

## **November 2007 Board Perspective by Sonny Eboigbe**

The recently concluded Board of Directors election again reaffirms the nobility of our democratic process. The Board Candidate and Nominating Committee along with the Election Committee did an excellent job to ensure the integrity of our electoral process.

As you are well aware, Board members come from the body of owners. These are owners who out of a burning desire to contribute to the well being of the Coop, stepped up to the plate to serve on the Board as volunteers. The Board is not and should never be misconstrued as an elitist group. It is simply an adult group of people seven in number, who are elected from the body of owners. Their role is to formulate policies and monitor and ensure the solvency of the Coop. They serve for 3-terms at three years each for a maximum of nine years. These owners take the first initiative by declaring their desire to run for the Board. Serving on the Board is in the coop ideology, is the ultimate expression of volunteerism.

The process of running for the Board is very simple and streamlined. The prospective Board candidate picks up the board packet from the customer service desk and turns in the required forms on or before the nominated dates. When qualified, the candidates get an opportunity to meet with owners and customers. Dubbed “Meet the candidate Night”, it offers opportunity for the candidates to introduce themselves to the owners. There is usually music, food and presentation by staff. The next phase of the electoral process is the “Town Hall” meeting where candidates are asked prepared structured questions in random order and then is opened to the owners to ask further questions of some or all candidates. Candidates begin campaigning afterwards outside the store with the owners in a polite and non-intrusive, and non-bothering manner. Candidates are required to maintain a very high ethical standard. The campaign effort is singular where a candidate articulates what he/she will do if elected rather than what their “opponents” did or did not do. Candidates do not make derogatory remarks on other candidates because it is not a political campaign. Rather it is an opportunity for candidates to express passion, commitment and desire to serve and help steer or ensure the Coop is in the right direction.

Next step ballots are mailed to the owners and they are required to sign and mail or postmarked on a certain date to be valid. The ballots are then counted by the Election committee and volunteers and results communicated to the Board President.

This year the Board had three positions to fill and six candidates (3 incumbents and 3 owners) volunteered to run for the three positions. The election results had 2 of the 3 owners and 1 of the incumbents elected to serve.

The election results were challenged for the first time in our most recent history. The Board voted to have previously excluded ballots recounted. At the end, the election results were not changed and remained consistent with the initial decision of the owners.

In the coop movement which is bigger than all of us, fair elections are part of the democratic principles on which the coop movement was founded over one hundred and sixty three years ago. In the coop movement there are no winners or losers. Volunteerism is an innate desire. Serving on the board or committees for that matter, in my opinion is not a right but rather a privilege and honor. From time to time, volunteers request to be relieved or are relieved through electoral process. It is not a permanent position and volunteers serve at the pleasure of the owners. Every effort must be made to ensure that politics is kept out of the discuss and operation of the cooperative.

Over the years, the cooperative principles have evolved around these seven principles:

- Voluntary and open membership
- Democratic member control
- Member economic participation
- Autonomy and independence
- Education, training and information
- Cooperation among cooperatives
- Concern for the community

These seven principles have universal application. Simply stated, cooperatives are people working together cooperatively to meet common needs and goals.

The election is over, the dust has now settled and we must now pay our attention to the issues at hand. Agenda/action items from Board retreat, member communication and other pertinent issues in this ever increasing competitive market place.

Submitted by:

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