



Rashaun Ellis

Place of Employment/Position: Produce Manager at Daily Groceries Co-op, contributing writer at Flagpole Magazine

Education (degree, major, training, etc.): I have a BA in journalism with a minor in ceramic art. I completed my internship at Twin Oaks Community, an income-sharing intentional community (“commune”) in Louisa, VA.

How many years have you lived in the Athens area? I moved here on February 4, 2010.

How many years have you been a member of Daily Groceries Co-Op? A year and a half! I’ve been working here since November of 2012.

2016 Daily Board Application Questions

1. Why would you like to serve on the Daily Groceries Co-Op Board?

I want to be a board member because I want to see our co-op grow to become the downtown grocery store that Athens needs. I want Daily to become a community space where everyone in Athens feels welcome and able to shop for their entire home and family. Being an employee and department manager puts me in touch with our customers and community members who want deeper involvement with the co-op, and I believe that my closeness to the community would help the board better serve the city of Athens. I believe that the Daily Co-op Board would benefit greatly from adding economic and ethnic diversity to their membership, especially as we now plan to expand our co-op and get more people through our doors. I want to make Daily Groceries Co-op a genuinely accessible store for the entire city of Athens.

2. Describe your professional, volunteer, and community involvement experience that could benefit the Daily Groceries Co-Op board in doing its work.

As an employee of the co-op, I know what our customers are looking for on our shelves, and I know what they are willing to pay. I’m not a rich person by any stretch, and I regularly experience the lack of accessibility that keeps shoppers out of our store and at places like Kroger. As a journalist I am able to communicate my thoughts clearly and precisely, and I am able to listen to and comprehend the words and needs of others. I spent most of my twenties living in community in the Northeast, first at Twin Oaks Community and then with The Finders (now called Open Circle) in Culpeper, VA, and Takoma Park, MD. After that I lived on a farm located on a land trust called Blueberry Hill in Vienna, VA. I’m well acquainted with living closely with others and sharing resources, not to mention the sometimes exhaustive (but always worth it) processes of collaborating with others to make decisions and meet goals. Every

commune I lived with used consensus as their decision-making process, and at Twin Oaks we had almost 98 members when I was there. I can listen, I can go slow, I can rethink my decisions, and I can admit when I am wrong. These qualities are key in any cooperative decision-making process. I feel that my writing job and my unique life experience put me in touch with people in the community who we want to see walk through our doors – i.e., young locals with the money and time to contribute to our co-op. We have to find a way to connect with them and get them to join us in providing unadulterated food for Athens, and I believe that I can help with that.

3. Describe your experiences working collaboratively in a group setting.

A few years ago I volunteered with Food Not Bombs here in town, and while they are an anarchist organization I feel that the experience was very valuable for learning how to work collaboratively. Initiative, communication, and humility were key amongst the volunteers, seeing as how we had no leader. If someone had a good idea they were encouraged to present it to the group, and if everyone was on board with the idea then it was up to that volunteer to see it through. If people took issue with something, it was important to stay humble and remember that our endgame was to feed the public, not to be the one with the best ideas. At Twin Oaks there were many, many instances of collaborative work, from food processing shifts to organizing and planning the annual Women's Gathering. My strength was layout and design, so my primary job was to update the look of the mailer and website, as well as writing fresh copy for both. Others were powerhouses when it came to fixing up the retreat site or scheduling performers, and we all knew that our roles were vital to making the gathering happen. No one's job was unimportant.

4. Describe a time when you were successful working collaboratively in a group setting and a time when you were not.

Every day I am successful at working collaboratively with my co-workers here at the co-op. We have a staff of about 17 people, and we support each other by helping out wherever we can. I'm the produce manager but I can also perform all of the duties of a cashier. All of our staff members are pretty much Renaissance Men, and it is incredibly necessary to the co-op's success. I also think I did a good job of being on an ad hoc committee for the Co-op board during the Meat Debacle. The committee was made of people who had differing opinions and levels of passion for the issue, and I think that we all did a marvelous of listening to each other, listening to the members and customers who reached out to us, and working together to reach our decision in the end.

I'd say my last failed attempt at working collaboratively in a group setting was probably when I worked as a fundraiser for the Human Rights Campaign in Washington, DC. We were door-to-door canvassers and it was the height of summertime, and the organizational structure was the traditional manager-and-underlings setup. I was expected to bring in a certain amount of donations by the end of each work day but physically I was not up to the task, not to mention that I had a pretty big bone to pick with the HRC. I saw the payment structure as unfair and exploitative, and as a LBGT+ person I was personally offended by certain positions they'd taken as an organization. Basically, me and the HRC were not a good fit.

5. The Daily Groceries Co-Op Board does not deal with operational matters. It does deal with overall policies that identify and guide the mission of the organization. How will you maintain the larger vision without being distracted by day-to-day operational issues?

That is a fantastic question for a person who is also a department manager! I think the best way for me to be a board member while keeping my other responsibilities to the co-op separate would be through proper training and guidance from my fellow board members. As a department manager I greatly appreciate our board's adherence to staying out of operational issues, as it allows the staff to be creative and use their unique knowledge as food retailers to maximize growth and profit for the co-op. I intend to stay very committed to that.

6. Who does the Daily Groceries Co-Op serve and in what ways? Do you see that changing in the next five or ten years? If so, how?

On paper, Daily Co-op serves its members and the community of Athens, GA. As far as who is actually walking through the door, it's mostly well-to-do people who live in the immediate vicinity of the co-op. If Daily is able to move into a new space, I see our customers and membership growing to include low-income members of our community and people of color. I can say from my own experience that I did not feel entirely welcome the first time I walked into the co-op back in 2010, as I was unemployed and decidedly ratty-looking, and I believe that at our current size we can't really do the outreach to effect the culture change needed to let low-income and ethnic members of our community know that they are welcome. (That's not to say that staff and customers are not friendly, but it would be simply untrue to say that our public perception is that of a store that anyone can walk in.) I believe that we should pursue student dollars and engage with the university, but not to the detriment of providing for our loyal local customers. I hate that anyone in this town could imagine us to be anything that could be construed as elite or private, and I want us to serve our entire community if we can.

7. Is there anything else you would like to add?

I have a B.A., yes, but I love my job at the co-op and I want to do what I can to increase our reach across the city of Athens. I do my job out of love for my community and desire to effect real change on a ground-floor level, and I want to see everyone in this city be able to join us and shop with us. I want us to be able to offer low-income and free memberships in the future, and I want to bring back a volunteer program. I like cooperatives and community because I am very passionate about not giving money to corporations that have no investment in the communities they serve. If I could, I wouldn't shop anywhere else. I want to join the board so that one day, maybe that can actually happen for me and the whole city.