the chance to offer input. As a member of a group that is in the decision making process, I often find myself able to identify things that have been overlooked. Being a fairly independent thinker often allows me to shed light on issues and make points that have not previously been considered during the process. I also currently serve on the Middlebury Town Energy Committee and as Middlebury's Alternate Delegate to the Addison County Regional Planning Commission.



our co-op is a leader and transformative force in our community. The value of "concern for community" is built into the essence of cooperatives because it is one of the international principles of all co-ops. Concern for community is based on the values of justice and democracy that are part of our bottom line, along with profit. MNFC was started in 1976 because members of our community couldn't find the healthy foods they wanted. They organized as a cooperative believing that co-op values and principles would guide the business to obtain and sell the goods they wanted in a democratic, just and equitable way. Since that time we've had a positive impact on our community. We've created jobs and we've created markets for local farmers and businesses, many of whom provide certified organic products. We challenge our co-op to constantly improve sustainable practices and to do that in collaboration with other community businesses and non-profits.

Cooperative principles provide values that challenge cooperatives to live up to high standards of ethics, fairness and citizen participation that are not the norm for many business models. There are often tensions between our values. How can we be economically viable and ecologically sound? How can we make healthy food available for more of our community in the light of increased income disparity? Even the perception of "healthy" food has changed quite a bit since we incorporated MNFC in 1976. Yet, despite these tensions, I believe MNFC can continue to better embody our cooperative values. I believe this because of what I have experienced working with staff, our Board and our member/owners as Board President.

Our Board is working to create a vision of an MNFC future that embodies cooperative values. Much of the operational challenge of living up to our values is accomplished through the leadership of the management team and hard work of the staff. They are constantly implementing new ways to incorporate cooperative values into our store's operations. Our member/owners are a constant source of creative ideas, honest feedback and commitment of time and energy to help us live up to our ideals. We have over 4000 member/owners and the varied ideas that many of you have shared with the Board and managers enriches and emboldens the choices we can make for the future.

As I write this our staff and Board members are finishing a series of "co-op conversations" with our member/owners at sites all around the county. This is the first stage of a plan to learn as much as we can about what you are thinking about our co-op's future direction. There will be more opportunities for input as we move into the next phase of planning. Please stay in touch.

*Jay Leshinsky,*  
Board President



emphasis on bulk buying.

Kristin pointed out the reusable plates and utensils for the annual meeting dinner as part of the commitment to reduce waste.

**Board Elections:** Jay thanked Kristin and Karen for their work on the Board as they step down and announced the results of the elections. Kevin Lehman will retain his seat and Sheila McGrory-Klyza and Steve Getz will be new directors.

**Adjournment:** The meeting was adjourned at 5:55 pm on a motion by Bill Schneider, seconded by Peggy Rush. All voted in favor.

Respectfully submitted by Victoria DeWind



## President's Report 2014

by Jay Leshinsky

When I travel for business I try to stop at food co-ops in the cities I visit. The Minneapolis/St. Paul area has many, as does the Seattle area. Austin, Texas has one (the *only* food co-op in Texas) and Santa Cruz, California where I visit often has one that is run by students at the University of California at Santa Cruz.

What I've seen in the 25 years I've traveled to Santa Cruz is the rise and prevalence of privately held natural foods chains like *Whole Foods* and *Trader Joe's*; large natural foods sections in supermarket chains like *Kroger* and *Safeway*; the local natural food chain *New Leaf Markets*; and the single store, *Staff of Life*. Many of the products that could only be found at co-ops 25 years ago can now be found at the privately held stores.

The number of food co-ops dropped from a high of about 600 in the 1980's to about 250 operating 275 stores in 2008. Since then, there has been a new wave of co-operative food stores opening in the United States. But competition from privately held natural food stores is intense because over the past several years the natural foods market has been growing at rapid pace. As people have more and more choices of where to shop for natural foods, why should they choose a co-op? What differentiates us from the privately held stores?

The number of food co-ops dropped from a high of about 600 in the 1980's to about 250 operating 275 stores in 2008. Since then, there has been a new wave of co-operative food stores opening in the United States. But competition from privately held natural food stores is intense because over the past several years the natural foods market has been growing at rapid pace. As people have more and more choices of where to shop for natural foods, why should they choose a co-op? What differentiates us from the privately held stores?

For me, the most compelling aspect of being a member/owner of MNFC is that



## Lynn A. Dunton Middlebury

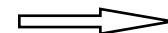
In 1985, I made a conscious decision to settle down and start my family in Addison County, Vermont. I was drawn to this part of Vermont because I felt a sense of connection to the community and landscape. Almost thirty years later, I can honestly say that this was one of the best decisions of my

life. I love my community and feel a strong sense of place...and imagine that many county residents echo my sentiment.

The Middlebury Natural Food Co-op (Co-op) has become my "go to market" as I have become more conscious of what I eat and where my food is grown and raised. I am a strong believer in supporting our local economy. When I shop at Co-op, I know that I am supporting a local business and farmers across the county and Vermont. I also feel a tangible sense of community and energy whenever I enter the store. Staff members are friendly, knowledgeable, and helpful. And I feel a kinship with other customers who avail of this local treasure.

For the past twenty five years, I have worked and volunteered for several not-for profit organizations across Addison County as both a staff and board member. At the core of every experience was a deep sense of connection to the mission of each organization. I have training and over 20 years of experience in organizational financial management and would bring this experience to the Co-op if elected to the Board of Directors.

I have spent my professional life working with community groups and enjoy collaborative work. For the past two years, I have been working on an MS in Mediation and Conflict Studies and will graduate from Champlain College in May, 2014. During this time, I have fine tuned my communication skills and learned strategies for finding common ground. As the Co-op moves forward, I would be honored to help navigate the challenges that accompany change and growth.





## Kate Gridley Bristol

I served on the MNFC board for 4 years but had to step down for professional reasons. I would like to complete the work I was involved in as MNFC goes through it's next set of transitions. Familiar with policy governance, with many years of board experience at other non-profits under my belt, and a personal

interest in the food system, not to mention a son who now works in it (as meat cutter and a farmer), I am passionate about helping guide MNFC meet the needs of it's member-owners.

I served on the Town Hall Theater board for 11 years, through its capital campaign and during its transition to a performing arts establishment. Other non-profits I have worked for include: The Bridge School, the Gailer School, Friends of the Arts at Middlebury College, Elm Street Arts, and The Champlain Valley Unitarian Universalist Society.

I am a firm believer in the "wisdom of the crowd," which means I enjoy participating in groups particularly when there are processes in place that ensure the sharing of diverse viewpoints before decisions are made. While I am comfortable speaking publically about what I think, I am most skilled at matching people with the right opportunities or roles. I have experience with governance, having chaired governance committees at both THT and MNFC. My main interest is what other people can bring to the table, and how to work towards a whole that fits within the Mission, Ends and Means of MNFC. It's all about direct democracy.

I am an artist. Every board should have an artist of some kind on it to help with out-of-the box thinking! I have written a column for the Addison Independent the last couple of years on gardens, food sources and cooking called "Patchwork: Many Gardens, Many Kitchens."



33%. He said increasing sales of local products is a top priority for the Board. The winter season and need for storage are the primary obstacles that stand in the way of increasing local products in the store. The Neighboring Food Co-op Association is working to increase local sales starting with the frozen produce program. Contracts have been made with growers, processors and distributors to provide local items to stores. Price is also a barrier as it is hard to compete with the volume of larger producers. Additionally, local companies, once successful, are often bought out by larger entities which move them out of state (American Flatbread, Earth's Best, Boves, Green Mountain Gringo, Ben & Jerry's) so these items are no longer local.

There was a suggestion that MNFC produce its own food. Glenn responded that this had been considered and it was felt that the Co-op is better at selling food than growing it. However, there is support for community kitchens.

There was a question about using glass canning jars. Glenn did not see it as feasible with low volume in products as compared to larger store chains. Andre Munkres pointed out that jars are expensive and push prices above reasonable levels.

Elizabeth Frank said a few words about the NOFA Farmer Correspondence Program for students to learn about different farming practices. MNFC is contributing funds for student field trips to farms after written correspondence from the farmers. Her farm uses permaculture practices. She also discussed the recent march in Montpelier to protest Monsanto's control of 90% of food production. Bernie Sanders' amendment to a GMO law to prevent Monsanto suits against growers failed and instead an amendment was passed to give permission to Monsanto to plant any crops they chose and they are exempted from lawsuits. This bill needs to be reauthorized in September so Elizabeth encouraged everyone to learn more and help stop this.

Ross talked about the VT Natural Gas pipeline project for Addison County. He mentioned rising gas prices, safety concerns and allowing fracked gas to be used in VT when it is against the law to produce it in state. A long-term investment in gas infrastructure will discourage development of sustainable energy sources. He encouraged all to attend the Public Service Board hearing on September 11 in Middlebury.

Glenn pointed out the laundry line time-line and encouraged people to add their memories as well as thoughts on MNFC's future.

Glenn was asked if the Co-op would do more glass recycling. He said for now space is too limited to take that on.

Irene Barna asked that MNFC consider selling bulk milk for those bringing their own containers. Glenn responded that a future store would have a greater

# Middlebury Natural Foods Co-op Minutes of the Annual Meeting June 1, 2013

*To be approved at the 2014 Annual Meeting*

**Board Members Present:** Daryl Benoit, Kristin Bolton, Ross Conrad, Francisca Drexel, Mary Gill, Kevin Lehman, Jay Leshinsky, Karen Miller-Lane.

**Board Members Absent:** Ilaria Brancoli Busdraghi, Tam Stewart, Louise Vojtisek.

**Others present:** Victoria DeWind (staff liaison), Glenn Lower (General Manager) and approximately 100 people in attendance at the meeting with many more for the dinner following.

**Call to Order:** Glenn called the meeting to order at 5:17 pm on the Green in Middlebury, welcoming everyone to the 37<sup>th</sup> MNFC Annual Meeting and the 5th Annual Community Celebration on the Green.

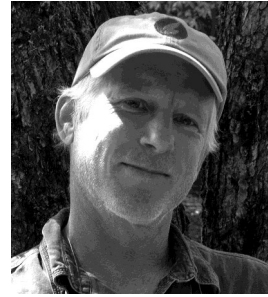
**Approval of Minutes:** The minutes of the 2012 Annual Meeting were approved, with all in favor, on a motion made by Peggy Rush and seconded by Ari Lattanzi.

**President's Report:** Jay said that now, more than ever, the primary issue for the Board is future growth. With the increased growth nationally in the sales of natural food, it is important to keep co-operatives strong financially and with growing membership. The Board will be looking for member-owner feedback on growth in the near future.

**Treasurer's Report:** Karen explained that because the audit is not complete there is no written report at this time but it will be available soon and all indications now are that it will be a clean report. She pointed out the charts with graphs showing consistent growth in annual sales, local sales and membership.

**General Manager's Report:** The Annual Report will be available in the store or on request once the audit is complete. Glenn asked for questions from the floor. Bill Schneider asked what percentage of total sales is deli prepared food. Glenn said that it is about 8% of store sales. There is 50% margin less 35% labor for a 15% net profit.

Steve Gross asked why the local sales graph seems basically flat. Glenn explained that local means grown, made or value added in Vermont plus 30 miles at the border. Currently it is about 25% and there is a goal to increase this to



## Tam Stewart (Incumbent) Goshen

When I first joined the Board in 2009, I had absolutely no idea the work would be so compelling, intense, and meaningful. Not a week goes by without something drawing me in to the amazing inner doings of our Co-op and showing me something new. Since the last election, my role on the Board

has grown and deepened so much I can hardly keep track of it all. So I figured, since I only get the chance every few years, I'd tell you some highlights.

*Vice-President: 2013-present.* Working closely with Jay, and supporting his role as President, is a joy. We're in constant touch about a huge range of issues, tasks and decisions, and carefully divide chores so things get done properly and on time.

*Communications Committee Chair: 2009-present.* As one of two standing Board committees, our job is to make sure all of you know what the Board is thinking, planning and doing on your behalf. We also helped make sure Board members write an article for the newsletter each month; pushed for Board wi-fi access during meetings (makes a *huge* difference); and help plan the Co-op's annual meetings. We helped the Board Development Committee with its election outreach, and with its new Board member orientation materials. And we advocated for and helped draft MNFC's new Education "end", which puts a strong emphasis on sharing vital information about healthy food, environmental best practice, responsible socio-economics, and other cooperative values.

*Annual Reports.* I edited, designed and produced the full-color, booklet-style Annual Reports we've had the last few years. They tell our Co-op's story, with detailed financials, and have a year-round shelf life.

*Secretary: 2012-2013.* Collected, digitized, reformatted, and filed all Board governance documents on our cloud-based collaboration tool, Basecamp. Kept the Board area of the MNFC website updated. Proposed the review and update of all Board policies, (currently underway).

*Basecamp Administrator and Evangelista: 2012 -present.* Proposed we use this advanced, web-based collaboration tool; got it up and running; and serve as its admin and support guy. The Board now has a central, secure place to share ideas, debate topics, exchange and store files, schedule tasks, and get a ton of other stuff done while not in meetings. Moreover, much of what we do and learn now resides on Basecamp to serve as a permanent record and reference,



both now and for future MNFC Boards.

*Executive Committee Member: 2012-present.* Being Secretary and now Vice-President means that I've been on the Executive Committee (EC) as an officer for about three years. In that time, we've worked to heighten the EC's leadership role; streamline its governance practices; focus its goals; strengthen its support of our general manager; balance its work-loads; and clarify its responsibilities.

Okay, that's a lot (and it's a partial list). And yes, it's been a big part of my life the last five years. But the truth is: putting my back into this work, for this incredible Co-op, with its super-high standards, gifted general manager and inspiring staff, and its nearly four thousand devoted member-owners, has been more meaningful, personally, than I can possibly say. Thanks, all of you, for making it possible.



**Judith A. Wiger-Grohs**  
**Middlebury**



I wish to serve on the Board of Directors because I believe I can make a significant contribution to the Co-op's long-term development plans and its plans for continued and expanded public education and outreach. As a member of the Co-op I strongly believe in its mission and guiding principles, particularly its goal to continuously seek out "ecologically sound and healthful patterns of production and consumption." I believe the Co-

op is playing an increasingly important and influential role in the Middlebury community. My hope is to assist in developing strategies for bringing additional community members to the Co-op. Such strategies, whether educational or financial, would enable the Co-op's products to be within reach of more of Middlebury's residents.

My experience with co-operatives is limited to my involvement at MNFC where I am both a member and a volunteer. However, my experience with not-for-profit organizations is considerably more extensive. I am a member of the Board of Directors for the Willowell Foundation and I work with Middlebury's Hospice Volunteer Services in a number of capacities. Most importantly, I

spent the majority of my 34-year career in education as a high school science teacher at Vergennes Union High School (VUHS).

I have extensive experience working in groups including day-to-day interactions with students, meetings with colleagues, professional development and various district-wide and statewide committees. I believe most group dynamics necessitate establishing a sense of *community* among members based on equity, respect and trust. As I became heavily invested in teacher leadership and worked in a number of leadership capacities I continued to employ these same basic principles - community, equity, respect, trust.

As a teacher leader I played a critical role in initiating and implementing beneficial change at VUHS. I have considerable experience in the areas of communication, facilitation and budget development. Related to the above, I am a trained facilitator for both the *National School Reform Faculty* and the *Educational Testing Service's* "Formative Assessment" program. If elected to MNFC's Board of Directors I would hope to put all of these skills and experience to good use for the membership.



**Present Board Members:**

Daryl Benoit  
Ilaria Brancoli-Busdraghi  
Ross Conrad  
Francisca Drexel  
Steve Getz  
Mary Gill

Kevin Lehman  
Jay Leshinsky (President)  
Sheila McGrory-Klyza  
Tam Stewart  
Louise Vojtisek

**Please note:**

The year-end **financial report** will be available to members at the Annual Meeting and at the registers in the store the week prior to the Annual Meeting. Please contact Glenn Lower at [mnfc@together.net](mailto:mnfc@together.net) with any questions.