

## Stretch Skills

BY ELLEN MICHEL

**S**tretch skills. Years ago I sat on the board of my local co-op, Bloomingfoods, at a time when we were about to embark on a member loan campaign. I remember Bill Gessner of CDS Consulting Co-op counseling us about how to deal with the uncertainty of making that ask. “I encourage you to stretch,” he said.

That simple way of putting it stayed with me. It’s something I think about whenever confronted with a challenge, and it’s one of the reasons I find involvement with food co-ops endlessly fascinating and instructive. We develop our stretch skills.

It can be a stretch to imagine ways forward during difficult times. It can be a stretch to find the words to use when describing what makes food co-ops uniquely important. It can be a stretch to make the ask—to find the allies and ambassadors who support the work we do. Stretching feels good, yet is sometimes painful. Stretching again often eases the pain.

At the Crossroads Cooperative Summit held in Indianapolis in early November, we heard from Judy Ziewacz, retiring President and CEO of NCBA CLUSA. She described the work that the National Cooperative Business Association (NCBA) and its international programs (CLUSA) undertook in 2016, when celebrating their 100th anniversary. Seeking to define their purpose for the next hundred years, the board embarked on a strategic visioning process. Judy described this in *The Cooperative Business Journal*: “Focusing on cooperative enterprise as a ‘Force for Good,’ this endeavor revealed a desire to assert the relevance of co-ops in a contemporary context, while enhancing cross-sector collaboration toward a shared goal.”

One way we can stretch is to focus on the ‘Force for Good’ aspect of what we all do. For food co-ops, this also means becoming more familiar with those vital apex organizations like NCBA CLUSA that help connect co-ops across business sectors. Find your allies throughout the broad co-op landscape—it’s a beneficial stretch. •

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## 2018 CGN BOARD RETREAT

In March 2017, the CGN board met for a retreat just before and during the Up & Coming Food Co-op conference. During two days of deep conversation, we identified our chief initiative: working to ensure that Cooperative Grocer Network becomes increasingly vital and visible, delivering an informative and inspiring experience to stakeholders.

Building on our mission, we articulated a vision: CGN is a learning community committed to nourishing the people who work in, govern, and support food co-ops.

- We protect, preserve, and curate elements of our history to broadcast and educate about food co-ops.
- We share vital insights, information, and resources.
- We explore the challenges, successes, and changes facing our industry.
- We partner with other co-ops and support organizations.
- We work to build a more just and equitable world, in which cooperatives thrive as inclusive communities.

This coming March, we'll meet again in Milwaukee, holding our retreat just before Up & Coming 2018. We will again be asking questions such as these: How might we:

- think in innovative ways about the work we do and the value we deliver?
- create more efficient, sustainable, and trustworthy systems?
- encourage others to continuously improve the co-op experience?
- better engage with our members, sponsors, and vendors?
- do a great job of telling food co-op stories?
- provide a context for quality information, education, and training?
- build excitement, innovation, and energy?
- grow and maintain CGN as a valued and vital authority platform?

We always welcome your feedback! [admin@grocer.coop](mailto:admin@grocer.coop)