

Suburban Life

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The aroma of spices penetrates the rented church kitchen as Kay Christman (left) and Doris Pulgini weigh out individual orders for Nature's Kitchen members. After unloading the truck, the Friday

work crew continues on an assembly-line type basis filling bags and boxes until late afternoon pickup time.

RANDY BORST/staff photographer

Nature's Kitchen

Health food co-op is smoothly run organization

By Lorraine McClish
staff writer

A Nature's Kitchen work crew stands at the ready at 10 a.m. the fourth Friday of every month waiting

to unload the truck marked "Michigan Federation of Food Co-ops' Food for People - Working Together For Economic Democracy." As the morning goes on more suppliers will drop off cartons and crates, and the work crew will remain at their station opening, sorting, weighing and distributing until all orders of the co-op are filled.

Nature's Kitchen is about to enter its sixth year of operation, an operation that is "running smoothly, running as smoothly as its ever been run," said Anne Andries, who started the co-op with her neighbor Barb Leslie.

"WE WENT into it blind. We didn't know the first thing about co-ops. We were just sure there was a better way to go than paying top dollar at the health food stores, and it wasn't always running smoothly. It took quite a while to get it going. We learned by trial and error," Andries said.

The Farmington Hills neighbors began Nature's Kitchen with their registration with Michigan Federation of Food Co-ops and a membership of eight working out of their kitchens.

Today a closed membership stands at 26, a number Andries says is "just right and manageable." And distribution is made from rented rooms in Antioch Lutheran Church.

NATURE'S KITCHEN hooked up with Food for People, sometimes known as People's Warehouse, in Ann Arbor, because a good portion of its food is organically grown, much is prepared without additives or preservatives, and the co-op's founders were all health food advocates.

"Our purpose was to get the best quality for the lowest prices," Andries said. "Store front co-ops all have to mark up the prices because they are paying for rent and help. We do all the work ourselves so we're getting the food at the lowest possible prices. An extra \$1 is added on to every member's order every month and that pays the room rent at the church."

EVERY MEMBER has a job. Members must work one Friday at the church every third month. If she (there

are no male members in the co-op) is not signed up as one of the work crew, her job might be that of bookkeeper, secretary, or purchaser of the bags or jars necessary for distribution. And each job has a spelled-out job description.

Whatever trouble Andries and Leslie had during Nature's Kitchen's beginnings, it was not getting members or getting members to work. "Two mandatory meetings a year take care of that," Andries said. "I think you'd have to have a note from your doctor to get you out of one of these meetings and even that might not work. You have to be an active member and you have to know what's going on at all times."

AS ONE MEMBER leaves Nature's Kitchen, a new one is added from a waiting list that is constant, and is not accepted until she has gone through an orientation session with the current membership chairwoman.

Not all of the newcomers are necessarily interested in health foods, but are drawn to the concept of a food co-op because of the money savings.

Even so, Andries says, "Everybody is cooking healthier meals. We can tell that by just looking at the order lists and seeing how many are at least trying tofu (a soybean protein replacement for meat) and yogurt now, both biggies. We get new converts to health foods sometimes by printing a recipe or two in our newsletters."

"IF THE warehouse has a special on some kind of dried bean — so nutritious — or millet (a grain that can be used as a main dish) that we think some of our members wouldn't know what to do with, we'll put something about it in our newsletter to let them know how best to prepare it," she said. "And you'd be amazed how many quick converts we get to cheese that aren't artificially colored, or raw nuts and seeds. Or peanut butter that is just pure organically grown ground-up peanuts."

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— Anne Andries



Jan Wood (at left) Doris Pulgini and Kay Christman are among the Nature's Kitchen work crew for October, unloading the month's order from People's Warehouse into Antioch Lutheran Church where the food is prepared for distribution to members.

Marsha McClain (at right), a truck driver for People's Warehouse, checks out a box which will be handed down to Jan Wood. In turn, the box is checked off Nature Kitchen's order list by Ann Harden (below).



Women pay emotional toll for being good listeners

The last time you had a problem, who did you confide in or ask for help? Chances are it was a woman.

Women tend to talk over problems with other women, often turning first to their mother, daughter or sister. Beyond the family, they create networks among female friends, co-workers and other associates, a University of Michigan sociologist reports.

But men also approach women more often for advice and support. Listening, counseling and caring exact a high emotional toll, Professor Ronald C. Kessler suggests, and may be one of the reasons women report higher stress levels than men.

"It's not that men are less empathetic than women or less willing to offer support. But having provided help, men seem more able to detach themselves from other people's troubles," he says. "Women continue to feel concerned."

WHILE MANY researchers have looked at the health benefits of receiving help, Kessler and his graduate student associates, Jane McLeod and Elaine Weithorn, are among the first to examine the health hazards of giving it. Studies of "staff burnout" in

fields such as social work affirm that professional helpers need to guard against overinvolvement with their clients' problems or they will become victims of their own efforts. Lovers are even less able to set these emotional limits, Kessler points out.

Women are more vulnerable than men on several counts: they are called on for help more often; they find it difficult to say no; they involve themselves more deeply in the lives of people they care about; they care about a larger number of people, Kessler says.

"We believe one of the major reasons for the sex differences in stress levels is this tendency of women to take on the concerns of others."

Kessler estimates that as much as 15 percent of the population experiences a degree of "low well-being" that is intense and constant enough to inhibit the ability to function. Previous studies have shown that stress victims more often are poor rather than rich, old rather than young, black rather than white. The studies also indicate that stress is highly correlated with life crises, such as job or income loss, divorce or death of a loved one.

'We believe one of the major reasons for the sex differences in stress levels is this tendency of women to take on the concerns of others . . . Women screen the information men receive and men profit emotionally from this monitoring.'

— professor Ronald Kessler,
University of Michigan sociologist

"SO WE BEGIN to see some indicators of why people are stressed," Kessler says. "Blacks have a higher rate of poverty and unemployment. Poor people are more susceptible to job loss or marital problems. Older people are more likely to experience illness or death of someone close to them."

But what explains the consistent research finding of higher stress and depression levels among women? Some clues may lie not in the major life crises but in the everyday vexations and worries that gradually take their toll, Kessler suggests. His research subjects keep daily di-

aries of the small frustrations — a flat tire, a traffic jam, a child with a runny nose, an argument with a spouse. Some early findings point to the cumulative stress caused by mild but relentless problems associated with a dissatisfying job or an unhappy marriage. Kessler believes these situations often have a bigger emotional impact on women than on men.

Furthermore, the life inventories indicate that women are not only distressed by the problems that afflict them but also by those that happen to those they care about. In an interview, a woman will mention that her brother-in-law lost his job or that a

neighbor is seriously ill. Men won't. To our question, "Has anyone important to you had marital problems?" we got far more affirmative responses from women. We don't think it's that women know more people with problems. They simply define more people as "someone important to me," the U-M sociologist says. Women have wider field of concern."

MEN GET TOGETHER over lunch and talk about job or marital problems, he adds. "While some researchers have suggested that men are less willing to talk about personal matters, we did not find this to be the case. We did find, however, that men are able to offer advice without becoming as emotionally involved as women tend to."

Most serious personal life crises affect women and men equally, Kessler emphasizes. The death of a child or a marital disruption is devastating to both wife and husband. But when problems occur outside the immediate family circle, women are more strongly affected than men.

Kessler thinks, too, that women tend to buffer men from many of

life's stresses. "A wife might not tell her husband that their daughter had an abortion, knowing it would greatly upset him. Instead, she confides in a friend, who provides sympathy and an outlet for her distress. Women screen the information men receive," he says. "And men profit emotionally from this monitoring."

Support systems have long been recognized as an important means of alleviating or preventing stress. Just knowing that friends are "out there, available if called on" may be as important to people as actually obtaining help, Kessler reports.

But it is important for women to recognize the emotional costs of being "on call." It's a trade-off, he concedes. The opportunity to support someone we care about can be gratifying. We also know that while involvement in large social networks has risks, it also has many rewards.

"I think the goal is to remain open and caring, while not allowing yourself to be buffeted by other people's adversities," Kessler explains. "It is possible to be responsive to other people's needs without feeling responsible."