

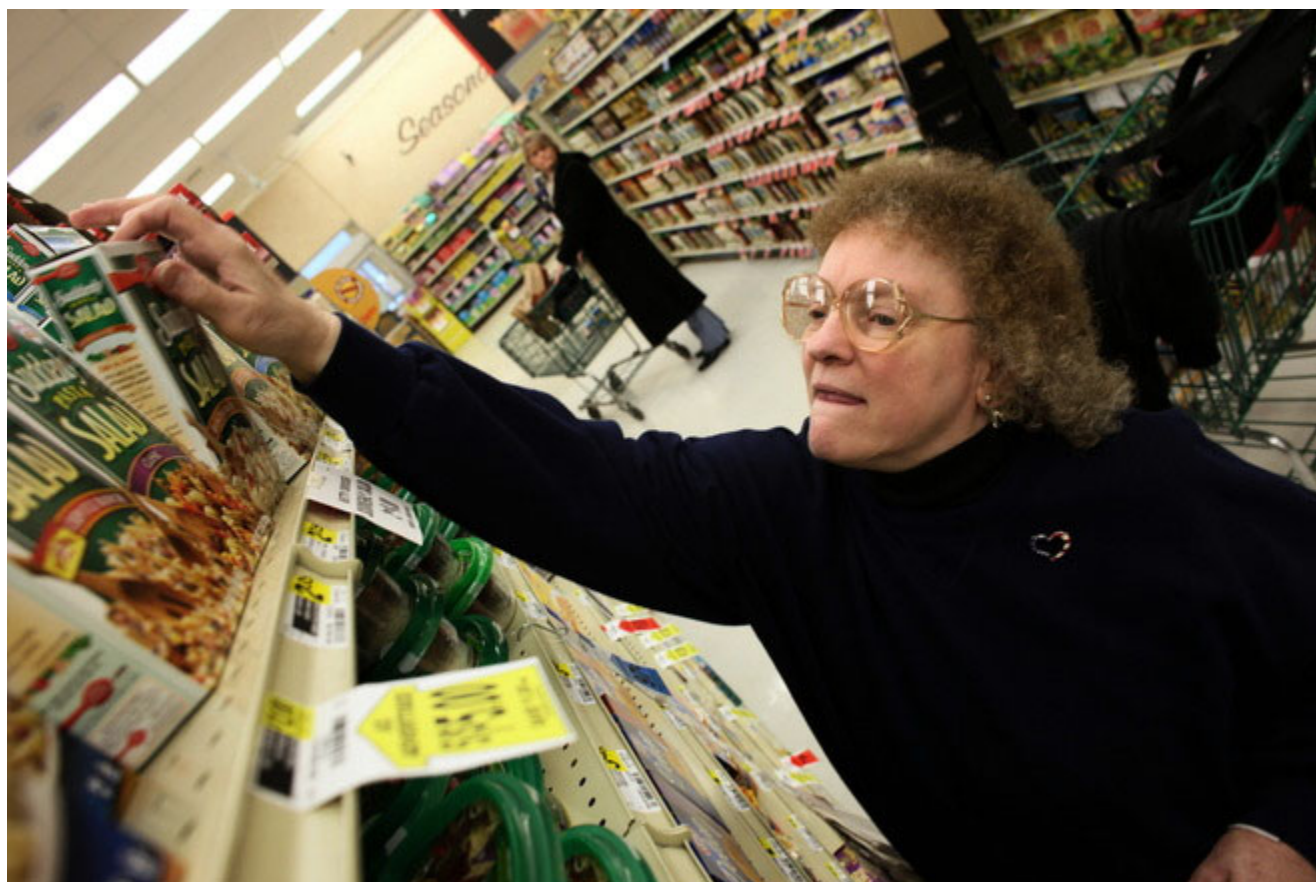


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Faces of Hope | Felicia Thomas-Lynn

SHARE food co-op making comeback in tough economic times



Michael Sears

Lois Liebau-Templin of Brookfield shops at a Menomonee Falls grocery store, but she also has joined a food co-op program.

Posted: Feb. 28, 2009

Lois Liebau-Templin's trips to the supermarket over the past year have been a lot less frequent since she joined a food-buying club that allows her to purchase high-quality, healthful foods at affordable wholesale prices.

Each month, Liebau-Templin chooses grocery items from a pre-set menu, which includes a variety of meats and fresh fruits and vegetables, at a single rate of \$15 per person.

"This has been a good way for me to save," said Liebau-Templin, 66, who lives on a fixed income. "Everything is so expensive right now."

She orders food monthly through the Self Help And Resource Exchange, or SHARE, a volunteer-run cooperative that has more than 40 sites in the Milwaukee area, including Waukesha, Washington and Ozaukee counties, Racine and Kenosha. It also has sites in northern Illinois and Michigan's Upper Peninsula.

"We have been here through thick and thin," said SHARE's executive director, Paulette Flynn, noting that the organization first began in 1985 when the country was in a recession.

Now, she said, those times are here again, as evidenced by an uptick in their numbers, particularly from those living in suburban communities.

"We are seeing more modest middle-income people," said Flynn, who works out of the organization's headquarters in Butler. Some sites, she said, have seen their numbers more than double. In February, for example, food orders totaling \$2,512 were placed in Waukesha through the cooperative, compared with \$1,220 at the same time last year.

She said the bulk of the membership is made up of young families with children and seniors living on a fixed income.

"These are people who need to stretch their food dollars," Flynn said. "When people are struggling, they have to think differently about how they handle their household expenses. You can't negotiate with the landlord or quit paying your utility bill."

Open to anyone

There are no eligibility guidelines, income limits or membership fees to be a part of the food-buying club. People become members by placing an order and making their payment online or by mail.

This month's \$15 menu, for example, includes turkey mignons wrapped in bacon, ham steaks, chicken tenderloins, deli sliced turkey, popcorn shrimp and assorted fresh produce.

The cooperative works by leveraging the buying power of the more than 25,000 people who purchase food monthly through the club, enabling organizers to buy food at a bulk rate - a savings of 30% to 50% compared with grocery store prices.

"It's the economy of volume," said Bev Lieven, who volunteers at the Our Lady of Good Hope site, which serves families in the North Shore area.

Lieven said the site has seen a 25% increase in participation. "We have several families who are buying enough food for their grown children who are out of work and back at home."

Another key element to the cooperative is its volunteer support. Once the food arrives, volunteers divide it

into household orders, which are then distributed to the various sites.

"When times are tough, people have a tendency to cut back on their groceries, but the danger is that they may not be eating the right kinds of foods. There is a health risk," Flynn said. "We make it still affordable for people to eat a balanced diet. Our intention is to help people save money."

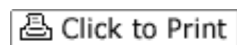
Faces of Hope focuses on Milwaukee-area people who need a hand and the agencies that are helping them. If you have story ideas, e-mail Felicia Thomas-Lynn at lynn@journalsentinel.com">fthomas-lynn@journalsentinel.com or call (414) 224-2073.

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