



Steep Hill Food Co-op

As part of Saskatchewan Co-operative Association's ongoing series of co-operative profiles, we interviewed Gerry Yakimoski, manager of Steep Hill. Gerry has been involved with three co-operative food stores (Magpie Symbiotic Food Co-op, Steep Hill and Prairie Gold) in Saskatoon since their beginnings in the 1970s and 80s. Magpie and Prairie Gold have since closed. Gerry believes the reasons that people join today are often very similar to that of the 1980s: We want to have local, organic, cheaper foods that are easy to find all in one friendly little store.

Steep Hill Food Co-operative
730 Broadway Avenue
Saskatoon, SK S7H 0L2
Phone: (306) 664-4455
Fax: (306) 664-4595
<http://steephill.sasklife.com>

Where is your co-operative located?

730 Broadway Avenue in Saskatoon.

When was it established?

We opened for business in October 1978.

What is the Steep Hill Food Co-op?

Steep Hill is a natural and organic bulk food co-operative.

What community need does the Steep Hill Food Co-op address?

We source and sell locally and/or organically grown foods and earth-friendly soaps and taxables. It was established to create a storefront where people could find and sell healthy foods and earth friendly products for a lower price (wherever possible) and to create a place where at least a few local natural and/or organic producers could market their products.

Who are the members of the co-operative? How do they participate in the co-operative?

There are approximately 900 members that include young families, all age groups both male and female, university students and professors, local neighborhood populace, doctors, lawyers, teachers, administrators, technicians, politicians and so on. These people participate by shopping, which supports both local producers and local small business. About 150 members participate by helping in the store on a regular (or irregular) basis; they package bulk foods, clean, recycle cardboard and compost, and shelve items for sale.



What makes Steep Hill unique?

We are unique because there is no owner; we are a co-op in the truest sense of the word.

What have the greatest successes of the Co-operative been? How do you feel they were achieved?

We have been in business for over 30 years. Many people who shop here find like-minded people and become friends, share food prep ideas, etc. I feel we have achieved this, and much more, by remaining small. We are personally interested in our members/customers and share time by working together in a small space. We also invite members to two potluck suppers a year. Usually about 30 people come and share good food and time. In 1991, we received the Saskatchewan Environmental Award for Environment-Economy Integration. In 2009 Steep Hill was voted the People's Choice "Best Eco-Friendly Store" in Planet S Magazine.

***What do you find inspiring in your work at Steep Hill?***

I enjoy the people, their stories and food related ideas, as well as trying to fulfill their needs. As a small group of 12 people back in 1978, we were able to make this store happen and continue to flourish into a happy, thriving community and storefront.

“ We are personally interested in our members/customers and share time by working together in a small space. ”

What challenges did Steep Hill face during its development or does it continue to experience now?

The first 16 years were the biggest challenge financially as sales were low and slow. Enough people continued to support us and tell their family, friends and neighbors about our store, though, so we became a thriving business in the Broadway district.

***What do you envision for Steep Hill in the next five years?***

We plan to continue to do what we are doing. We do not believe bigger is better. We do not advertise other than by word of mouth and being a part of the wonderful Broadway district.

How can people find out more about your co-operative?

People can come into the store and the staff will gladly answer any questions they may have. We also have a website cared for by two of our members: <http://steephill.sasklife.com>