

Connections



Northwest Cooperative Development Center

Fostering community economic development through the cooperative business model

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Cooperative Housing Offers Senior Care Solutions

“Baby Boomers” are aging and society needs to find solutions to the issues surrounding their care. This is a hot topic in co-op development circles, as we realize cooperatives offer a variety of solutions to address elder needs.

Examples of identified benefits include: 1) The community spirit found in housing co-ops has been shown to prevent age-related declines in mental function, 2) Ownership of residences allows a portion of eldercare costs to be kept in the family as equity, and 3) Housing co-ops can provide a concentrated market thereby reducing costs of care through bulk purchasing, possibly through worker-owned homecare co-ops.

Recently, NWCDC has been involved in forums that seek to share best practices. In May, Clara Berridge represented NWCDC at the 7th Annual Senior Cooperative Housing Conference in Minneapolis-St. Paul, MN. Not coincidentally, the Twin Cities are home to 40 senior housing cooperatives - nearly half the national total. The conference emphasized creating community and encouraging board and committee participation.

During the month of May NWCDC also had the honor of hosting a delegation from national organization of Swedish housing co-ops, HSB, that boasts over half a million members. The delegation was specifically interested in learning about cooperative development trends in the U.S. While they were here, NWCDC presented on the U.S. co-op movement, followed by a discussion of housing issues shared by both countries.

Later the delegation of 22 toured the Silver Glen housing cooperative, a 123-unit complex near Seattle.

The Silver Glen senior housing co-op was the result of efforts by Group Health Co-op's Senior Caucus, and shows a great example of how co-ops can branch out into new areas to help meet their members' needs. Silver Glen offers spacious units, a wide variety of activities and amenities for its members, and a cost that rivals the cost of a simple apartment at market rates.

After the inspiring tour, we all enjoyed an evening of food and friendship with our new overseas contacts. It was a pleasant ending to a day filled with discovery. Both NWCDC and the Swedish delegation had much better understandings of our respective cooperative movements, along with personal contacts to keep us connected.



Silver Glen In Bellevue WA



NWCDC is a 501(c)3 providing development services for co-ops. Founded in 1979, the Center serves WA, OR, ID and HI

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Board Development: Keys to Successful Cooperation

The interconnected building blocks for economic cooperation are: the *membership*, which elects the *Board*, which hires the *management*, which operates the *business* to serve the *membership*.

Strong, effective Boards are critical for the successful operation of all co-ops. The Board is the conduit for the membership to govern the organization. Boards provide a venue for accountability both legal and social.

A co-op's entire purpose for being is to provide services desired by the membership. If a co-op's Board cannot mobilize the organization to provide the service, then the co-op has lost its reason for being.

According to the NWCDC's Co-op Development Consultant Mary Webb, "Boards are living things with living people.

A Board must constantly work together to develop their relationships and skills to improve their usefulness."

Like any asset in any business, Boards require investment. A Board of Directors is just a group of people until catalyzed by the labor of individual members. Boards require investments of time, education and team building. This development includes activities both inside and outside of the formal "Boardroom."

Never are these needs more apparent than for start-ups whose Board is new and ever-evolving. First a *Steering or Exploratory Committee* is formed, then (hopefully) a *Founding or Incorporating Board* launches the co-op. Next

a *Managing Board* transitions over time into, finally, a *Governing Board*. It's imperative Directors both understand the industry and the business operation but also comprehend their role as being a strategic one.

Boards are living things with living people

Michael Toelle, the CHS Chairman, outlines the goals, objectives and philosophy of CHS's board development, "Board commitment to professional development helps cooperatives fulfill their visions and missions."

While a major source of satisfaction, directorship is neither simple nor easy. Boards ought to have all available tools to meet any potential organizational or marketplace challenges.

Board trainings can appear in a variety of ways ranging from the facilitation of a strategic plan to the training of roles and goals.

While a Board is comprised of diverse individuals with a range of expertise and experience, assessing the developmental needs of the Board is both an art and a science.

The Center has worked with Boards at a variety of developmental stages in diverse industries. Group dynamics are a complicated beast and often providing an unprejudiced third party view can be a critical ingredient in everything from educational training to conflict resolution.

Center staff would be enthusiastic about meeting with you regarding your co-op's Board to assess and to develop customized services to meet your organization's needs.

Co-op Board's "Circle of Responsibilities"

- Represent members
- Establish policy
- Supervise senior management
- Oversee asset acquisition/development
- Preservation of cooperative character
- Assess the co-op's performance
- Inform members

From the USDA's Management Tip Series
by James Baarda (CIR 61)



Co-op Business Development: Teaching the Next Generation

CooperationWorks!, a national cooperative of 18 centers for cooperative business development, is pleased to announce the 2007 professional development training program: the *Art & Science of Starting a Cooperative*.

The program is based on two, five-day intensive training sessions. Session One was held last November. Session Two will be held September 9-14, 2007, in Madison, WI.

Session Two will address the steps of new co-op business development, co-op law and finance, and the development of stakeholder capacity to own and operate a successful cooperative enterprise.



Session 1, Class of 2006

This is the most extensive training program on cooperative business development available in the U.S.

The program is designed to deliver the best of what has been learned about starting

new cooperatively based enterprises.

It brings together some of the most experienced co-op business development practitioners in the country for a five day immersion in cooperatives and the best practices of new co-op development.

This is the most extensive training program on cooperative business development available in the U.S. designed to build cooperative business development skills.

The program features a rigorous curriculum and includes lectures, interactive sessions, case study analysis and tours to local co-ops to talk directly with co-op stakeholders about the development process.

Participation in Session One is not required, Session One be held in the Spring of 2008. Registration for Session Two will open on August 1. Space is limited

For more information about the program, contact:
Audrey Malan
CooperationWorks! Executive Director
307.655.9162 or cw@vcn.com

Shop the Frontier Helps Local Co-op Entrepreneurs

Rural artisan cooperatives have begun joining forces with a non-profit e-commerce website. The website enables rural artists and entrepreneurs to expand their business opportunities to new markets.

Stone Soup, a nonprofit organization based in eastern Washington, created www.ShopTheFrontier.org in 2005 to encourage rural entrepreneurs to sell their products and services online, thereby reaching a broader global marketplace. Teaming up with artist cooperatives in the Northwest was the natural next step.

Rural artists and entrepreneurs, like Cascading Threads Quilt Boutique, are utilizing *Shop the Frontier* as their online store. Cascading Threads, a cooperative business, is representative of how an internet presence



is helping women in rural areas transform a passion, in this case quilting, into a business enterprise.

Shop the Frontier offers an immediate service and retail outlet that might not otherwise have occurred for this fledgling business within a reasonable time frame.

Cooperatives have the opportunity to join *Shop the Frontier* at little or no cost. By linking shopthefrontier.org on their site or displaying a physical advertisement in their storefront, *Shop the Frontier* offers a dis-

For more info on how *Shop the Frontier* can assist with marketing, Stone Soup welcomes artisans and/or artisan co-ops from rural Washington and Idaho to contact them at 877.807.7278 or info@shopthefrontier.com



New RCDG Projects

Each year the Center applies for funding through USDA's Rural Cooperative Development Grant Program (RCDG).

"Established under the 1996 Farm Bill, the RCDG is awarded to non-profit corporations and institutions of higher education for the primary purpose of improving the economic condition of rural areas through the development of new co-ops and improving operations of existing co-ops. Emphasis is placed on those projects with high potential to improve rural business activity through the cooperative form of business (Building Better Rural Places, Jan. 2001)."

This spring NWCDC's Board of

Directors approved 11 new projects for inclusion in our RCDG proposal.

Since reorganizing in 2000, NWCDC has been working on our capacity to deliver technical assistance to the four states in our service territory. This year we are pleased to have all states (WA, OR, ID, HI) included in the RCDG application.

The USDA will issue notification of funding by September 15th. If awarded the grant, the NWCDC will initiate work with projects beginning October 1, 2007, when funds will become available.

Proposed projects include:

Connections

Our Quarterly Newsletter is the source for cooperative news and information around the Pacific Northwest. To subscribe, please email your contact information to ben@nwcdc.coop

NWCDC is building a strong foundation of cooperatives around the Northwest serving sectors ranging from food co-ops to renewable energy.

Connections is distributed to over 900 organizations and individuals. If your co-op is interested in submitting an article for publication please contact: ben@nwcdc.coop

For more information about co-ops and how to get involved in the Northwest cooperative community, please visit our website:

www.nwcdc.coop



Hawaii	Idaho	Oregon	Washington
Co-op Dev. Workshops (Molokai)	Grow Your Own Food Co-op Workshops	Manufactured Home Park Co-op	Community Energy Partnership
Home Care Workers	Lost River Valleys Marketing Co-op	Pacific NW Organic Seed	Mountain Community [Food] Co-op
Kona Coffee Growers	Pacific NW Organic Seed	Pendleton Community [Food] Co-op	Pacific NW Organic Seed
Pacific NW Organic Seed		Umpqua Bio-Alternatives Co-op	

Small Forest Landowners Become Firewise

Thanks to support from the Okanogan Conservation District, the Methow Forest Owners' Cooperative (MFOC) will be able to offer discounted memberships this summer. As part of the membership fee, one of the benefits of becoming a member of MFOC is an initial two-hour consultation with a forester. This summer the Okanogan Conservation District will be picking up the cost of the consultation, thereby making it possible for the Co-op to lower the membership fee to \$20.

The MFOC was created to provide a coordinated effort to help small-scale forest owners promote forest health while managing risk of impact from wildfires. At a recent Firewise workshop sponsored by MFOC and the Conservation District, it was pointed out that the more people who participate in clearing their property of potential fire dangers, the more likely their efforts will pay off in avoiding major fire damage. It's hoped that this generous offer will spur more people to become involved with the Co-op and their neighbors to reduce fire hazards.

For more information on the work of the Methow Forest Owners' Cooperative, please contact their general manager, Lorah Waters, 509.923.1944. or <http://www.okanogan1.com/forest/>



Lessons from Country Natural Beef

In May NWCDC's Andrew McLeod attended the spring meeting of Country Natural Beef (CNB). The 3-day event in Boise provided an inside look at the workings of one of our region's most unusual cooperatives. CNB engages in consensus decision-making with a group of over 100 cattle ranchers from throughout the Western U.S.

Country Natural Beef reaches consensus on a scale that I had previously believed to be nearly impossible, so I had high expectations for my visit. I was not disappointed. Watching this co-op's membership approach consensus was an amazing process, which gave me some insights into why they are able to work together in this way.

A sense of necessity is the most important ingredient. When founders Doc and Connie Hatfield first called together a group of fellow ranchers two decades ago, they knew that their way of life was in trouble. Unless they could find a way to collectively tackle their problems, the changing beef industry would soon drive them out of business.

They saw an opportunity to build a brand identity around sustainable practices through a company then called Oregon Country Beef, and the rest is history: 2006 sales reach \$40 million per year, with double digit growth. Membership has expanded to stretch from North Dakota to New Mexico to Hawaii.

A common interest must be matched with an ability to work together, and here is where CNB really stands out. Three days in a windowless room is a torment even for a city kid like me. Their use of colorful stories and humor made it tolerable. The facilitator often used these stories (which often

involved fishing) to ease the transition back into business. Humor also worked wonders at keeping the peace. Even at the end of the meeting, everyone was relaxed and respectful. The home stretch of consensus can often be frustrating, but as I looked around the room, there was little evidence of tension.

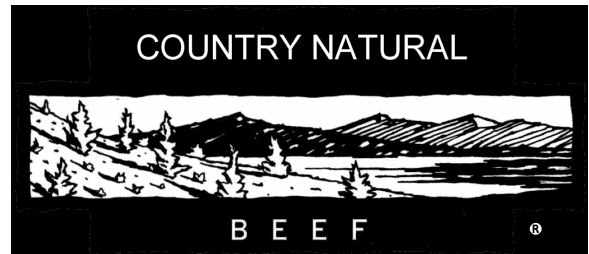
Disagreements were resolved with an ease that seemed almost magical. There are significant differences of opinion among members, but CNB has created an atmosphere in which they can laugh at those differences and work through them collaboratively.

The meeting began with several educational sessions. These significant investments in time focused the conversation. Not only did this increase the general level of knowledge, but it gave people a common point of reference from which to make decisions.

The way they deal with cell

phone interruptions is a stroke of genius: anyone whose phone rings during the meeting owes a bottle of Pendleton whiskey to the facilitator of the next meeting, who then shares it with the meeting participants after the days business is over. This mild punishment provides an opportunity to contribute.

Last but certainly not least, I was deeply impressed by the way they honored people in their meetings, by bringing them into the center of the circle for a standing ovation. This acknowledgement of contributions was powerful and moving. Many organizations of a similar size



(or smaller) experience a concentration of responsibility, and the way they consciously express gratitude is part of why CNB has such a great crop of leadership.

Country Natural Beef has clearly developed a community of common interest. This shows itself in their willingness to take time to hear each other's thoughts in the opening and closing circles, which each lasted for more than an hour and took pains to include the voices of every individual present. Frequent updates about births and other happenings back home, and prayers to an injured member, told others this support will be there for them in their own time of need.

A major obstacles to consensus is a lack of trust, and these practices help change a large group of individual ranchers into a community of common interest.



3 generations of the Pratt family



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CO-OP EVENTS:

- **CooperationWorks!** 2007 professional development Session 2, Sept. 9-14, 2007, For more info contact cw@vcn.com
- October is **Co-op month**
- **Western workers conference:** This event is open to all who are interested in democratic workplaces and collective management, held in Portland OR, Oct. 12-14, for more info visit : www.west.usworker.coop

To post your co-op event please email us 3 months in advance of the event

For more information contact NWCDC at 360.943.4241 or diane@nwcdc.coop

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