

Students Minding the Store

CAMPUS COLLECTIVES OFFER AN ALTERNATIVE

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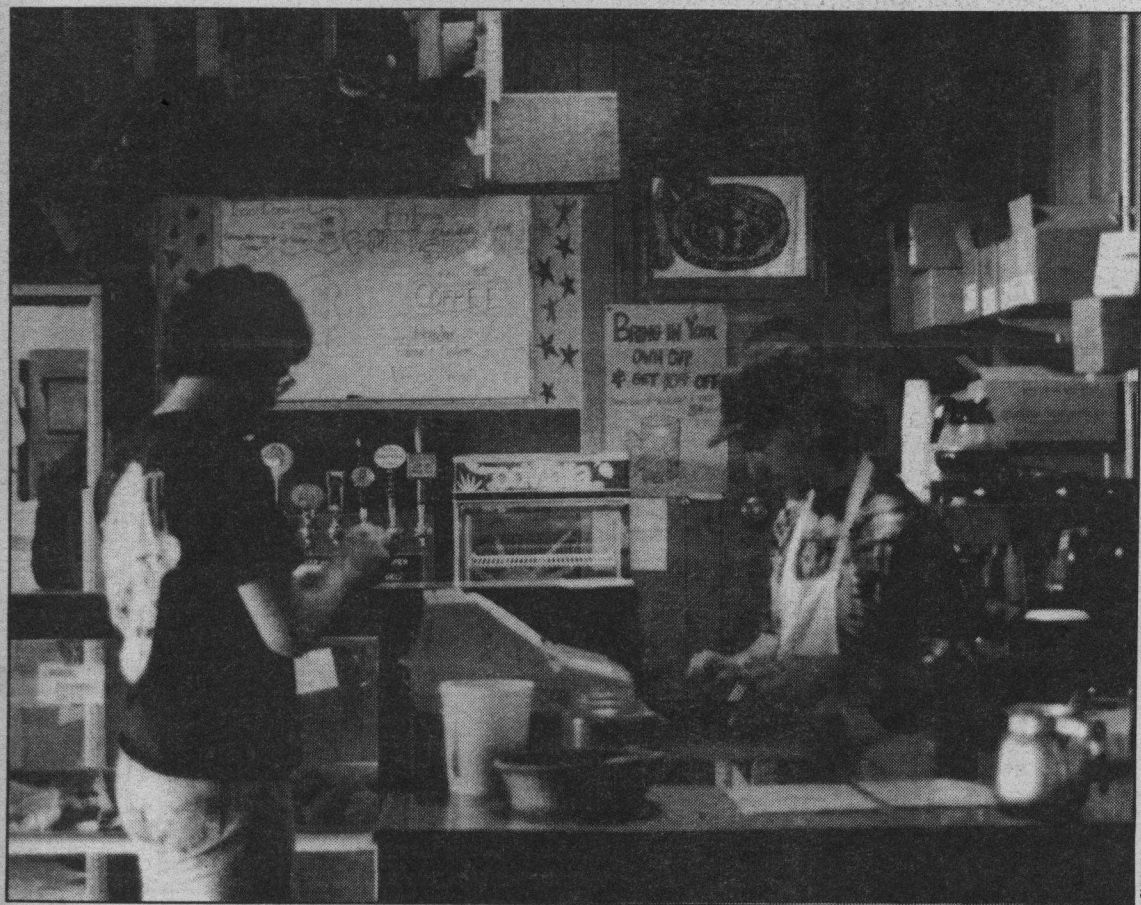
While corporate conglomerates seem bent on dotting the nation with chains of sterile corner Seven-Elevens and carbon copy McDonalds, some UCSC students are following another calling—running democratically managed businesses. The Kresge Co-op and Sluggo's Pizza are the only

The Co-op caters to vegans, who consume no animal products, and vegetarians, who don't eat meat, but welcomes all food-consuming persuasions. The Co-op carries everything from milk, orange juice, bread, butter, eggs, and toilet paper, to patchouli incense, chocolate covered apricots, Nature Burger mix, millet, soy milk, and tofu.

Co-op members have a philosophy behind the way they run their business. Collective decision-

\$4.40 an hour without benefits, collective members often volunteer to work double the hours they are paid, according to George. "There is so much work, but it is wonderful to be working toward an ideal," she added.

In weekly collective meetings, members reach decisions regarding every aspect of the business by consensus. If one collective member chooses to reject a proposal, it will be dropped. Oftentimes, however, dissenting



Sluggo's Co-op member, Dan Sain, helping a customer.

student owned and operated, collectively-run grub establishments on campus.

Employees are not polyester-clad, minimum wage workers with invisible bosses. Instead, they are members of a collective. Every member has an equal say in the daily operations of the business, from hiring to firing, setting management policy, fixing prices, and ordering goods.

These shoe-string-budget operations aren't out to rake in big profits or roll over the little person, but provide delicious, wholesome food, great atmosphere, and gratifying, friendly working conditions.

The Kresge Co-op is a lot like a small town general store, but with a slightly different twist.

making offers economic alternatives to capitalism, because people are empowered while serving the community, according to Kris D'Atri, recent UCSC graduate and Co-op collective member.

The Co-op sells only natural, environmentally sensitive products and supports the locals—small businesses as well as farmers who sell organic fruits and vegetables. "We are not here to sell coke and Doritos. We want to serve the community by offering healthy, natural food from small local companies as cheaply as we can," said Amy George, Co-op expenditure monitor and senior Art major.

Ten members currently form the Co-op collective. Earning

members choose to stand aside and abstain from voting, according to George. "If someone stands aside that means they are uncomfortable with the decisions, but they trust the collective to make the right choice," she said.

"It is so rewarding, because my decisions and my input really do count," George said. "And we live in a society where individual power often doesn't really make a difference."

The Co-op turns a small profit, but the extra revenue doesn't go to collective members. Extra dollars go directly back into the business to cover the payroll, operation costs, and maintenance. "We are certainly doing better financially than we have in the past," D'Atri said. "We're not making money,

but we're not losing money either."

Kresge students initially created a vagabond Co-op in 1975 as a small food-buying collective. They bought goods in bulk quantities in order to trim unwieldy grocery bills. The Co-op eventually settled down and in 1978 a small emporium opened on the bottom floor of one of the college apartment buildings. Kresge College lacks a dining hall and the apartments are equipped with kitchens, making the Co-op a more than convenient market.

As a private vendor, the Co-op pays one dollar a year in rent and

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-- Patrick Farley, Sluggo's Pizza

utilities to Kresge College.

"We don't have any real affiliation with the university administration or Kresge College. We have a contract with Kresge, but we make all our own decisions," George said.

The Co-op, however, is not wholly independent. It is an affiliate of Democratic Management Services (DMS), a non-profit umbrella agency committed to creating and incubating socially responsible businesses. Originally established by a handful of UCSC students, local business people and clergy, DMS handles the Co-op's payroll, taxes, and serves as a financial advisor.

"People in Santa Cruz tend to think anything related to business is corrupt," D'Atri added. "But why not just have a good business."

Sluggo's Pizza patrons won't find polyester uniforms, vinyl tables, plastic potted plants, fluorescent lighting, or prefab anything at the eatery located next to Porter College's dining hall. Whether a student art show blankets the restaurant walls, live acoustic music fills the establishment, aspiring poets recite their verses, or employees declare an impromptu limbo night, Sluggo's has its own ambiance.

"Sluggo's is not the corporate idea, or the *Rolling Stone* magazine version of what student life is, with a big-screen television and MTV running," said Patrick Farley, Sluggo's collective member and senior Theatre Arts major.

Sluggo's Pizza is much more than that, according to Farley. "It is empowering for students to see a business run by students. The effect of corporatizing the university creates a feeling of

powerlessness and ineffectuality. It's like being in a big play pen where the rules have already been made by someone else," Farley said.

The restaurant offers a selection of specialty pizzas, soups, desserts, and a variety of other dishes made fresh on the spot from natural, organic, whole foods. The pizzeria is the only cafe on campus serving beer on tap. Loungers can sit for hours reading, conversing, sipping coffee, or simply watching the scene.

Sluggo's Pizza was the brainchild of a group of economics students in the early seventies. The restaurant grew out of a class project and developed into a cafe soon after, according to Farley. "They wanted to form an autonomous workers' collective and put into practice theories they had learned in class," Farley said. "Sluggo's was founded on a lot of different ideas including Mao's China and early American forms of capitalism."

Sluggo's has evolved over the years, shedding old management styles and traditions, but it still strives to provide quality, organic food, a hospitable atmosphere, and a socially responsible service. Collective members regularly recycle. Over the years, the collective has kept an eye on their menu and inventory, switching tuna brands when they discovered the one they were using contained dolphin meat. They boycotted coffee swizzle sticks made from Brazilian rain forest wood, and they boycotted Budweiser beer, because of sexist commercials featuring blond bikini-clad 18-year-old women, according to Farley.

The Sluggo's collective is similar to the Kresge Co-op's. Both are under the direction of DMS, and follow the same decision-making process. The Sluggo's collective, however, is much larger than the Co-op's, with 25 members. Because of its size, Sluggo's also has a different management structure, which the collective recently overhauled. Six members comprise a core collective management team, and committees sprout from each core position.

"Ideally in a collective, there are no core positions, but we all have horrendous schedules. We divide up responsibilities, so one person has a tiny fraction of a manager's job," said Rocky Mullin, Sluggo's community representative and a senior Theatre Arts major.

Profits are divided up among collective members, but Sluggo's has not seen significant returns for the past few years, and extra dollars were channeled back into the business. Collective members actually pulled themselves out of the red a little over a year-and-a-half ago.

According to Mullin, the restaurant was coming up 2,000 dollars short each month, as a result of extreme mismanagement, staff burnout, and a high

employee turnover rate. "We took pay cuts, toned down our benefits, and put in un-paid hours for the good of the restaurant," Mullin said.

Sluggo's, like the Kresge Co-op, rents space from the Porter College, but remains independent. The college charges Sluggo's five percent of their gross monthly income for rent and roughly one-and-a-third percent for utilities.

Porter provided some of the cafe's furniture and kitchen appliances, including a 1940s pizza oven from the Watsonville School District and a Hobart dough mixer from a World War II naval ship. In addition, Porter maintains all the college-supplied equipment.

However, within the past few years, the college has assumed more authority over the restaurant. Any menu or price changes require college approval, according to Janice Cockren, Porter College's administrative officer. Live music has also been curtailed. Once a Sluggo's staple, live bands performed every Saturday afternoon. Now Sluggo's has a two hour slot one Sunday a month and bands have to be approved by the college, according to Cockren.

Yet, on the whole Sluggo's remains independent, and collective members are committed to offering an alternative to

"There is so much work, but it is so wonderful to be working toward an ideal." -- Amy George, Kresge Co-op

typical businesses where employees are simply nine-to-five cogs. According to Sara Weiner, Sluggo's associate bookkeeper, collective members do not just work for themselves and their wages, but they work for the good of the collective and the restaurant.

"It comes out in how we work together and the atmosphere we create in the restaurant," Weiner said. "There is a difference in the way the restaurant is run and how the employees treat customers. It is a totally different attitude when you don't have a boss breathing down your neck."

This past summer Weiner worked along with hundreds of other employees at the Hollywood Bowl in Los Angeles as a ticket ripper. "I went to work everyday at 5:00pm and went home at 10:00pm. I had no idea what was going on. It was so impersonal. If I had a problem it would have never gotten heard," Weiner said. "If you are going to work, it shouldn't just have to be for money. Why waste your life like that?"