

Thank You, Nancy Casady!

BY KAREN ZIMBELMAN



Nancy Casady was introduced to cooperatives when she was hired as the general manager at Ocean Beach People's Organic Food Co-op in 1997. But to that job she brought a lifelong dedication to activism and to whole, natural foods. Her passion for sustainability, justice, and citizen-focused political action was a natural fit with the San Diego co-op, and she enthusiastically brought her commitment to building a better world to the co-op and the entire U.S. food co-op community.

Nancy Casady first encountered the natural foods industry when she and her husband Derek Casady owned and managed a natural foods grocery store in San Diego called Casady's. When she became general manager at Ocean Beach Co-op, the co-op's annual sales were \$4.7 million, and a decade-long planned co-op expansion project had stalled.

Her leadership helped guide the co-op through a complicated process that involved buying two neighboring properties, tearing down the buildings on those properties, and then designing and building one of the first "green" buildings as the co-op's new store. The \$2.5 million project was completed on time and within budget. Even more remarkably, the store was closed only one day, the day of the actual move. After opening in its new building, the old co-op store was razed and converted into a parking lot (with a permeable surface).

The new store featured early commercial solar panels that Casady loves to show visitors. In its new location, the co-op's sales grew to \$13.8 million by 2016, with 115 staff members and 14,000 member-owners. Through her tenure, the co-op always maintained a net profit, despite strong growth and many challenges. This made it possible to pay off its building loan more than seven years early, at a savings of over \$1.4 million.

Nancy Casady's influence and impact extend far beyond Southern California. She was a founding member of the Pacific Cooperative Grocers Association, served on the board of directors of the National Co+op Grocers (NCG) for four years, and was on the founding board of the NCG Development Co+operative. She has been a friend and mentor to many co-op managers and has willingly made herself available to help and support new co-ops on numerous occasions.

In 2012, Casady was appointed by Governor Jerry Brown to the California Board of Food and Agriculture, and she continues in that role for a second four-year term. Locally, she is a founding member of the Wild Willow Sustainable Farming Education Center, a working farm in San Diego that trains new farmers and provides hands-on growing experiences for kindergarten through 8th grade students. Casady is a longtime anti-GMO activist, and she and Derek also continue as local organizers for climate mobilization.

Casady officially retired as general manager as of the end of December 2016, but she has continued as the project manager for the co-op's expansion—opening the O.B. Garden Café, scheduled for August 2017.

In the words of Jamie Decker, the co-op's financial manager, "Working closely with Nancy Casady for over 20 years has been a completely rewarding, educational, and enjoyable experience. Under her professional leadership, the co-op has evolved into a credible business that has earned the respect of the local community as well as the larger co-op world." Nancy Casady, thanks for your contributions, enthusiasm and for challenging and supporting a better world through cooperatives! Thanks for help from Jim Kase, Jamie Decker, and others at Ocean Beach Co-op.

□

