MORE THAN A GROCERY STORE

RENAISSANCE COMMUNITY CO-OP
GRAND OPENING - NOVEMBER 4-5, 2016
Our Community, Our Values, Our Mission

Healthy, Affordable, Community-Owned

The mission of the Renaissance Community Cooperative’s (RCC) is to create a democratically owned and controlled grocery store in Northeast Greensboro providing all of Greensboro with healthy foods at affordable prices with a commitment to locally sourced foods, community education and dignified jobs.

The RCC alleviates an 18-year food desert, bringing good jobs, healthy living options, and community wealth to a neighborhood that struggles with obesity, diabetes, unemployment, and poverty.

With the RCC as a community-centered anchor, the revitalized Renaissance Shops at Phillips will become a thriving example of community-based economic development.
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No one knew, back in December of 1998 when Winn-Dixie closed, that we would embark on the journey that has brought us to where we are today as OWNERS of our very own, cooperative grocery store. Nearly two decades later, our organizing and dedication have paid off, and I want to thank each of you for the role that you played in getting us here today.

This effort truly involved a TEAM. From longtime community leaders and young people who joined in our cause, to city officials and national partners and supporters who provided invaluable support, we could not have done it without you. The collaborations that made this dream a reality will serve as a model for years to come as other communities around the country look to us to learn our story. A special thanks to the team at the Fund for Democratic Communities (F4DC) - without you all working alongside us, this would have been impossible.

I have been honored to serve as the Board Chair since my election in 2013. You all have given me the encouragement and the strength to pursue this goal every day over the last few years. I would like to give special thanks to my wife, Hazel, who told me to get involved in the first place. As the store opens and we enter a new phase of our work together, let us continue to dream big for our community. Our prayers and our hard work have gotten us this far. Imagine what we’ll do next!
MORE THAN A GROCERY STORE

November 1, 2016

A Note from the Fund for Democratic Communities
Sohnie Black, Mildred Powell, Dave Reed, Marnie Thompson, and Ed Whitfield
In 1998, the Winn-Dixie Corporation closed its grocery store on Phillips Avenue in Northeast Greensboro, a working class neighborhood where the majority of residents are African American. Winn-Dixie made the decision to close its store despite the fact that it was profitable, just as many corporate grocery chains made similar moves in cities and towns across the US. These corporate chains were seeking to consolidate their operations to achieve economies of scale and chasing higher returns in more affluent markets (though these hoped-for higher returns did not always materialize).

The closure of the last grocery store in the area led to the neighborhood becoming what is now known as a “food desert,” a term that hadn’t been invented back in 1998. Northeast Greensboro was hardly unique in receiving this designation – food deserts arose in thousands of urban and rural places around the country in the 1990’s and early 2000’s. In Northeast Greensboro, being a food desert meant that the people who lived near the store – many of whom lack cars and have limited incomes – could no longer easily access fresh, affordable food. The closure of the anchor store at the shopping center also contributed to years of economic decline that blighted the whole neighborhood.

Today we celebrate the story of a tenacious neighborhood that didn’t give up in the face of this blight and discouragement. Instead, they organized and steadily increased their power and capacity until they were able to build their own community-owned grocery store, the Renaissance Community Co-op, or RCC. The RCC is not a glorified convenience store or any other kind of half measure—it is a 10,530 square foot full-service grocery store that stocks a full array of fresh fruits and vegetables, meats, dairy products, and groceries that you’d expect to see in any supermarket, and it does so at a price that its community and owners can afford.

Not only does the RCC provide access to a wide array of fresh, healthy foods, the store is playing a key role in turning around economic conditions in the community. The RCC currently provides 30 good-paying jobs in an area with high unemployment. The lowest starting wage is $10 per hour, roughly 25% higher than the prevailing grocery starting wage in the area, and full-time employees receive health benefits. Since people from the neighborhood fill the majority of jobs, wages and
MORE THAN A GROCERY STORE (cont)

benefits are projected to move more than $3 million into the area in the next five years. The RCC also serves as the anchor store for a revitalized shopping center that will soon boast a new health clinic, pharmacy, and credit union—all services the community sought for close to two decades. Without the RCC, the shopping center would likely still be languishing, and all these other needs would remain unaddressed.

Best of all: the RCC is 100% owned and controlled by its community of over 1,000 owners, the majority of whom live right in the neighborhood. Because it is owned by its community and operated to meet community needs, this beautiful store is never going to pick up and leave, seeking a higher return on investment elsewhere. Its entire reason for being is to serve its neighborhood! And because the store is community-owned, any profits made by the store stay right in the community, to seed the next stage of community revitalization, as determined by the community of RCC owners.

This turn-around has been a long time coming: 18 years! Community leaders began organizing to fill the space left by the Winn-Dixie back in 1998, as soon as they heard the Winn-Dixie was closing. While the initial efforts to protest Winn Dixie’s decision and to attract a chain grocer didn’t work out, the community continued to organize itself, visualize the kind of community they wanted, and build the power to accomplish that vision. Along the way, the community had to turn its attention to the urgent matter of closing down a poisonous landfill. While the landfill fight may have pushed the grocery store to the back burner, it ended up building the community’s capacity and political power.

By the end of 2011, when the landfill struggle was well and truly won, the community had both the breathing room and the strength to tackle its food access issue. When representatives from our organization, the Fund for Democratic Communities (F4DC), suggested that the community could take the initiative to build its own store, active residents in the community were immediately interested. Tired of waiting for someone else to solve their food desert problem, the community was excited to solve the problem for itself. Working with F4DC, community members began to explore whether it would work for the community to own and operate its own grocery store. It took five years of education, organizing, political struggle, capacity building, business planning, and fundraising, but the community figured it out!

That’s the triumphant story we want to tell in detail at some point, because this story carries both pragmatic and inspirational lessons about how black, brown, and working class communities can take charge of their destinies by building inclusive, democratic, community-owned enterprises to meet their needs. The RCC story directly challenges some pernicious myths about black people and marginalized communities, and it displaces some common assumptions about who should lead economic development. While certain key partners assisted in the development of the RCC and the shopping center, it is the community that took the lead, making good use of expertise only when it was needed to meet community objectives.

These are just some of the lessons we at F4DC want to highlight when we tell the RCC story.

We’re not the only ones telling this story, as many people and institutions around the country have connected to the effort, and each person and organization has their own unique perspective. Not surprisingly, a group like F4DC is going to highlight the social justice and democracy-building aspects of the story, because we want more communities to be inspired and to have the tools to take their destinies into their own hands.

In this souvenir booklet we try to capture the key events in the timeline and begin to acknowledge the people and organizations that made the RCC possible. In later publications, F4DC is eager to share the motivations behind the RCC project (both ours and the community’s) and get into the details on democratic governance and management, finance, business planning, and accessing grocery distribution networks to put healthy affordable food on the shelves. We also hope to draw out major lessons learned, so that other communities who want to learn from the RCC story don’t have to learn all of them the hard way!

For now, we ask you to go visit the store, so you can see for yourself: the RCC is bright, beautiful, and welcoming, and it signals hope and equity to its community. You see it in the faces of the customers, staff, and owners: a tangible feeling that the RCC is much more than a grocery store. While the opening of the store represents the culmination of years of work, it is also the start of something new, and we can hardly wait to see what this organized, powerful community does next!
RENAISSANCE SHOPS AT PHILLIPS AVENUE

The Renaissance Community Co-op is the anchor for this revitalized hub in our community.

In 2015-2016, Self-Help Ventures Fund, an affiliate of Self-Help Credit Union, purchased the Bessemer Shopping Center from the City of Greensboro and completed a massive renovation of the entire property.

The 45,000 square foot neighborhood shopping center once included a supermarket, pharmacy and a public library.

Once redeveloped, Renaissance Shops will be home to businesses and community spaces including the Renaissance Community Co-op, the anchor tenant, the Greensboro Municipal Credit Union, a health clinic, pharmacy and more. As part of the redevelopment process an advisory committee composed of 19 community members worked to ensure recognition of the Renaissance Shops’ history and that redevelopment plans are in sync with the community’s desired outcomes.

The renovated Renaissance Shops at Phillips Avenue will once again be a commercial and social hub for a revitalized community in Northeast Greensboro!
Winn-Dixie Closes - Concerned Citizens of Northeast Greensboro Forms

1998

In December 1998, Winn-Dixie announces it will close its store at the Bessemer Center on Phillips Avenue. Led by Rev. Dr. Goldie Wells, the community immediately organizes Concerned Citizens of Northeast Greensboro (CCNEG), with the goal of attracting a chain grocer to take Winn-Dixie’s place.

Community develops a shared vision for the shopping center

1999-2008

Without its anchor store, the shopping center begins a long, slow deterioration. Supported by the City of Greensboro, community members meet with consultants from the Institute of Cultural Affairs and frame up a vision that puts a quality grocery store in the center of a family-focused neighborhood center. In 2008, the City of Greensboro purchases the shopping center to facilitate their plans to build a free-standing branch of the McGirt-Horton Library, as part of this vision.
A group of 10 neighborhood residents formally decide to form the RCC Steering Committee; they elect Leo B. Steward as President. The Steering Committee's first act is to commission a Market Study, paid for by F4DC and CEEJ, to assess the financial feasibility of a full service grocery store at the site of the old Winn-Dixie.

RCC Steering Committee is formed
**November 2012**

Concerned Citizens of Northeast Greensboro joins forces with a new city-wide ally, Citizens for Economic and Environmental Justice (CEEJ), to fight against the re-opening of the White Street Landfill, which is right down the road from the Bessemer Center. Through years of community organizing, political pressure campaigns, and court challenges, the community is ultimately successful in blocking the landfill. At the September 2011 celebration of the win, staff from the Fund for Democratic Communities (F4DC) approach Rev. Dr. Goldie Wells with the idea of turning this community organizing power toward starting a community owned grocery store. F4DC will go on to partner with the RCC throughout its five year development, providing extensive technical assistance and more than $300,000 in grant funding to support the project during its start-up phase.

Northeast Greensboro gets organized as it fights to keep the White Street Landfill closed.
**2009-2011**

Russ Research Associates completes the RCC Market Study, which shows that a 10,000 square foot store can be economically sustainable at the site. On the basis of this positive news, RCC begins selling ownership shares at $100 apiece. The first owner share – #001 – is purchased by Steering Committee member Sadie Blue.

The idea of a community owned grocery store gains steam
**2012**

Throughout 2012, F4DC staff attend neighborhood meetings and lead educational sessions to discuss how a cooperative ownership model could be used to solve the area’s food desert problem. In August, F4DC organizes 30+ members of the Northeast Greensboro community to tour Company Shops Market, a food co-op in Burlington, NC. Though not everyone thinks a community-owned grocery store will work in Northeast Greensboro, a core group of champions believes that the cooperative can work following this trip. They begin to meet regularly, to study the co-op model and explore its applicability to a community-owned grocery store.

Market study demonstrates the feasibility of a grocery store
**January 2013**
At the start of 2013, the City of Greensboro announces its intention to sell the Bessemer Center to one of two sets of developers, neither of which live in Northeast Greensboro. In addition to purchase rights, the City also plans to offer $2 million in forgivable loans to support the center’s redevelopment. RCC supporters respond by closely examining each developer’s proposal to assess whether it would work well with a community-owned grocery store as the anchor tenant. In a democratic community meeting attended by more than 75 members of the Northeast Greensboro community, the community members present vote NOT to support either developer’s proposal, and to demand that the City require any developer to meet several benchmarks demonstrating support for the RCC. After two lengthy Council meetings devoted almost entirely to this issue, in a 5-4 vote, the City awards the purchase rights for the shopping center to a developer that did not show good faith in its interactions with the RCC. RCC supporters continue to pressure the City to hold the developer to Council-approved benchmarks, and as a result of this pressure, the developer withdraws. At the urging of RCC, F4DC, and others, Self-Help Ventures Fund submits a new proposal to purchase the Bessemer Center from the City, which ultimately sets the scene for a long-term lease with a supportive landlord.
In December, RCC owners convene in their first Annual Meeting, in which they approve bylaws, dissolve the Steering Committee and elect a nine-member Board of Directors with John Jones as President. At the end of 2013, there are 81 RCC owners!

First RCC Board elected!

**December 2013**

In December, RCC owners convene in their first Annual Meeting, in which they approve bylaws, dissolve the Steering Committee and elect a nine-member Board of Directors with John Jones as President. At the end of 2013, there are 81 RCC owners!

2015 kicks off with a bang – RCC’s Indiegogo campaign is a huge success!

**January 2015**

With the “We Want a Co-op” video as a hook, RCC concludes a wildly successful Indiegogo campaign that raises $16,001 from more than 600 donors from across the US and 23 countries!

In contrast to the ups and downs of the previous year, 2014 is a year of steady outreach, development and growth. Under the leadership of its Board, RCC staff and volunteers canvass the neighborhood and hold monthly community meetings, which draw 40 to 100 people. The Ownership Campaign gets serious with a huge celebration at Peeler Recreation Center in April. The Owner Loan Campaign launches in June, attracting $54,900 in owner loans in its first six months. With the help of grocery experts at Uplift Solutions who were contracted by F4DC, RCC develops its business plan and begins to seek outside financing, submitting its first loan application to Shared Capital Cooperative. (Shared Capital remains a steady partner throughout the start-up phase, ultimately providing $480,000 in patient loans for equipment and working capital.) With financial support and coordination by F4DC, RCC makes its first video, “We Want a Co-op,” which goes viral and shows the country that co-ops aren’t just for wealthy, college-educated white folks. By the end of the year, RCC has 369 owners!

A year of development and growth

**2014**

A year of development and growth

Regenerative Finance to the rescue!

**Spring 2015**

Struggling to access sufficient capital to cover rising start-up estimates, RCC reaches out to Regenerative Finance (Regen). By Spring 2015, Regen organizes 20+ young people with wealth from around the country to collectively invest more than $200,000 in the RCC project. They pass their investments through The Working World (TWW), another critical partner in the financing of the store. The “non-extractive” loan terms round out the financing plan and help to convince the Greensboro City Council to participate. (Ultimately, Regen and TWW will provide a total of $403,000 in non-extractive finance to the RCC.)
Following many presentations to City staff and City Council by RCC along with F4DC and Self-Help Ventures Fund representatives, an agreement is reached for substantial support from the City. This is an important milestone that adds to the project’s credibility in the community and beyond. The successful vote was the product of more than two years of persistent education, lobbying, and community power-building.

City of Greensboro approves a $250,000 economic development grant to RCC!

April 2015

RCC receives $40,000 donation from Mount Zion Baptist Church

July 2015

RCC’s momentum in the community continues to build, with Mount Zion Baptist Church committing $40,000 in support to the project, to be paid over the next four months.

Groundbreaking at the Renaissance Shops at Phillips Avenue!

June 2015

Over 300 people, most of them RCC owners, turn out on a blistering hot day to join Self-Help in celebrating its purchase of the shopping center and the upcoming renovation, which is sure to renew the neighborhood!

RCC hires Mike Valente as General Manager

August 2015

With the help of UpLift Solutions and F4DC staff, RCC Board members conduct a nationwide search for a General Manager with experience with start-ups, general operations and working with co-ops. Mike is clearly the top choice among several strong candidates!
Another year of growth and development concludes with the owner count standing at 698!

December 2015

RCC signs a supportive contract with MDI, a highly reputable grocery wholesaler

November 2015

GM Mike Valente signs the deal as the culmination of eight months of work with Lakeshore Food Advisors, who were contracted by F4DC to run a bidding process that attracted five distributors to compete for RCC’s business. After negotiations with the top three bidders, RCC selected MDI of Hickory NC, which offered the best deal on price, quality, selection, delivery schedules, and payment terms.

Store design is finalized

Early 2016

The start of 2016 has RCC working hard to finalize all the details of the store design so that construction can begin as soon as the City’s inspections department signs off on the plans. Building on designs prepared by CDS consultant Nicole Klimek, Architect Jimmy Norwood, General Contractor C2-Weaver Cooke, and Self-Help’s construction team all work with RCC to make sure the engineering, layout, and aesthetics will work together to create a beautiful, efficient, welcoming store. A highlight for owners is the March RCC community meeting, where they select the color palette for the interior of the store.

This is getting real!

March 2016

March is a huge month for the RCC, with three pivotal events signaling that there is no stopping us now: On March 11, RCC and Self-Help sign a 10 year lease, which is closely followed by the signing of a construction contract with C2-Weaver Cooke. On March 16, RCC closes on its loans from Shared Capital Cooperative, for a total of $480,000 in patient lending.
Stuart Reid of the Food Co-op Initiative presents this award to “new food co-ops that have done an outstanding job of organizing their communities, building ownership, and following strong, viable business plans.” Board members John Jones, Eleanor Graves, Mo Kessler, along with Mike Valente, Sohnie Black and Dave Reed were on hand to accept the award at the Consumer Cooperative Management Association meeting in Amherst, Massachusetts.

RCC receives the Coop Start Up of the Year Award from the Food Co-op Initiative

June 2016

RCC receives $50,000 from Starmount Presbyterian Church

July 2016

Starmount Presbyterian donates $50,000 of a bequest from Lillian Steele, the former librarian at Bessemer Elementary School. Along with the Interactive Resource Center and the Out of the Garden Project, Ms. Steele’s generosity will help combat hunger in Northeast Greensboro and across the city.
With construction more or less on schedule, the store starts to fill up with equipment and fixtures. GM Mike Valente starts hiring his management team, including the store’s Operations Manager Walter Davis and Bookkeeper/Office Manager Kelly Alston.

At the start of September, GM Mike Valente fills out his management team, hiring managers for Produce, Meat, Deli, Dairy & Frozen, and Hospitality. The team then hires the balance of the workforce, with the vast majority coming from a two-mile radius of the store. September is spent training, training, and more training.

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It was an exciting morning when our distributor, MDI, pulled a truck up to the front of the building and our newly hired staff began loading pallet after pallet of food into the store! RCC and MDI staff spent several days getting the shelves properly set for the soft opening.
Sometime during this day, the 1,000th owner signs up at the cash register!

RCC passes the 1,000 owner mark!

October 31, 2016

Sometime during this day, the 1,000th owner signs up at the cash register!

The Renaissance Community Co-op officially opens for business!

October 14, 2016

Board members, community members, and eager shoppers gathered at the store early in the morning. After a moving benediction by Bishop Clarence Wall and Pastor Angeline Wall, everyone celebrated the first day!

Renaissance Community Co-op Grand Opening!

November 4-5, 2016

After 18+ years as a food desert and over 5 years working to launch our grocery store, the co-op celebrates its Grand Opening with an evening reception, ceremony and ribbon cutting, and a family fun day for the community.
From the RCC Bylaws, Section 4.1:

The Board shall be composed of nine (9) Directors, elected from among members of the Cooperative. Except for matters for which member voting is required, the Board shall have full power to govern the Cooperative, including, but not limited to, hiring management and evaluating its performance, establishing compensation and benefits for management of the Cooperative, setting the policy framework and constraints under which management must operate the Cooperative and assuring that the mission of the Cooperative is carried out.

This is for those who come after us.
WHAT IS A CO-OP?

Like conventional businesses, cooperatives must be financially sustainable, but in other ways they are different from conventional businesses. Co-ops are organized to meet the need of the people who are the members or owners of the business, not simply to turn a profit. For example, in the case of the Renaissance Community Co-op, we are able to offer higher wages and benefits to our employees because we recognize that as a critical need in our community. As a co-op we can elevate that need over the drive to generate greater profit at the expense of our community.

There are co-ops all over the world in all sorts of industries meeting the needs of their members or owners. The International Co-operative Alliance maintains a globally recognized definition, values statement, and set of principals that offer guidance to co-operators.

DEFINITION

A co-op is an autonomous association of persons united voluntarily to meet their common economic, social, and cultural needs and aspirations through a jointly-owned and democratically-controlled enterprise.

VALUES

Co-operatives are based on the values of self-help, self-responsibility, democracy, equality, equity and solidarity. In the tradition of their founders, co-operative members believe in the ethical values of honesty, openness, social responsibility and caring for others.
THE SEVEN CO-OP PRINCIPLES

1. VOLUNTARY & OPEN MEMBERSHIP

Co-operatives are voluntary organisations, open to all persons able to use their services and willing to accept the responsibilities of membership, without gender, social, racial, political or religious discrimination.

2. DEMOCRATIC MEMBER CONTROL

Co-operatives are democratic organisations controlled by their members, who actively participate in setting their policies and making decisions. Men and women serving as elected representatives are accountable to the membership. In primary co-operatives members have equal voting rights (one member, one vote) and co-operatives at other levels are also organised in a democratic manner.

3. MEMBER ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION

Members contribute equitably to, and democratically control, the capital of their co-operative. At least part of that capital is usually the common property of the co-operative. Members usually receive limited compensation, if any, on capital subscribed as a condition of membership. Members allocate surpluses for any or all of the following purposes: developing their co-operative, possibly by setting up reserves, part of which at least would be indivisible; benefitting members in proportion to their transactions with the co-operative; and supporting other activities approved by the membership.

4. AUTONOMY & INDEPENDENCE

Co-operatives are autonomous, self-help organisations controlled by their members. If they enter into agreements with other organisations, including governments, or raise capital from external sources, they do so on terms that ensure democratic control by their members and maintain their co-operative autonomy.

5. EDUCATION, TRAINING & INFORMATION

Co-operatives provide education and training for their members, elected representatives, managers, and employees so they can contribute effectively to the development of their co-operatives. They inform the general public - particularly young people and opinion leaders - about the nature and benefits of co-operation.

6. CO-OPERATION AMONG CO-OPERATIVES

Co-operatives serve their members most effectively and strengthen the co-operative movement by working together through local, national, regional and international structures.

7. CONCERN FOR COMMUNITY

Co-operatives work for the sustainable development of their communities through policies approved by their members.
On November 5, 2016, members of the Northeast Greensboro community, as well as friends, supporters from across the city and beyond, and local elected officials will celebrate the return of fresh groceries to the neighborhood with a Grand Opening Ceremony and Ribbon Cutting for the Renaissance Community Co-op.

SPEAKERS

INVOCATION
Pastor M. Gray Clark, Presbyterian Church of the Cross
Rev. George Coates, Loflin United Memorial Methodist Church

STATEMENT FROM THE PRESIDENT & INTRODUCTION OF THE BOARD OF DIRECTORS
John Jones

ELECTED OFFICIALS
Mayor Nancy Vaughan, City of Greensboro
Mayor Pro Tem Yvonne Johnson, City of Greensboro
Council Member Jamal Fox, City of Greensboro

SELF-HELP
Ronald Wiley

COMMUNITY MEMBERS
Dr. Bob Davis, Concerned Citizens of Northeast Greensboro
Rev. Dr. Goldie Wells, Citizens for Economic & Environmental Justice
Ernestine Surgeon, Claremont Courts Neighborhood Association

FUND FOR DEMOCRATIC COMMUNITIES
Marnie Thompson
Ed Whitfield

CLOSING BENE DICTION
Pastor Bryan J. Pierce, Mt. Zion Baptist Church
Rev. Ray Mims, Starmount Presbyterian Church

RIBBON CUTTING
COMMUNITY PARTNERS

Ben & Jerry’s Foundation
C2 – Weaver Cooke
Carolina Common Enterprise
CDS Consulting
Citizens for Economic and Environmental Justice
City of Greensboro
Community Foundation of Greater Greensboro
Company Shops Market
Concerned Citizens of Northeast Greensboro
Cone Health Foundation
Cone Hospital
Food Co-op Initiative
Fund for Democratic Communities
Lakeshore Food Advisors
Loflin Memorial United Methodist Church
McAlister Foundation
MDI
Mount Zion Baptist Church
Norwood Architecture & Design
Peeler Recreation Center
Presbyterian Church of the Cross
Regenerative Finance
Russ Research Associates
Self-Help Ventures Fund
Shared Capital Cooperative
Southern Reparations Loan Fund
Starmount Presbyterian Church
UpLift Solutions
The Mayor and City Council of the City of Greensboro
The Working World
YWCA of Greensboro

SPECIAL THANKS

Congresswoman Alma Adams
Nikki Marin Baena
Sadie Blue
Kim Cameron
Art Davis
Lamar Gibson
Helen Graves
Suzanne Hoyle
Doris Johnson
Representative Ralph Johnson (deceased)
Alexandria Jonas
Hazel Jones
Eileen King
John King
Julius Rankin and family
Kevin Smith
Paul Spinelli
O.W. Sweeney
Lois Todd
County Commissioner Ray Trapp
Rev. Dr. Goldie Wells
25 Owners who made loans to the co-op
... and over 1,000 RCC owners!
This is for those who come after us.