

# LINEWAITERS' GAZETTE

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Volume 00, Number 13

August 11, 2020

## July GM Overwhelmingly Approves Black Lives Matter Statement



ILLUSTRATION BY TOMMY KANE

*"The Park Slope Food Coop unequivocally supports Black lives and the dismantling of all systems that propagate and empower systemic racism. #BlackLivesMatter"*

## Coop Finances, Temporary Markup Strategy, Return to Member Labor Also Explored

By Frank Haberle

Coop members overwhelmingly approved a statement of solidarity and support for the Black Lives Matter movement at the July General Meeting after a number of members expressed disappointment that it took so long for the Coop to take a stand on such a heartfelt issue.

"The Coop can do more to find our place to fight against racism," said Jasmina Nikolov on the Zoom meeting that was attended by 341 members. She said she was disappointed that "we as a community could not come forward faster."

In other business, Coop members debated a staff plan to raise food prices as a temporary measure for dealing with the financial stress created by the pandemic which is causing losses of \$95,000 per week. Also, Coop staff members presented General Coordinator reports on the current financial situation and the volume and quality of fresh produce coming into the Coop this season.

### The Vote on Black Lives Matter

The Black Lives Matter statement passed with 260 of the members on Zoom voting yes and 10 voting no. It said: "The Park Slope Food Coop unequivocally supports Black lives and the dismantling of all systems that propagate and empower systemic racism. #BlackLivesMatter"

The statement was authored and presented by Coop member Toisha Tucker with fellow Coop members Trish Tchume, Summer



PHOTO BY TOISHA TUCKER

Coop member Toisha Tucker authored the Coop's statement on solidarity with Black Lives Matter.

Stephanos, Rebecca Pristoop, and Hayley Gorenberg. The presenters began by expressing their concerns that it has taken so long for the Coop to make a statement of support for the BLM movement.

Tucker stated that 66 days had passed since the death of George Floyd, but in its social media postings the Coop had not made any mention of BLM that was not accompanied by reports on the Coop's bottom line. "We needed to make a strong statement as an anticapitalist,

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## Checking in with Joe Holtz on Coop Lifelines

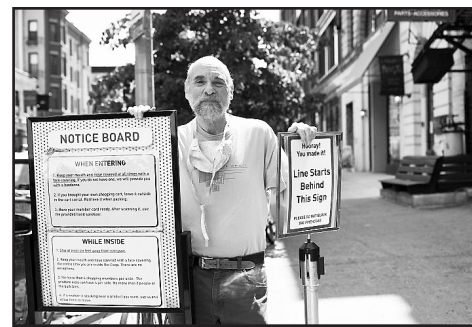


PHOTO BY ZACHARY SCHULMAN

Joe Holtz hopes we can find a way to expand the Coop's hours from 77 per week to 112.

By Leila Darabi

Six months into the COVID-19 pandemic, the Coop is working on increasing store hours, allowing more members to shop at a time and other strategies to bring more cash in the door.

General Coordinator Joe Holtz described these efforts in an interview with the Gazette in which he also shared an update on finances, delivery and member labor. "Bringing back member labor is the most important essential element of our Coop. It's the most unique, foundational, spiritual thing about our Coop," said Holtz, who is also the Coop's treasurer and co-founder.

Despite the financial challenges of recent months, Holtz said the Coop has a healthy bank balance of \$3.9 million. That's about the same amount that the Coop had at the end of last year and roughly tied with its highest cash level in history. In July of 2019, the Coop's cash balance was \$3.3 million.

### Member Investments and Loans

But the Coop's current balance obscures the financial challenges of recent months. One reason the cash balance is so high is that the Coop received \$1.5 million in federal funds through the Payroll Protection Program. While technically a loan, the Coop has applied and is eligible for the loan to be forgiven in full.

Also, the Coop has received \$700,000 in contributions

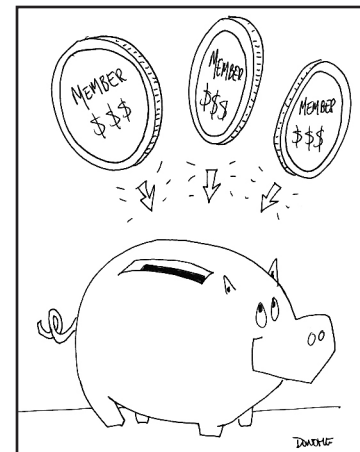


ILLUSTRATION BY JOHN DONOHUE

though the Member-Owner Equity Investment Campaign, which encourages members to increase the investment they made when joining the Coop. Members can request to get back any contribution they make over \$100 at any time. The Coop will honor that request within two weeks.

Without the federal funds and the additional member investments, "we would be down to \$1.7 million in the bank and that would be very frightening because we haven't changed the tools of burn," Holtz said.

### Slumpless Summer

In other words, the Coop continues to incur increased expenses and make far fewer sales because of shorter hours and restrictions on how many people can shop at a time. Payroll expenses in particular are up by \$27,000 per week to cover minimum wage for the part-time labor hired to work while member labor is suspended.

In the category of "temporary

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## July GM

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antiracist organization,” Tucker said.

Stephanos, a member since 2007, added: “95% of members voted in support of this statement in our June GM. It saddened me that the Coop leadership chose not to make a statement at that time. The Coop needs to meet this moment.”

Tchume stated, “I think it is wrong that the approval of this statement has become such a process for the Coop. Smaller stores had statements in May. It is deeply upsetting that it has taken not one but two of these meetings to approve this statement.”

Gorenberg, a 27-year member of the Coop, added “I’m saddened that we spent this much time, that we failed to use our mission statement, and we deferred to processes. We chose structures that perpetuate racial harm. I think we need to do better.”

Members applauded the efforts of Tucker and the other Coop members to create a clear and strong statement on behalf of the Coop. A resident of Bedford-Stuyvesant, member Efe Osaren stated that “I was shocked that I was hearing nothing from the Coop. It’s July 28. I started shopping at Green Hill Coop because it supports Black people and Black lives and the Black community. I appreciate you Tucker and Trish and Summer and Hayley.”

Paul Warren added: “I really appreciate this statement. I was very disappointed that we couldn’t adopt a statement (in June.) This is a statement from the Coop to the world.”

Eric Frumer said “thanks to the authors for this statement, which puts us on the right side of history. The Coop can do more to find our place to fight against racism.”

Maitefa Angaza, of the Coop’s Diversity and Equity Committee, proposed an amended longer statement that explored the Coop’s positions on diversity and inclusion. The amendment was then discussed.

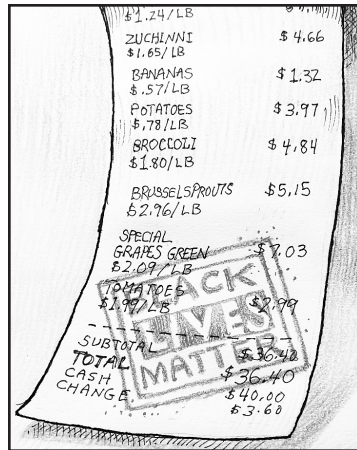
Tucker objected to the new statement. “My statement is crafted for social media,” Tucker said. “The Coop needs to make an unequivocal statement that we support Black Lives Matter. This amendment is too broad a statement; it is a laundry list of procedural stuff.”

Marion Yuen, member since 1988, said: “I fully support what Tucker has drafted. The message needs to be loud and clear, as Tucker had it:

Black Lives Matter.”

Elliot Hetterly thanked Tucker and added, “I support your statement which is clear and brief. It should not be this hard. We need to approve this now, and there is much more work to be done. This is long overdue.”

The proposed amendment was voted down, with 225 members voting no and 46 members voting yes.



\$2.24/LB	
ZUCCHINI	\$ 4.66
\$1.65/LB	
BANANAS	\$ 1.32
\$.57/LB	
POTATOES	\$ 3.97
\$.78/LB	
BROCCOLI	\$ 4.84
\$1.80/LB	
BRUSSELS PROUTS	\$ 5.15
\$.296/LB	
SPECIAL	
GRAPES GREEN	\$ 7.03
\$.209/LB	
TOMATOES	\$ 2.99
\$1.99/LB	
SUBTOTAL	\$ 36.40
TOTAL	\$ 40.00
CASH	\$ 40.00
CHANGE	\$ 3.60

ILLUSTRATION BY TOMMY KANE

### Temporarily Raising the Markup

The financial pressure on the Coop is partly resulting from increased costs for such things as protective equipment and more paid workers. Meanwhile revenues have dropped because of reduced hours and safety-related restrictions on the number of members who can shop at one time.

To deal with this pressure, Coop staff has proposed raising the Coop’s markup from 21% to 25%. The proposal will be voted on at the August 25 meeting. If it passes it would have the effect of increasing a shopping trip that would normally cost \$50 to \$52.

Two Coop staff members, Receiving Coordinator Margie Lempert and General Coordinator Joe Szladek, presented the markup increase proposal for discussion. “In March, with the suspension of member labor, hiring of members as part-time staff and departure of several full-time staff, the Coop lost 80% of its workforce overnight,” Lempert explained.

“At the same time, COVID-19 protocols required that we reduce hours and limit shopping to 35 members at one time. After the largest shopping week in our history, with sales over \$1.6 million, we fell off a cliff,” Lempert said. “Since then we’ve kept staff healthy, we’re up to 77 shopping hours weekly and our revenues are up to \$750,000 a week.”

But Lempert pointed out that “weekly losses of \$95,000 per week aren’t sustainable. At the current rate of losses, the

Coop’s reserves will be exhausted by May 2021,” she said.

The Coop stopped using member labor out of health concerns. Reintroducing it would cut costs but it also would increase risk, Lempert said. “We have to reintroduce member labor gradually, given the times. We are looking at a small 4% markup increase—from 21% to 25%—to help meet the gap,” she said.

Szladek added that “increasing sales will reduce weekly losses from \$90,000 to \$40,000. We need a short-term strategy. Reducing our weekly loss will extend our financial runway.”

The proposed markup would turn what is today a \$50 shop into a \$52 shop and a \$100 shop into a \$104 shop, Szladek said. “We are discussing an exemption option for people experiencing hardship. We are all more emotionally invested here than a traditional grocery store,” he said.

The markup is a temporary solution, to help cover the gap until we return to member labor. “We want to include a sunset clause,” Szladek added, “where 90 days after we return to member labor this markup ends.”

The Coop’s current goal is to increase weekly sales to \$900,000.” Along with the markup, we also think we can get more hours open and increase people on the shopping floor. All 3 make sure we can make it through 2021,” Szladek said.

Questions and comments included member and long-time staff member Janet Farrell, who said: “I am totally against raising the price 4% because we haven’t tried anything else. I don’t think it’s responsible to say ‘oh, let’s just get more money.’”

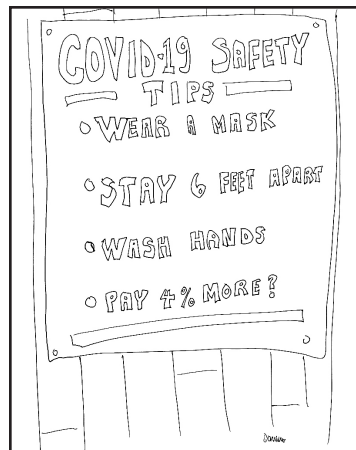


ILLUSTRATION BY JOHN DONOHUE

George Olken stated: “We know that a small price raise will affect our lowest income members. The Coop we love is going to be very different. Will this cause more vulnerable members to not shop?”

Leah Schwartz asked: “This markup doesn’t work for everybody. Can we look back

at our greatest strength, our 17,000 members, and find a feasible way to get our member labor back on track?”

Szladek’s response was: “We all want member labor back, but we have to be prepared for uncertainty. What if we have to pull it back again?”



PHOTO BY ROD MORRISON

**There’s a host of amazing products in the produce aisle.**

### Reports of the General Coordinators

Prior to the agenda items, Eleanor Astrinsky provided a colorful report on the many amazing products now available in the produce aisle, and Joe Holtz presented a preliminary financial report for the past 20 weeks of the fiscal year, compared with the same period a year ago. Sales are \$5.2 million below last year, while expenses are up \$493,000, mostly from hiring temporary staff. This represents a swing of \$1,444,000 from last year.

“This is not a good situation,” Holtz said. “If we maintain weekly cash burn of \$90,000 a week we will lose all the money we have by May 2021.”

Holtz also pointed out that we have more cash in hand at the moment—\$4 million, as opposed to the \$3 million we had last year, thanks to the federal Payroll Protection Plan loan of \$1,454,000 and \$689,000 in increased membership investments we received from members.

“Had we not gotten the [federal rescue money and increased membership investments] we would have \$2 million, not \$4 million. I would encourage members who haven’t yet, to go to our website and learn how to increase owner equity investment.”

One member asked, “Does this mean we will be out of business by May, 2021?”

Holtz responded, “No. It means we have a serious problem and if we don’t increase shopping hours, and increase people coming in to shop, and get our members back to working at the Coop—which is what makes our Coop feel unique and special—we’re in trouble. If we do these things, we can stay in business a long time.” ■



## BOTH MEMBER + SHOPPER, NOT EITHER/OR

PSFC's mission reads: "The Park Slope Food Coop is a member-owned and operated food store..."

At the 7/28 GM, members were asked to be our Better Selves in considering and approving the Black Lives Matter statement. Then, the Coordinators asked us to consider a markup increase to help PSFC's economic recovery. This proposal felt like an austerity measure asked of me as a shopper-customer.

We each are both a member and a shopper. As "an alternative to commercial profit-oriented business," our PSFC challenge is to hold and practice Both aspects vs. Either/Or. At the GM, a small yet significant symbol was that the Coordinators remembered the dollar amount of fresh MOEI recently infused into PSFC but not how many members/member-households made those investments.

I cherish PSFC as a nugget in our collective endeavor towards Another Future that is Possible. At a time when many are receiving packaged food distribution, the psychological and nutritional value of even a modicum of fresh produce cannot be overstated. So, when Coordinator Joe S characterized the proposed markup as affordable since folks are no longer going to restaurants, I asked myself: How many members who currently don't shop at PSFC or shop infrequently might be receiving boxed food distributions and/or standing in a food-pantry line?

Money is critical for PSFC to operate as a store. At the same time, PSFC would have lost its soul if certain members could no longer come to the Coop or afford to shop in it.

I am a Chinese-Asian American, self-identified as POC. A member since 1988 and a Park Slope resident for 18 years (until 2004), I have experienced many phases of PSFC.

Proposals:

- Immediately re-institute the member-labor arrangement in whatever manner feasible.

- The first order of business should be an Audit (not a survey) to look into the well being of each member in each Squad/Committee as well as unattached members, prioritizing those who have not shopped since early March.

- An Audit will show mem-

bers who have transitioned, recovering from COVID-19, grieving losses, or struggling to cover rent, food and other necessities. It likely find Black and Brown members who have not shopped recently residing in clusters/areas due to Brooklyn's segregated housing.

- Since the PSFC process requires two GMs to approve a proposal, the audit should be started by a team of volunteer members with pertinent skills and necessary staff support.

- PSFC proactively uses its vendor relationships and buying power to join forces with mutual-aid groups, pantries and smaller food coops. By leveraging PSFC capabilities, we can expand collaborative buying and allow fresher produce to be more accessible.

Black Lives Matter because not everyone has mattered under the euphemistic "All Lives Matter" approach to which the business and institutional sides of PSFC have often succumbed too easily. However, PSFC has too much history and potential for us to give up. Let's actively work towards Both aspects in a wholistic PSFC.

*Respectfully,  
Marion Yuen*

## VOTING AT THE ZOOM MEETING

Thank you to the people who organized the Zoom General Meeting held on Tuesday, July 28, 2020. It is good to keep an open forum so that Members can be informed about operations at the Coop. This is a useful tool to provide updates via

committee reports, on financial matters and general information regarding the Coop. However the technology is not robust enough to allow for replacing the in-person discussion and voting on proposals and issues.

While we were able to participate via Zoom video last month, this month we were not able to sign on. Another person during the meeting described the identical problem we had, where Zoom did not accept our email address and/or password.

Without the video we could not see the poll questions or polls, and following the issues by voice only was more difficult without seeing people and their faces or even the simple name in a screen box. When it came time to vote, we were not able to vote in confidence on the phone, it was confusing to determine if we were voting on an amendment and how to cast a Yes or No vote. For households with a single computer but multiple Coop members, only one member can vote and not in private.

We suggest that until a robust viable solution is available for people using video and/or voice to attend, that future meetings restrict the agenda to committee reports and operational issues. Voting seems especially problematic using only a non-video connection.

We urge the Coop to continue to explore how to hold a remote meeting while Covid restricts our physical attendance. But we firmly believe that this not a replacement for attending and voting in-person

and especially for those that use non-video means to attend.

Again thanks to those that worked hard on finding and implementing a technological solution. As retired Network Engineers, we understand the challenge. We just don't believe that the current solution supports the ideals of Coop democracy at this time.

*In Cooperation,  
Stewart Pravda and  
Cathy Monblatt*

## MEMBER LABOR

### DEAR MEMBERS,

At the August General Meeting I hope to propose to restore a modified, voluntary and temporary member labor system. I had hoped that the General Coordinators would do this, but since they have not, I hope that we, the members and owners of the Park Slope Food Coop can convince them with our collective vote. There are two reasons that this is important to our Coop. First, the current system of only paid labor is eroding our culture of cooperation and turning our unique Coop into a regular store with all of the spoken and unspoken alienation between staff and customers that we have so beautifully avoided for almost 50 years. Second, because we do not have member labor, we have hired a huge number of new, temporary staff and we still are not open for our full hours, consequently we are losing an incredible amount of money each week—according to Joe Holtz, our General Manager, about \$90,000/week. We

are paying only minimum wage to the temporary staff, thus going back on our values to be an excellent employer. We are also jeopardizing our permanent staff's job security as our financial condition worsens.

I will propose that member labor is returned to solve both problems. I will propose that each area of labor is examined with key staff to make sure that public health and safety protocols are established and easy to follow; the protocols for check out and shopping will no doubt be different from receiving for example. Initially, members will still be able to shop without working and we will offer modest incentives to members to bank work shift credits, for example, credit for 2 full shifts in the future for every 4 hour shift worked voluntarily. I will try to anticipate as many issues as I can in my presentation, but the agenda item specifies that restoring member labor will involve cooperative revision.

My usual work slot is leading the Loan Committee and in that capacity I regularly interact with groups wanting to start a Coop using our model. I had two such conversations this week, one with a group in Connecticut and another in upstate NY. I sent them each a couple of videos that are on YouTube about our Coop. I urge you all to look up these short videos to be reminded of how special and functional our model is. Let's bring it back. Please sign up for the GM and consider voting to restore our model.

*In Cooperation,  
Rachel Porter*

## STATEMENT ON THE COOPERATIVE IDENTITY

### DEFINITION

A cooperative 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

Cooperatives 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 cooperative principles are guidelines by which cooperatives put their values into practice. The International Cooperative Alliance adopted the revised Statement on the Cooperative Identity in 1995.

They are as follows:

1. Voluntary and Open Membership
2. Democratic Member Control
3. Member Economic Participation
4. Autonomy and Independence
5. Education, Training and Information
6. Cooperation Among Cooperatives
7. Concern for Community

REFERENCE: ICA.COOP

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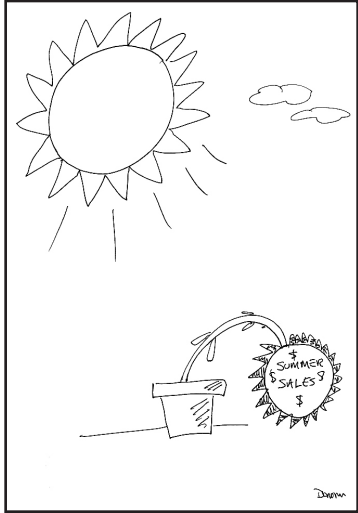
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## Checking in

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ILLUSTRATIONS BY JOHN DONOHUE

good news," Holtz shared that the Coop traditionally experiences a major drop off in sales in July and August when many New Yorkers leave town for summer vacations. "People seem to be staying in town," Holtz said. "As opposed to a week in mid-June when sales were down \$400,000 [from a comparable week the year before], we're only down \$200,000 per week in July."

### More Open Hours and More People in the Store

One "lifeline" that Holtz says he and the other General Coordinators have focused on is increasing the

Coop's hours of operation.

"Tweaks we have made to add a half hour of shopping here or there make a difference," Holtz said. "We're going to need [even] more hours. We used to have exactly 100 hours of shopping per week. Now we have 77 per week." Even if the Coop resumed its pre-COVID-19 hours of operations "100 hours at less volume is still a problem." Holtz said he hoped to find a way for the Coop to expand its hours to as many as 112 hours of operation per week.

Another strategy for increasing revenue has been to allow more shoppers in the store at a given time. Since the Coop reopened, 35 shoppers have been allowed to be inside at the same time.

By the time of publication, this number has increased to 38. Holtz stressed that any increases to capacity would be made slowly so that staff and members could assess how safe they feel about the crowds. While an additional three shoppers at a time may not sound like much, by Holtz's estimates it could lead to an 8.5% increase in sales every day.

In other efforts to speed up the flow of shopping and get more shoppers in the door, the produce aisle now allows

14 people at a time (seven per side) and aisles two through seven, once limited to four shoppers, now allow five at a time.

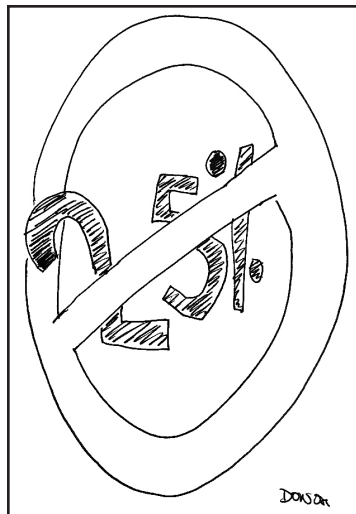
### Member Labor

Another focus of Holtz and the General Coordinators' is reducing labor costs by bringing back member labor. They sent a survey to members



**To reduce labor costs, the Coop is focused on bringing back member labor, which is currently performed by hard-working temps like Jonathan Landreth.**

to assess people's comfort level with this idea. Holtz says he hopes that the expense of hourly workers is temporary. But "as of this moment there's no date for reducing the temp labor force," Holtz said



### Raising prices

The July General Meeting included a discussion of increasing the Coop's markup from 21% to 25%. Holtz says

he worries about this option, which he wrote about in the July 10 Coordinators' Corner in the *Gazette*. The proposed markup will be voted on at the August meeting. The additional markup would, for example, turn a \$50 shop into a \$52 shop.

Our Coop is known for excellent prices and is premised on the idea that by working together we can keep prices low. While an increase would possibly help us financially, the concern is that it could be a burden on those members/owners who can least afford it.

Higher prices also would be a risk to the Coop in a less obvious way. As our prices rise, some members could choose to shop elsewhere.

Holtz would prefer to focus on radically increasing the Coop's hours of operation, restoring member labor and finding safe ways to allow more shoppers in the door—including allowing more in at a time and finding ways, once inside, for shoppers to move through the store and check-out more efficiently.

### Delivery

When asked about delivery and curbside pickup options, Holtz said he isn't opposed but that "the General Coordinators have reasons why we haven't done it yet, we've had our hands full."

Holtz referred to May 21 Coordinators' Corner *Gazette* article written by General Coordinator Ann Herpel in which she laid out many of the challenges of initiating a delivery program. Holtz was quick to

clarify that the piece does not mean the General Coordinators are opposed to the idea.

"We have this unserved body of the membership," Holtz said. "We have not been fast to develop this delivery."

Just before COVID-19, the General Meeting approved a pilot delivery program for members with disabilities. But, due to member labor suspension, it has yet to launch.

Holtz noted that the Flatbush Food Coop has offered delivery for years, and that delivery programs introduce new challenges and labor needs.

"I recognize the efficiency of shoppers gathering their own food, it's the basis of why supermarkets were invented 100 years ago," he said, referencing the historic local market system where store clerks gathered items for shoppers and often delivered them. That model, Holtz underscores, included a high cost of labor that led to the self-service model of today. "When you don't do that gathering of food, someone else has to do it."

Holtz encouraged members to submit delivery and curbside pickup ideas to the General Meeting agenda. "It's fine for members to tell [the General Coordinators] that though we appreciate you, we really need you to do this. Tell us more—not just through the *Gazette*, but at the General Meeting." ■

PHOTOS BY ZACHARY SCHULMAN



**Increases in shopper volume will be made slowly so that members and staff like Carline Aurelus can assess how safe they feel.**



## RECIPE

## Recipe for French Toast as Served at Le Succulent



PHOTO BY PETER GRANT

**Mélanie Delcourt's famous French toast has become a weekend staple at Le Succulent, her Fifth Avenue bistro.**

By Peter Grant

When 2020 began, Mélanie and Xavier Delcourt had good reason to believe that they had finally achieved their dream of running a successful Park Slope restaurant.

After a rave review in the New York Times, Le Succulent, a bistro on Fifth Avenue between 1st and 2nd streets, was packed with diners. "People would come and stand in line outside because we didn't have enough space," said Ms. Delcourt, a native of Cameroon who studied at Le Cordon Bleu in Paris and specializes in the fusion of French and West African cooking.

Of course the pandemic changed everything. Like most Park Slope restaurants, Le Succulent is struggling to survive with takeout and sidewalk tables. "Covid came in and shot me down," she said.

French toast is one of Le Succulent's Saturday and Sunday brunch specialties.



PHOTO BY JOHN MIDGLEY

**Mélanie and Xavier Delcourt, owners of Le Succulent bistro on Fifth Avenue.**

Ms. Delcourt makes two types of brioche, one with butter and the other with olive oil, and says she prefers to make French toast using the olive oil brioche.

Le Succulent serves French toast with a homemade compote. Diners often add syrup or confectioners sugar. Ms. Delcourt said it was a favorite of her and Xavier's four children when they were growing up. "Everything is house-made and handmade," she said.

**The following makes about four to six pieces depending on bread size.**

### Ingredients

- 2.8 cups whole milk
- 3 eggs
- 1¾ oz. cane sugar
- ¼ tsp. vanilla extract
- ⅛ tsp. cinnamon
- Brioche

Mix the milk, eggs and sugar, leave to infuse in the refrigerator for two hours.

After two hours, add the remaining ingredients, mix well.

Put the brioche in the mixture until the liquid is absorbed.

Place it in a frying pan with a little butter over low heat until the brioche is golden brown, cooking for 3 minutes on each side.

Serve with one fried egg and whipped cream. ■