



## **Valley Alliance of Worker Co-operatives**

**Supporting the Success of Worker Co-operation in the Valley & Beyond**

### **Report from the Executive Director**

**for VAWC Member Meeting, July 26, 2017**

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We're fresh off from our annual meeting where we had presenters, accepted a new member and elected two new members of the board of directors. We continued legislative engagement and are launching a new communication tool for VAWC Member Co-ops to communicate their needs and goals.

### Annual Meeting

From a report from the board and accepting a new member to hearing about educational collaboration and cross sector interco-operation, the 2017 annual meeting sent the message of co-op led support and development.



Thanks to Anasuya for delivering the board report, to professor Ali Aslam for speaking about the collaboration between VAWC and Mo'Coffee, a student run effort at Mount Holyoke College. More educational partnerships as Joe Chernak spoke about his internship with Leverett Village Food Co-op. Finally, Erbin Crowell, former VAWC Staff Co-ordinator, and current Executive Director the Neighboring Food Co-op Association, spoke about VAWC's roots, partnership with food co-ops and the many interco-operative efforts we share.

### Welcome our new Board Members

Join me in welcoming our new board members! As you can see on the last page of this report, we have our first board member from Green Mountain Spinnery, Lauren. Collective Copies continues to have a board member with us as Faith Seddon was elected just when Randy Zucco stepped down.



**CollectiveCopies**

A sincere thank you to our board members Anasuya Weil of Co-op 108 and Randy for their years of service, dedication, guidance and leadership.

As a co-op of co-ops, our board is a key component of co-op leadership. Our board is made up of members of VAWC co-ops and has seats for Stakeholder Directors from other sectors and worker co-operatives outside our region. Board duties include financial oversight, proposing our budget and supervising staff.

### Legislative Engagement

At our last meeting we discussed current and potential legislative efforts in Massachusetts. Afterwards I compiled letters from VAWC Representatives and sent them to our state legislature. The letters spoke of the goals to empower co-operatives and the development of our co-operatives and also focused on the model of favorable legislature as seen in Emilia Romagna, Italy.

Our letters were received and State Representative Paul Mark met with me about how to collaborate for legislation. I communicated that while many legislative efforts in the U.S. are centered on government funding, few seek to recreate the legislation that works in other parts of the world. Representative Mark agreed that the goal is to build something that is self-sustaining. Additionally, VAWC's structure adds accountability to members and co-op leadership.

We took the opportunity to educate about legislation in Italy were written by co-operatives themselves in partnership with legislators who are prioritizing the economic and social well-being of their region. In Italy they have been a part of creating one of the largest, most successful co-op complexes in the world.

Emilia Romagna, a region about the size of New England, has 8,000 co-ops, 5,000 of them worker co-ops. These co-ops were instrumental and were part of crafting some of the most innovative and successful co-operative legislation to our knowledge. 1947 saw the social value of co-operatives written into Italy's constitution in Article 45. In 1991 Italy codified the social co-operative which grew from 25,000 to 500,000 employees since then. Around 1/3 to 1/2 of those are worker members. Another law saw co-operatives get a tax break on 70% of their indivisible reserves. Law #59/1992 saw all co-ops in Italy commit 3% of their surplus to co-operative development which is the concept we borrowed from in order to create our own VAWC Interco-operative Development Fund.

This more partnership based legislation heightens the profile of co-ops, asserts their social value and protects the identity and co-

operative operations. With a higher profile co-operatives become more present in education, media and business development materials and the higher retained earnings of co-operatives in Italy provides a cushion for economic downturns and a resource for research into expansion during good times.

### **Co-opreneurship turns into Membership**

Welcome to our newest provisional member, Oxbow Design Build of Easthampton, MA. We've worked with Oxbow for several months to prepare a transition to worker co-operative ownership and are excited for the next steps. Look for more information about them to come.

### **Co-operative Education**

We have three interns this summer between VAWC and NFCA co-operatives. These interns will receive the Certificate in Co-operative Enterprise from the UMass, Amherst, Economics Department. If you'd like to see the presentations of the interns come to the event on August 15 at Gordon Hall at 6pm.

Eliya Hakim Mouly is working with Pedal People this summer. Just this week she's just finished reporting that is supporting Pedal People's communication mechanisms - as they spend most of their work lives on their own - as well as marketing materials.

### **Launch of the VAWC Membership Community Communication Channel**

In our on-going effort to support our member co-operatives and to meet member needs and goals we are launching a new communication portal. For now this will be a Facebook group as more members have accounts but this may shift based on participation. It is for VAWC Co-op members only, and is a nexus of information, peer-to-peer sharing and support from the board and staff. This group is for any member to ask questions, share expertise and provide business opportunities quickly and easily without waiting for a meeting.



Contact Adam to be "invited" to the group in order to participate at [adam@valleyworker.coop](mailto:adam@valleyworker.coop).

### **Upcoming Events**

#### **Co-operative Enterprise Collaborative Internship Presentation**

August 15, 6pm, Gordon Hall at UMass, Amherst.

#### **Next VAWC Board Meeting**

August 30, 2017, 6:30pm. Location to be determined. Contact Adam or any board member with questions.

#### **Northeast Organic Farming Association**

August 11-13, 2017

UMass, Amherst

We will be co-presenting with Neighboring Food Co-op Association on co-operatives, conversions and the food system.



#### **Director of St. Mary's Co-operative Management Education Program comes to UMass, Amherst**

December 5, 4pm, location to be determined.

Sonja Novkovic is Sonja Novkovic (Ph.D.) is a Professor of Economics at Saint Mary's University. Her research interests are in the field of labour-managed and cooperative firms, social economy, and comparative economics.

### **First time reading this Report?**

As a co-op of worker co-ops that have come together as a means of strengthening the efforts of our core goal is to provide ourselves with the resources and support we need to advance our co-operatives, empower our members, and benefit more people in our communities. VAWC Representatives attend meetings, direct resources while defining the goals of our organization. Interested in being a Representative or on the Board? Contact [adam@valleyworker.coop](mailto:adam@valleyworker.coop). Here's some of our core activities:

- Ad/PR campaign through area food co-op newsletters, local and movement media;
- Maintain your **VAWC Owners' Manual** aimed at educating, training, and empowering current and especially new members of all member co-ops;
- Measures of economic and environmental impact and a shared identity among VAWC members; and
- Developing our co-operative economy especially with inter-VAWC purchasing and cross sector collaboration.
- Education of many sorts including directing the UMass, Amherst Co-operative Enterprise Collaborative (on Facebook) and the Certificate in Co-operative Enterprise we co-created.
- Operating the **VAWC Interco-operative Development Fund** made from 5% of VAWC Member surplus, owned and controlled by VAWC Members.

Worker co-operatives and our movement are made stronger through shared identity, statutes and structural provisions that preserve our individual autonomy while clearly identifying our organizations as co-operatives united in the common cause of developing a co-operative economy.

#### Definition

A co-operative is an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social, and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly-owned and democratically-controlled enterprise.

#### Values

Co-operatives are based on the values of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity and solidarity. In the tradition of their founders, co-operative members believe in the ethical values of honesty, openness, social responsibility and caring for others.

#### Principles

The co-operative principles are guidelines by which co-operatives put their values into practice.

- Voluntary and Open Membership
- Democratic Member Control
- Member Economic Participation
- Autonomy and Independence
- Education, Information and Training
- Co-operation among Co-operatives
- Concern for Community

The worker co-operative identity is further detailed by the World Declaration on Co-operative Worker Ownership established by CICOPA (The International Organisation of Industrial, Artisan and Service Producers' Co-operatives) in 2004.

The Valley Alliance of Worker Co-operatives (VAWC) is rooted in the ideals of co-operation, mutuality and solidarity. VAWC is itself an expression of co-operative principles — a “co-op of co-ops” that have come together as a means of strengthening the efforts of our individual co-ops to develop their businesses, serve their members, and contribute to the wider co-operative economy. Our core goal is to provide ourselves with the resources and support we need to advance our co-operatives, empower our members, and benefit more people in our communities.

## VAWC Member Co-ops

Broadfork Permaculture Co-op  
Collective Copies  
Co-op 108  
Green Mountain Spinnery Co-op  
Mindel and Morse Builders Co-op  
Oxbow Design Build Co-op  
Pedal People Co-operative  
Pioneer Valley Photovoltaics

## VAWC Board of Directors

Philippe Rigollaud  
Pioneer Valley Photovoltaics  
Faith Seddon  
Collective Copies  
Lauren Yohe Von Krusenstiern  
Green Mountain Spinnery  
Suzette Snow-Cobb  
Franklin Community Co-op  
– Stakeholder Director

[www.valleyworker.coop](http://www.valleyworker.coop)

**Working**  
for a Co-operative Economy