

Hello again! This is Derek Firenze with your local news and commentary for Wednesday, August 28, 2024 beamed in from the *Jefferson County Beacon* for KPTZ 91.9FM in Port Townsend, Washington.

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On August 8, the Board of Directors and the staff of Black Lives Matter Jefferson County (BLMJC) and Well Organized – a collection of Jefferson County Activists, Organizers, Community Members, Artists, Farmers, and those whose goal is to build a more equitable place to live for all – sent the Port Townsend Food Co-op a letter asking for the redress of a string of racialized and transphobic actions they say have been committed in recent years. The latest incidents include the departure under duress of a trans employee and the abrupt removal of a Black man from their board.

The activist organizations gave the Food Co-Op board until August 15 to respond and notified them that they would act if they did not. The Co-Op did not respond within that time period.

Starting August 16, BLMJC and Well Organized sent out a letter calling for a boycott of the Co-Op and began encouraging people to sign a petition requesting that the Port Townsend Food Co-op take immediate action to remediate the hostile environment they say it has created for employees, board members, and member-owners who identify as Black, Indigenous, People of Color, People of the Global Majority, or LGBTQIA2S. The boycott will continue until such time as the original requests by the organizations have been addressed.

This is what BLMJC and Well Organized are asking the Food Co-op to do:

- Replace the general manager and board president as soon as possible.
- Publicly apologize to all employees, member-owners, and board members who have been harmed.
- Overhaul policies and procedures through an equity lens with guidance from an outside facilitator steeped in equity theory and praxis that reflects the Co-op's published values and operating principles.
- Provide ongoing training for employees and board members on matters related to equity and inclusion.
- Conduct a series of listening sessions with target group members among constituent groups to identify relevant issues and actionable outcomes that will be reviewed quarterly until completed.

These actions are not taken lightly. However, BLMJC and Well Organized now feel compelled after attempting for several months to encourage the Co-op board and management to live up to the values and principles that they publicly profess to have.

As cited in a recent letter that a sympathizer sent to the board, according to its own website, the Food Co-op acknowledges that it takes work to fulfill a commitment to inclusion. On the Co-op's site they write, "We see equity and inclusion as key to fulfilling our mission of working together to nourish our community. As a cooperative business, we are rooted in our beliefs around equality, equity, social responsibility, and harmony, among others. While we stand in opposition to bigotry, inequity, injustice, and gender biases, we realize there is work for us to do. As a Co-op, it is our responsibility to recognize these truths and then do the work."

Andrea Stafford, the Communications Manager for the Food Co-op, did respond in a comment for the *Beacon* saying, "We as the staff of the co-op are very saddened to hear about the events that have transpired from the board in recent weeks. While we respect the right for people to boycott, we ask that our members stay open to hearing from all sides. Be inquisitive. Ask for clarification. Don't make assumptions. A boycott to the co-op is not like boycotting a large corporation, it directly affects the staff, our local vendors, and the member/owners of our co-op. If you have questions about our work, or suggestions on how we can improve, we are listening. Thank you for your care and consideration and being a valued member of our co-op. Email: [coopboard@foodcoop.coop](mailto:coopboard@foodcoop.coop) if you would like your voice heard."

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In literary news this week, *Beacon* arts reporter Kathie Meyer gave us a list of titles tied to our locale.

First, there's *The Day We Got Lost* by Faith Pray. The latest from the Watson family is a story of independence versus family framed around a hike up Sunshine Peak for ages 3 to 6.

Next up is *Polite Calamities* by Jennifer Gold better known as Nicole Persun. This compelling novel explores how chronic pain and infertility shape lives. If you enjoy Taylor Jenkins Reid, you'll love this book by a Port Townsend author.

Lastly, *The Bones at Point No Point* is the first book in the Thomas Austin crime thriller series by Hansville author D.D. Black, a pseudonym for Adam Fuller. All of Black's books are set in familiar locales, even Port Townsend if you read through book eight, *The Silence at Mystery Bay*.

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