

Members of Green Top Grocery (Bloomington, Ill.), which won one of the raffles for co-op consulting services, with Deb Trocha (second from left) and Jacqueline Hannah, who organized contributions for this from Central Corridor members of NCG.



Startups Continue to Get Up and Running

BY STUART REID

Six years ago, the Up and Coming, Up and Running (UCUR) conference debuted with the goal of providing training and networking opportunities for startups and new co-ops in the region. This year a record 114 cooperators representing 41 co-ops participated in the conference. Attendees came from 19 states across the country to network, share ideas, and learn from the experts and each other. Attendees liked what the conference delivers—they liked it a lot. UCUR has consistently gotten rave reviews, and this year rated a positive 3.97 out of a possible 4 points on overall evaluations.

What makes this conference so special and so successful? Deb Trocha, executive director of the Indiana Cooperative Development Center has gathered support from Bloomingfoods Co-op, Food Co-op Initiative, CDS Consulting Co-op, and other co-op champions to plan and carry out a carefully crafted event. Workshops are chosen to address the most pressing needs and concerns of startup organizers and young co-ops. Presenters are experts whose background and careers have focused on food co-ops—people from the above organizations, commercial lenders, and peers who have excelled at meeting critical organizing challenges.

Peer presentations have always been popular, and this year, Katie Novak and Melanie Shellito from Green Top Grocery joined Greg Berlovitz from the Chicago Co-op to describe how they were able to build ownership. Shellito, a graphic designer in her day job, and



"This was an incredible conference. Thank you for providing the opportunity to learn at an affordable cost."

Joy Rust shared their expertise in "Building Your Brand."

Case study presentations from recently opened co-ops inform and inspire the organizers who are following in their footsteps, and this year's included Sharon Hoyer from Dill Pickle, Michael Faber from Monadnock, Nate

Roberts from Pogues Run, and Amy Fields from Eastside.

With four tracks of workshops, there were topics for everyone, and many co-ops brought several members so that they would not miss any presentations. Themes for the tracks were "Cornerstones" or the essential building blocks for co-op development; "Cafés" for discussion topics and sharing; "Case Studies"; and "Running the Store," for new co-ops that have not been operating for very long.

This year we were honored to be able to air the film, *Food For Change*, following our evening reception. We also were moved by a beautiful video of testimonials from members of the Renaissance Co-op in Greensboro, N.C., which may be located on that co-op's website: <http://renaissancecoop.com/2014/12/08/video-the-problem-we-face/>. Conference attendees also were inspired by a video with brief clips from many different established co-ops with a message for the startup groups: "You can do it!"—the video can be viewed at the FCI website: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=msOla0W1z1s>.

An essential component in this conference's success has been the many networking opportunities for attendees and presenters. New alliances are formed and support systems born.

Planning is already well underway for next year, when we hope to share the experience with even more cooperators. UCUR will be held on March 10–12, 2016. ■

UCUR organizers
Deb Trocha and
Mychaela Brandle.



UCUR organizer Deb Trocha, Malik Yakina of Detroit Peoples Food Co-op, and Jacqueline Hannah of Common Ground Co-op.

(left) Keith Nytray from Sitka (Alaska) Co-op opens an account with Northcountry Cooperative Development Fund, represented by Brenda Pfahl.



(right) Thomas Beckett of Carolina Common Enterprise and Zulayka Santiago of Fertile Ground Food Co-op.



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