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HIGH 66
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Complete forecast on page 10

County's 1st co-op grocer opens after years of planning

Woodstock-based grocery store owned by members of the public

By CLAIRE O'BRIEN
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Food items and other merchandise are making their way to the shelves at Food Shed Co-op in Woodstock ahead of the store's grand opening Wednesday.

Food Shed, located along Route 14 near the Crystal Lake border, will be the first co-op grocery store in McHenry County. As a co-op, it differs from grocers such as Mariano's and Jewel-Osco in that the residents have ownership.

"It takes power back from big corporations," said Sue Jensen, Food Shed's community outreach director.

People can become owners by purchasing at least two shares at \$100 each, but ownership is not a requirement for shopping at Food Shed.

"That is the biggest misconception" about co-ops, Jensen said.

Food Shed emphasizes local food but also spotlights local creatives with the artist wall in the store, Jensen said the artists will rotate, and they'll keep all the profits they make.

"The co-op doesn't take any," Jensen said. "We just want to bring community together."

Hyperlocal farmers, whom Food Shed defines as farmers within a 30-mile radius of the store, get "preferred terms," so they might get paid within a week or two or when they drop off produce, Jensen said.

"We really want to be able to bring in these farmers that are our neighbors," she said.

In addition to its emphasis on local, Food Shed also wants to protect the environment and cut down on waste. People who bring their own containers won't be charged for the weight of their containers, Jensen said. To encourage people to bring their own containers and bags, Jensen said, the store will give shoppers a "wooden nickel" for each container, and then people can vote for which nonprofit they want to support.

Jensen said transparency is a big part of the concept as well, and Food Shed splurged on an "elevated lighting package." Food Shed plans to offer reading glasses at the aisles.

"We really want to make it easy for people to know what they eat," Jensen said.

Food Shed is set to open its doors Wednesday – a milestone years in the making. The McHenry County Food Cooperative was established in 2014 to raise money and begin planning for the co-op, and Food Shed now has about



Gregory Shaw

Julie Hafer with National Co-op Grocers helps price items at the Food Shed on Friday, May 10, as the store prepares to open on May 15.

2,200 owners as of Friday, Jensen said.

Construction of the Food Shed Co-op began last summer, and the space is 9,000 square feet. Construction costs were about \$5.8 million, according to previous Northwest Herald reporting.

The store's amenities include a kitchen with grab-and-go food. Some of that will consist of recipes from Duke's Alehouse and Kitchen in Crystal Lake and Duke's Inferno, located up the road from the store in Woodstock.

The food will be from local sources, and the space also features a community room. Members of the public can reserve the community room by signing up for a slot, Jensen said.

"People have a few more days to become 'founding members,'" said Scott Brix, who sits on the board. "You were an owner before it was cool."

Brix said the heightened concerns around food sparked by the COVID-19 pandemic "only accelerated this project."

But the proprietors of Food Shed noted that opening day is a day of grat-



Potatoes are for sale at the Food Shed, McHenry County's first co-op grocery store, Friday, May 10. The store opens May 15.

Gregory Shaw

itude. "We are so grateful that the community stepped up in ways beyond our wildest imagination," Brix said.

Martie Gorman is one of the community owners of Food Shed. She said she bought into Food Shed in 2015 and has volunteered and been on the board since 2017. Gorman said there aren't

many co-ops in this area, but McHenry County is the "perfect" place for such a store.

She added that people have been asking for years about when the store will open. Now that the store is about to open, Gorman encouraged the community to "come check out your new community grocery store."