

## **Deanna Garwol Info**

### **Why are you interested in serving on the co-op's board of directors?**

In short, my love affair with food, food systems, and food justice began when I started shopping at the EACM during the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic - and I haven't looked back. While I had exposure to these areas prior to my time as a customer-turned-member-owner at EACM, it was here where I started to learn what love for community through food in action really looked like. As a young person at the very beginning of my professional life, I want to explore in a more concrete setting just how far my love for food, justice, and community can go, and I couldn't think of a better place to do that than the EACM Board of Directors.

### **Summarize any experience you may have with cooperatives and community organizations. Be sure to note any leadership roles you may have held in these organizations.**

During my time as the Marketing Coordinator at The W Spa, I worked closely with the spa's CEO/Owner & staff, as well as PUSH Buffalo, to help the spa take steps towards becoming the first spa cooperative in New York State - with the process being completely ideally within the year. In my seven months at the spa, I provided guidance to our current CEO/Owner on cooperative principles, engaged in discussions regarding the process of transitioning the business to the cooperative business model with staff members, and partook in meetings with representatives from PUSH Buffalo as a visionary leader for the transition. Additionally, I am a proud supporter of many cooperatives across the WNY area and beyond, and even go out of my way to support cooperative businesses in many cases. As for community organizations, if elected, this would be my first community leadership role post-graduation - which is extremely exciting to me.

### **Summarize your professional experience and skills relevant to service on this Board. What unique skills, personal qualities, or perspective will you bring to the board?**

If elected, I will bring quite a unique perspective to the Board as a young person living in a larger body, who also grew up in a single-parent, working class family. As a 'zillennial' (genz/millennial), I am a member of a generation unapologetically on fire for justice, accountability, and supporting our local communities. As a person who has spent a lifetime in a larger body, I know all too well that access to the joy and satisfaction of food is not equal to all of us based solely on bodily appearance, and seek to change that. As the daughter of a widowed, working class mother, I know the struggle of not being able to afford the products, time, and energy that support overall wellness. Overall, while skills such as a keen eye for detail or personal qualities such as empathy are important, I will bring the greatest of these to the table and to our community - lived experience.

**Describe your experiences working collaboratively with others in a group setting.**

Collaborative leadership is one of my greatest strengths, and it has been cultivated by a lifetime of joyfully serving alongside members of my respective communities. I was able to truly shine in this area during my recent tenure at Canisius College, where I served in many leadership positions in Campus Ministry, my sorority (Phi Sigma Sigma), student government, simply as a caring member of the student body, and more. At the helm of my leadership style was - and remains now as an emerging professional - a focus on stepping back and ensuring that every single person in the room has the opportunity to contribute. And if they aren't in the room, taking the initiative to intentionally invite them and deconstructing barriers to their presence. My experience is not defined simply by titles, but it is defined by the responsibility and privilege of cultivating relationships that build community along the way.

**Based on your current knowledge and experience with being a Coop member, what is your:**

**a. Vision for next 3-5 years (near term)?**

While I have many visions for the near-term future, some of them include: increasing partnerships with and leadership of local Black, brown, and indigenous farmers/ producers; considerably reducing the amount of waste produced by the co-op by using less packaging/increasing bulk options for food and home goods; and creating programs for and with community members for many different reasons - educating, exposing, fellowship, etc.

**b. Vision for next 10- 15 years (longer term)?**

While I also have many visions for the longer-term future, some of them include: increasing memberships/customer traffic to ensure long-term profitability; being nearly (if not completely) plastic-free; serving as a community compost hub; and being known as a workplace that pays all workers more than baseline living wages with comprehensive benefits packages.

**What do you think is currently the greatest strength of the Coop?**

As an institution, the EACM's greatest strength is its offering of a wide-variety of unique goods that promote the health and vitality of our bodies and local community. While the food we eat is only one of many determinants of health, the EACM's position as a community leader offering such wholesome, tasty options to fuel our bodies and souls is a true strength. Equally paired with the fact that many of these products are benefitting small/and or local producers and in turn, the local economy, as opposed to large corporations, the EACM is a standout community leader in this way.

**What do you think needs improvement at this time?**

At this time, the EACM needs to demonstrate a stronger commitment towards improving the health and vitality of the greater WNY community through active support of justice and liberation-related matters for systemically marginalized people. Given that the EACM is primarily

operated by, funded by, and serving a community of predominantly white people (often affluent), there is a lot we can do to use our privilege and 'pass the mic', so to speak, to those who have been/are continually silenced in our community and country. Whether by creating partnerships with local Black, brown, and indigenous farmers (and compensating them for their time and guidance), pulling products from Amy's off the shelf to bring awareness to and support their workers' strike, or even allowing customers to round up their purchases towards a specific justice-oriented cause each month, there are many opportunities for the EACM to grow in this area.

**Just for fun...What is your favorite food?**

It changes pretty frequently as I'm always trying new recipes! Right now, it's grilled salmon, brown rice fusilli with a locally-made garlic-forward pesto, and asparagus. (Or a breakfast sandwich from any locally-owned cafe, really.)

**Please add anything else you feel is relevant to your candidacy.**

Everything I do, I do with intention - this candidacy included. I am wholeheartedly grateful for this opportunity.