

Oshkosh Food Co-op Board Nominee: Stephanie Gyldenvand, Oshkosh

Hello! I'm Stephanie Gyldenvand, Oshkosh resident for nearly 20 years. I am Oshkosh Food Co-op member #4 and am also a member of the Willie Street Food Co-op in Madison. I am one of several leaders in our community that brought together what is now the official Oshkosh Food Co-op and have served on the Board of Directors since its inception; currently serving as the Vice President of the board.

I started working to build a co-op in Oshkosh after finding these amazing organic peaches at Willy Street Co-op in Madison. I had no idea that peaches were grown in orchards up in Door County, did you? I became frustrated that I had to drive the opposite direction from where these lovely fruits were grown, to Madison, to purchase what was grown right up the road from us. This led me to a whole crew of people that, like me, wanted better access to the great food that is grown around us and we decided to find a solution...start a co-op!

My background is in social justice advocacy and I bring with me a perspective of equity and access. While I may have the means to purchase organic, local foods others may not. I want to build a store that is accessible to all and helps everyone live healthier lives. I also bring a strategic mindset and I'm eager to get the doors of our storefront open. I've worked alongside my fellow board members to ensure that we have a clear plan to get us to the milestone of opening our doors, that we are taking strong steps to move us in that direction, and that we are being responsible and sustainable in our approach so that we have a food co-op that serves our community for years to come.

My vision for the Oshkosh Food Co-op is that it builds itself into a strong business that incorporates the voice of area residents and our members. I see a co-op that responds to its community's needs, diversity, and economy to not only increase access to affordable healthy foods in the greater downtown area of our city, but that to also create an economy that benefits all. Our co-op has the opportunity to ignite new opportunities, employ area residents, offer living wages, support producers (big and small) across our region, and change the landscape of our food shed for generations. I see new producers and farmers popping up and existing family-owned farms, orchards, and producers thriving.

The Oshkosh Food Co-op is important to our community for the reasons mentioned above, and more! Co-ops offer space for community engagement. Education classes, often free, taught by those who learned how to bake bread or make sauerkraut from their Grandmother is one example of how co-ops help connect people around passions...or just plain fun! A co-op is more than a store, it's also a way for our community to take pride in itself and find friends and connection along the way.

I believe that Oshkosh is ready for a co-op. In the time that I've lived in this city I've seen three major grocery stores close-up and leave. The co-op model, owned and supported by its residents, is a sustainable approach to build and grow a grocery that represents its community, supports real farmers and producers, and keeps itself operating for decades. Coops are dedicated to the health and vitality of the community they serve.

Other facts about me! I've been a professional community organizer for the past eight years. I now work at Winnebago County Health Department focusing on coalition building, health

equity, and substance use prevention. I volunteer my time with area non-profit organizations and emerging groups. I love fermented foods...kim-chi, sauerkraut, pickles...and would like to learn from somebody's grandma how to make some amazing goods! I also love camping, hiking, the Porcupine Mountains, and Lake Superior. When traveling, I always scope out co-ops to stock up on goods and grab a good meal...five co-ops in one trip is the current record.