

BOARD STORIES



WHY I SERVE . . .

Bill Iverson, Oneota Co-op Board of Directors

I currently serve as treasurer of the board.

Bill Iverson's Co-op story began like many others. He met somebody already a part of the Co-op community.

In Bill's case, it was the woman he's been married to since 1978, Jo Berg Iverson. "Jo became part of the Co-op soon after high school," recalls Bill, "and was later a member of the collective and a vendor through her business, Waving Grains Bakery." Bill decided to run for the board after Jo retired, as he says, to "be part of the good." He's now serving his second term as board treasurer.

Bill's quick to encourage Co-op member/owners to serve a board term. "Please consider being a part of this vibrant process," asks Bill. "Don't feel like you have to come with specific experience - or have served on, say, 16 other boards. It's about showing up willing to participate. Come with ideas and enthusiasm. Remain open to the ensuing conversations. Genuinely look forward to the dialogue."

Bill's a guy who's seen a lot of community-building himself over the decades. Thankfully for us, he's rich in stories about his experiences. Bill's a retired deputy director of Northeast Iowa Community Action Corporation (NEICAC) - which, put simply, places basic life necessities in the hands of people who need them - throughout seven northeast Iowa counties. "My job as an administrator was to get the resources in the hands of people doing the work - financial, personnel, IT contracts, etc." NEICAC goals included (and do so today) affordable housing, rental, health and early childhood education assistance.

Bill says that the work NEICAC began in 1965 was "a sign of its times," and that other present day local organizations, including Oneota Co-op, also began through collaboration and a desire to serve.

"Oneota Co-op, NEICAC, Habitat for Humanity," notes Bill, "came along in the late 60s and early 70s. It was a time of increased consciousness surrounding matters of shared resources and equity.

It was an era of change-making across many avenues. Hometown Taxi came about as a result of these thought patterns in the 80s too. Many of the people involved in these community-sustaining organizations were, and are, involved in the Co-op."

Bill's Co-op memories are full of collaboration. He recalls shared labor groups formed by Co-op member/owners. He recalls years of Co-op potlucks and "building shelves and bins and counters and whatever was needed at one of the new storefronts we have moved into through the years." Bill's spent days pounding nails, pulling nails, raking fresh hay, raising structures and, he says, "chopping lots of firewood" alongside fellow Co-op member/owners. It was, he explains, "about sharing work that was too much for one individual, but possible when we worked together."

And that's how Bill feels about the work required by Oneota Co-op member/owners, board members and staff in our future: that it's got to be done together. He doesn't expect the work to be easy. As he says, "it's difficult as mainstream grocery stores have moved toward us. They've seen our success. They've followed our model. They bring in more organics, they brand themselves as a 'community' grocery store. So we continue to find ways to differentiate.

The pandemic made clear the importance of local foods," he adds. "The Co-op has always been committed to local foods, and the pandemic has made more shoppers aware of local impact."

"I've had the good fortune to be a member/owner of the Co-op since our early days," adds Bill. "I have met so many of my lifelong friends and acquaintances through the Co-op. Many are still Co-op members after nearly 50 years." These days, he adds, "there isn't any one specific 'type' of Co-op owner. We're all ages - and the whole area community. The Co-op is everyone."

Ed note: This interview was conducted prior to the 2023 election and has been modified for this election cycle. Blog by Tanya O'Connor.

IS IT YOUR TIME TO SERVE?

The Co-op welcomes all interested member/owners to confirm candidacy in our next board election cycle.

There will be two open seats on the 2024 election ballot.

[Applications](#) are due Tuesday, Jan. 2, 2024. Learn more by [clicking here](#).

COOPERATIVE PRINCIPLE NUMBER TWO

Democratic Owner Control. Cooperatives are democratic organizations controlled by their owners, who actively participate in setting their policies and making decisions. Men and women serving as elected representatives are accountable to the ownership. Owners have equal voting rights - one owner, one vote.