

SPECIAL GENERAL MEMBERSHIP BUSINESS MEETING

MONDAY, JULY 13, 1992, 6:30 P.M.

CHURCH OF THE TRANSFIGURATION
(EPISCOPAL CHURCH HALL)
336 E AURORA ST.
IRONWOOD, MI. 49938

To the Members of Northwind Co-ops:

You are immediately wondering, "Another co-op letter, another crisis?" Well, not exactly, but sort of.

First of all, this is not a letter about finances. We do have a \$6000 loan to pay off, and all the usual expenses, but our sales are up and we are doing about the same as always.

The problem is more one of spirit and energy than anything. The co-op movement and health food business are changing greatly and rapidly. Huge consumer owned co-ops doing hundreds of thousands in annual sales are falling or being bought out by suppliers to keep them from failing. Many suppliers themselves are in financial difficulty, including our own original warehouse, Common Health.

Product mix is changing too; society has moved away from labor intensive foods towards convenience foods, even though overall there has been tremendous growth in healthy foods. Vitamin, herb, and supplement sales are increasing, while actual food sales are decreasing. Our own store sales reflect this increase in non-food items.

This is a time of transition for our co-op. Transition, change, growth, whatever name you choose to use, it can bring us to wherever we wish to go. The questions are: Where do we wish to go? In what directions are we heading? What do YOU want from the co-op? What is available to us? What does the membership as a body want? What do non-member shoppers want? Are there REALLY members out there? Does anyone care if we are a co-op or not? Is the co-op currently serving the needs of the community/membership? The list goes on ad infinitum, and there are as many options/ways of looking at solutions.

On one end, we can ask ourselves if we want a co-op that is financially successful and sells products that are of questionable value because that's what consumers are demanding; and at the other end we must ask ourselves whether we want to continue struggling in an economically depressed area where chances are even if we do reach out and educate consumers on the benefits of eating right, their financial situations would limit their shopping dollars anyway. (Ex. How many of us will spend \$.99/lb on organic bananas when we can go to Copps and get them for \$.39/lb?) Get the picture? In addition, there are all those levels of existence inbetween these two extremes.

These are a few of the issues your board is facing. Burn out is another. There are only 5 of us where the by-laws call for 9. Most of us have served on the board for about 4 years now, and that is not good for us or the co-op. We need new blood, new ideas, and new energy if we are going to continue as a vital part of this community.

We need to know you're out there. We need to know if any among you feel strongly enough about preserving our co-op to serve on the board. If not, there may not be a board, and without a board, we are not a co-op, according to our by-laws. And if being on the board scares you, don't let that prevent you from showing up at this meeting. We need your input. We need to know if anyone cares if we dissolve; if we sell food; if people want their vitamins, herbs, and supplements and don't give a hoot whether the store they buy them from is a co-op or not; we need input on all this and more.

This is not our regular General Membership Meeting/Picnic. It is a special GMM called by a tired but concerned BOD. No dinner, no cocktails, just straight hard talk. What do you want for and from your co-op? How are you willing to support it in its effort to get there? That means more than just buying its products, doesn't it? If you can't possibly make it, please let one of us, or Ed, Sue, or Joyce at the store know. If attendance is low, or non-existent, we can assume we are serving no one's interests but our own, and can feel justified in restructuring/dissolving the co-op into something that is less work for all of us.

This was not a pleasant letter to write, but it's reality. And even old die hard co-ops like us have to face that. Maybe the co-op HAS outgrown it's usefulness as a co-op and could better serve the needs of the community as a privately owned health food store. Or maybe those of us on the board now are just so tired that we can't see any other realities.

Please come to the meeting if the co-op is important to you. We need your input, if not your support at that meeting. Without it, it is conceivable that the co-op will shut its doors or change to something other than a co-operative enterprise.

You have time to think about this-to contact board members and ask questions. And then come to the meeting prepared to aid us in a decision. Remember, you DWN this co-op, and we are only here to serve you. Without you, we don't exist as a co-op.

Sincerely,

Your Board

Norm Stone 932-5087

Felicia Santini 561-2880

Karen Secor 561-5140

Paul Sturgul 561-4600

Jody DeCarlo 561-3831

The Store 932-3547

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