

Connections

NORTHWEST COOPERATIVE DEVELOPMENT CENTER

Fostering community economic development through the cooperative business model



Funerals Go Co-op

There are a variety of co-ops in the NW, but now a new model is on the scene: a co-op funeral home. In reaction to the increasing trend toward corporate ownership of funeral establishments, People's Memorial Funeral Cooperative (PMFC) was established in 2007.

People's Memorial Association (PMA), a non-profit in Seattle, contracts with area funeral homes to provide simple, dignified, affordable cremation and burial options to its members in Washington since 1939. Due to corporate buyouts of local funeral homes, the organization found itself with no funeral provider willing to serve its roughly 35,000 members living in Seattle.

Determined to create a member-owned funeral home, the board of PMA turned to NWCDC for advice. As an established organization with a large membership, financial reserves and paid staff, it had many advantages for getting this new co-op off the ground.



Thanks to wise counseling from staff at NWCDC, it was less than 90 days from vision to reality. In this short period of time, the co-op was incorporated and licensed as a funeral home, moved into its new location on Seattle's Capitol Hill, and hired and trained its professional staff.

The funeral co-op opened its doors on June 11, 2007 and had business the first day.

In 2008, the funeral co-op handled over 1,000 funeral arrangements or approximately 1 in 12 Seattle deaths. In less than 2 years, PMFC is one of the largest-volume funeral homes in the State and the largest cooperative funeral home in North America.

PMFC is a model for consumers to take control of funeral prices and quality of services in the time of loss

The co-op offers significantly lower prices on cremation and burial arrangements and provides quality customer service to its members. In these lean economic times, families are increasingly price conscious when making funeral arrangements. The Co-op provides burial services at 1/3 to 1/4 the price of other Seattle funeral homes. The member price for cremation at the co-op is \$649 versus nearly \$3,000 at a traditional funeral home.

Despite offering drastically lower prices, the co-op showed a handsome increase in equity in 2008 and paid out over \$200,000 in patronage dividends to its members. In addition, it was able to bring staff up to a competitive wage scale and provide them with a complete benefits package.

While co-op funeral homes are common in England, the Netherlands and Eastern Canada, there are only three other funeral co-ops in the US. PMFC is the only one located in an urban setting and on the West Coast.

PMFC is a model for consumers to take control of funeral prices and quality of service in the time of loss. Lifetime membership in PMFC is a mere \$25 and includes funeral planning documents. For more info go to www.funerals.coop.

John Eric Rolfstad is the Executive Director of both PMA and PMFC; director@peoplesmemorial.org

NWCDC is a 501(c)3 providing development services for co-ops. Founded in 1979, we serve WA, OR, ID and HI

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We're Seeking Co-op Development Proposals

The Center is accepting proposals for our development services as part of our planning and application to the USDA's Rural Co-op Development Grant. The Center annually solicits proposals to be included in our work plan of co-op development projects.

We want to hear about your project by Friday, March 13. Please contact us if you are part of a group seeking to form a co-op or if your cooperative seeks any of the following activities:

- Business and strategic planning
- Co-op education
- Feasibility studies
- Trainings (board, member, leadership)

Projects must provide at least 25% match of the total project cost and preference will be given to projects with job creation potential. Pending an approximate August USDA approval of proposal, work would begin October 1st, 2008.



Please send us your bright ideas

Please contact Diane Gasaway for more details: 360.943.4241 or diane@nwcdc.coop

Many thanks to our 2008 United Co-op Appeal contributors:

- Group Health Cooperative
- Benton REA
- People's Memorial Funeral Co-op
- Big Bend Electric Co-op,
- David Albert, REI
- Washington Credit Union Foundation
- Diane Gasaway, NWCDC
- Lost River Economic Development, Inc.
- Maura Schwartz
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- Carol Coren

Local Farms-Healthy Kids Act Creates Co-op Opportunities

In 2008 the Local Farms – Healthy Kids Act was signed into law. The new Act establishes a Farm-To-School program to facilitate purchasing local farm products by schools, in addition to several other programs designed to encourage markets for Washington farms and improve access to healthy, Washington-grown foods for a range of vulnerable populations.

The new law is intended to help keep working farms working and promote awareness of how our food choices affect our health, communities, and the environment by increasing the amount of Washington-grown food consumed through our schools, food banks and farmers markets. Schools and other institutions represent a huge, stable market for Washington farmers. Increasing consumption of food that has been grown and produced locally reduces packaging, refrigeration, storage, and transportation, requiring less energy and resulting in less waste.

The legislation for Local Farms – Healthy Kids provided funding to promote access to local foods. Five programs were created to facilitate connections with local foods and farmers:

1. Farm-to-School Program
2. Washington Grown Fresh Fruit and Vegetable Program
3. Farmers Market Technology Program
4. Farm to Food Bank Pilot Programs
5. Farmers Market Nutrition Program

The Washington State Department of Agriculture

has been charged with coordinating the Farm-to-School program and Tricia Sexton Kovacs has been hired as Program Manager. Kovacs will help farms and processors sell to schools, help schools source Washington foods, and share resources to reach students about the nutritional, environmental and economic benefits of eating locally.

Schools are motivated to participate in the program but find sourcing foods challenging, ergo the cooperative opportunity for small farms. Individually a small farm may face difficulties in providing a stable supply and enough quantity of product throughout the school year. However, by banding together small farms may be able to adequately serve this market, especially if they include a plan for processing food products into a form schools can easily use.

Washington farms have an opportunity to prosper with increased markets for local crops. While some individual farms can be very successful selling directly to school districts, others may find it easier to work with a group of farms. Cooperatives and associations allow farms to supply larger volumes and a wider variety of products, provide simple processing like cleaning and dicing, coordinate billing and product delivery, and reduce the time and effort necessary to develop individual relationships for each farmer.

For information on the Local Farms – Healthy Kids Act or the WSDA Farm-to-School Program,

contact Tricia Sexton Kovacs at tkovacs@agr.wa.gov or 360.902.2029.

For more information on organizing a cooperative contact Diane Gasaway, diane@nwcdc.coop or 360.943.4241.





NW Cooperative Development Center

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360.943.4241

Cooperative Event Calendar

February

Housing Day

Talk to your Legislators

February 24

8:30am to 4:00pm

United Churches of Olympia

Olympia, WA

Contact: Michael Kelly

Michael@wliha.org

March

Manufactured Home Owners of America

Executive Board Meetings

March, 14 and May, 9

www.mhoa.net

Whatcom Farm Friends

Farmers Growing Trees for

Salmon tree planting

March 7th and 14th

Volunteers needed

360.354.1337

Rural Oregon Day

March 19

Salem Conference Center

Preregister by March 2

ruraloregon.org

April

People's Mem. Funeral Co-op

Annual Meeting and

presentation on green burial

April 18th, 10:30am

University Unitarian Church

Seattle, WA

206.325.0489

www.peoplesmemorial.org

May

Left Foot Organics

spring plant sale

May 9, 10.00am to 3.00pm

11122 Case Rd. SW

Olympia, WA

360.402.3748

www.leftfootorganics.org

Economic Development

Workshop

Tools and ideas to survive in today's economy

May 18-19

Great Wolf Lodge

Grand Mound, WA

Contact Linda Alongi

lindaa@cted.wa.gov

Tacoma Farmers Market

Thursdays, May 21 - Sept 29

253.272.7077

tacomafarmersmarket.com

NREDA 2009 Save Energy!

Save Your Community!

June 24 - 25

Great River Energy

Maple Grove, MN 55369

www.nreda.org

Co-op event submissions and brief articles are welcome please send them to: ben@nwcdc.coop