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Magazine lauds new focus, renovations

By Bethany Bump

Co-op's success gets nat'l coverage

SCHENECTADY — If you happen to be a regular reader of *The Gourmet Retailer*, you might notice a few familiar faces on the cover of national trade magazine's summer edition.

The Capital Region's very own Niskayuna Co-Op was featured as the cover story of the magazine's June/July edition, and it's quite literally put a smile on store officials' faces. Smiling on the cover from inside the store are general manager Don Bisgrove and assistant store manager Richard Gabree.

The 5-page article, titled "The Masters of Reinvention," examines how the 70-year-old co-op at 2227 Nott St. has adapted and innovated to remain competitive in today's grocery retailer market.

"There's a lot in there," said Co-Op Marketing Director Ben Wallach. "It's a lot of extra publicity, which is nice."

The Stagnito Media-owned magazine is well-known in co-op circles, among others, as an industry leader on specialty-food and houseware issues.

It covers everything from product merchandising, display ideas and gourmet-food retailing to trade-show reviews, coffee and tea studies, trends and new products.

award spurred coverage

The co-op was approached about three months ago for the interview, after *Gourmet Retailer* staff learned of its 2012 C&S Wholesale Grocers Innovation Award.

"We've become a leader in not just the co-op movement, but the buy-local movement, as well" said Wallach, "and it's really exciting all the new products we've brought in."

Bisgrove and Gabree talked about last fall's major remodeling at the store, and how they were able to reposition themselves as a specialty retailer, getting rid of their health and beauty-aids section.

"We looked like a CVS drugstore," Bisgrove is quoted in the article. "We had everything, including sneakers and underwear."

Now, the co-op is better known for its specialty products, its meat department and highly trained butchers and — of course — its local baked goods, which include chocolate babka, cookies, shortbread, pies, breads and rolls.

co-op as incubator

The magazine also highlighted the co-op's role as a local incubator, bringing in products from within 50 miles and letting vendors test them out on a broader audience. Residents know they can find local yogurt, milk and cheese and local grass-fed beef and free-range chicken at the co-op. They can count on bakery items, granola, sauces, eggs and produce to come from local businesses and farms, and all of the latest specialty-food trends to pop up on shelves.

Bisgrove also let it be known that the co-op isn't going anywhere soon.

"My big goal is to make sure this co-op goes on for another 75 years," he told the magazine.