

Co-ops and Public Figures Look to 2012

BY DAVE GUTKNECHT

Spreading inspiring co-op stories. Developing more co-ops to serve more people. Building more collaboration among different co-op sectors: credit unions, food co-ops, worker co-ops, housing co-ops.

These themes are being emphasized in regional and national sessions of cooperative members, organizational leaders, and public officials. They are looking at opportunities presented by cooperative success stories and the 2012 International Year of Cooperatives to demonstrate that “cooperative enterprises build a better world.”

Speakers and open sessions at the National Cooperative Business Association meeting in October urged co-ops throughout the country to reach beyond their usual efforts to tell co-op stories to the public and to build stronger cooperation among co-ops. Examples of co-op success and ideas for more collaboration are plentiful. And more and more public figures are supportive of co-ops, including Chakah Fattah (D-Pa.), who is sponsoring legislation for urban cooperative development, and Minnesota Secretary of State Mark Ritchie, who recently joined co-op historian David Thompson in facilitating conversations among 75 cooperators from multiple sectors at the inaugural event of CoMinnesota, an IYC-inspired initiative (www.cominnesota.coop).

At the CoMinnesota event, Thompson spoke, including these remarks from his 2010 induction into the Cooperative Hall of Fame:

“If we want a better America, we must have more cooperatives. If we want a just America, we must have more cooperatives. Everything that the inductees have done here today has been to lay a foundation for the future of cooperatives. We need to bring cooperatives to more Americans. We need more cooperatives to strengthen Main Street, and we need less Wall Street policies of greed that destroy the communities that we build.

“We need to learn from others. We need to learn from the Italian cooperatives how to practice solidarity and reciprocity. When you think of all of the dollars that we control in this room, if we spent more with each other, we would strengthen each part of the cooperative sector. We would be stronger just by changing that kind of practice. All the capital that we need to do what we want to achieve is in the pockets of our members. All we need to do is to get it out of their individual pockets into our common-wealth saving account. We have the capacity to fund the renewal of rural America, the revitalization of our inner cities, and the lives of our people.

“Our nation’s economic structure is both financially and morally bankrupt, and it is on a lifeline that is being paid for by us consumers. This is a



PHOTO: DAN NORDLEY

David Thompson and other cooperators discuss co-op messages that he will be taking to the U.N. launching of the International Year of Cooperatives.

time to make a case for cooperatives. With different policies, cooperatives can revive the rural economy and the family farm, and reward hard work, not daily traders.

“Cooperatives can bring common sense to America’s Main Street. Everybody in this room has co-op common sense. It’s time to go out and to share it with others, to teach others about what it is that we have. We have America’s best secret, and it should be a secret no more. I will be teaching that tomorrow, but I challenge you to also teach that tomorrow.” ■

CCMA 2012 in Philadelphia

The 56th annual Consumer Cooperative Management Association (CCMA) conference will be held in Philadelphia on June 14–16, 2012 under the theme, “Declaration of Independence: We Own It!”

The roving conference for food co-op leaders and their allies will be held at the Philadelphia Marriott Downtown.

Past attendees will soon receive an email survey soliciting program ideas. For hotel reservations and conference information, please check the CCMA website: www.ccma.coop.

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