

Susan McGaughey Ends 37 Years at Valley Natural Foods

BY DAVE GUTKNECHT

Susan McGaughey has been a leader at Valley Natural Foods in suburban Burnsville, Minnesota, for 37 of the co-op's 40 years. McGaughey served for the past 30 years as the cooperative's general manager and retired in October. During that period, the co-op's sales doubled and the store was relocated and expanded. The co-op successfully launched both a wholesale baked goods program and a wholesale local grass-fed meat program, and it opened a new meat processing plant. It offers a community teaching garden and additional community services and education programs.

Valley Natural Foods (VNF) moved to its current location in 2001 and last year reached \$17 million in sales and 12,000 member-owners. VNF is presently engaged in another expansion, to be completed in spring 2018, which will add 3,000 sq. ft. of retail to its existing 15,000 sq. ft. and another 8,000 sq. ft. for retail operations.

The co-op is celebrating its 40 years of cooperative services and ongoing success and honoring Susan for her enormous contributions over most of those years. It is also welcoming its new general manager, Nick Seeberger, who came from Seward Co-op in Minneapolis, where he was operations manager.

In announcing her retirement earlier in the year, Susan said, "Valley Natural Foods has provided much more than a livelihood for me. It has been a workplace with values, a place where the authentic relationships we build and the products we sell support our customer's health while supporting the health of the planet. I am deeply grateful to my staff (many have been here more than 10 years); to the board of directors, who are passionate about the mission of this cooperative; and to the member-owners, who have made my 37 years here interesting and worthwhile." •



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Here are tributes from colleagues who have benefited from Susan's shared knowledge and cooperative spirit, with thanks to Paula Sahin, Valley Natural Foods human resources manager.

Susan McGaughey's accomplishments over a long career have been impressive, supportive, and dynamic. Valley Natural Foods has been a leader in financial performance for years. She has set benchmarks that few stores have been able to attain. Her CoCoFiSt graphs are a beauty to behold and tell the story of constancy, vision, and leadership. Valley is now experiencing unprecedented competition, but the graphs tell the story of adjustment and courageous leadership. Susan has been a mentor on many levels, and her willingness to provide assistance and share systems and best practices has been beyond measure. – *Margo O'Brien, General Manager, St. Peter Food Co-op, Minnesota*

Valley Natural Foods has the best perpetual inventory system I have ever seen in a grocery store, and VNF is still the model for us to strive toward.... Likewise, VNF has been a source of innovation over time with their gluten-free bakery and meat sales to all local co-ops. Susan's comment about providing meats for smaller co-ops was simple. She was just doing what the Lakewinds (Minnetonka) Co-op did for VNF years before. – *Mead Stone, General Manager, River Market, Stillwater, Minnesota*

Susan served several terms on NCG's Risk Management Committee and Steering Committee.... Susan advocated for supporting struggling stores while holding them accountable for solid performance with a compassionate, no-nonsense approach to communication and problem solving. Susan has been a mentor to new managers in the co-op community and worked with them to improve their (smaller store) operations. She is welcoming,

knowledgeable, and accessible even with her very busy schedule. Her guidance has motivated staff and members alike in understanding the lasting value of cooperation as a solid economic model. – *Carol Collins, Central Corridor Advisor, National Co-op Grocers (NCG)*

For 37 years, our successes have been her successes. We are a cornerstone in our community and the greater Twin Cities area because of her servant leadership style. She has led us through steady and impactful growth via moving to new locations, expansions and adding additional services. Valley Natural Foods has not only seen steady member/owner and revenue growth, but her understanding of the competitive landscape and ability to identify a need has led us to grow through wholesale businesses. – *Michelle Nauertz, recent president of the Valley Natural Foods board of directors*