

COMMENTS OF RUSTY SIVILS TO THE FBFC BOARD, OCT. 19, 2017

I'd like to bring up again the idea of setting aside one percent of gross sales to be given as grants to local non-profit groups that would be nominated by co-op members, and selected by a vote of members. The Board could establish this program, or the Manager could, or it could be adopted by a vote of the members themselves, if it were submitted to them as a ballot question at next year's annual membership meeting. Ten years ago I had begun the process of placing the proposal on the ballot via a petition of owners, but when I saw that the Board was refusing to implement other ballot questions approved by the owners, I gave up on that route and on democratic governance at the Co-op in general. However, I want to promote this idea since I feel so strongly that it would be very beneficial for the Co-op as well as for the community, and would be such a natural fit for the Co-op. I'm distributing to the Board copies of the petition that Cicada Brokaw and I drew up ten years ago, which might serve as a starting point for thinking about implementing the idea. This would be a commitment by the Co-op, just as we are committed to pay our staff for their work and our suppliers for their goods, we would be making a (much smaller) commitment to the community and to our members to make these awards.

Regarding our staff, Michael's tragic death has prompted me to think about them and their position here at the Co-op. Although we pretend to be a consumer cooperative, we are realistically a little corporation, a business run by a paid staff, with little input from our "owners". Yet our staff enjoy a sense of community not common to the employees of most businesses. This is a good thing, and should be nurtured. One thought I have had is that our employees are the most over-qualified group of grocery workers I have ever encountered, and I would like to suggest that the Co-op offer them an additional benefit: That the Co-op will pay the tuition of any course an employee wants to take at any local accredited school or institution, the cost of which not to exceed the cost of in-state tuition for one three-semester hour course at UNCA. Such a benefit might encourage staff members to pursue their personal and professional goals, and might help to engender a "sense of right livelihood" as stated in our mission statement.