Dear Alumni,

We are pleased to bring you the 2009-2010 issue of the OSCA Alumni Newsletter. The newsletter serves as a way for Alumni to stay connected to the current members and up to date with OSCA goings-on, as well as a medium to share memories from co-op days of old (or not so old)!

Inside this issue, you’ll find articles written by current students, stories from other alumni, and news about current and upcoming events within OSCA. We’ve also included a lot of great photos – some old and some new.

We encourage all of you to stay in touch with OSCA. We have big plans for the organization, and we want to be sure our alumni are involved. One of the ways we’re hoping to increase communication is by continuing to build our mailing list and e-mail database. E-mailing allows you to stay in touch, depending on the type of information you would like to receive:

- anything related to OSCA alumni
- current events, policies, or decisions in OSCA today
- information from OSCA pertaining to your class year
- all of the above

If you are not on the e-mail list but would like to be, or you want to change your contact information, please visit the alumni web page on OSCA’s web site, or e-mail osca@oberlin.edu.

Finally, we hope you will join us for the annual OSCA Alumni Picnic on Saturday, May 29th as part of the College’s Alumni Weekend. In addition to the picnic, we have plenty of exciting events planned throughout the weekend. For more information about Alumni Weekend events, visit the OSCA web site.

As always, feel free to contact us with any questions or comments. We love to hear from you! Enjoy, and see you in May!

Caitlin Roseum
2009-10 Alumni Coordinator

Visit OSCA’s Web Site!
http://oberlin.edu/osca
The President’s Corner

To Our Distinguished Alumni,

Happy 60th OSCA Anniversary! My name is Emma Dorst, and I have had the honor of serving as the OSCA President this year. From September through today, my term has proven to be extra challenging and incredibly rewarding as OSCA has been shifting its focus and we work to re-negotiate our rent contract with Oberlin College.

We are forging ahead in our negotiations with the College and things are moving along at a fair pace. It is unlikely that OSCA membership numbers will increase dramatically, but other exciting changes are in the works, and I am confident that negotiations will end on a high note for all involved.

Some of the more exciting changes include the pending sale of Fuller House. This rooming house, owned and managed by OSCA’s sister corporation, OSCA Properties, with the aim of providing housing for low-income community members, has served us well for many years. However, as the tides have changed in the community and the economic sector at large, we have not been able to consistently fill the house while meeting the aforementioned goals. This, in addition to various irregularities with residents and neighborly relations, has led us to the conclusion that owning the house is no longer in our members’ best interest.

In other news, we are soon to be hiring a new employee! The new position of Business Coordinator has been years in the making and is designed to relieve much of the pressure placed on our Financial Manager, Iris Hunt. The person in this position will take on the non-finance related duties integral to keeping us afloat and provide more continuity.

As for OSCA’s future, we are still working on making the dream of constructing and owning our own space into a reality. As it stands, we are currently on the lookout for a good piece of land on which to begin construction of a new facility for Brown Bag Co-op (the “grocery co-op”). Ideas are flowing, and it is my personal dream to have this facility be a well-run and well-organized venue for both OSCA and community members to purchase fresh, local produce and other environmentally sound products at cost.

In closing, I must reiterate how honored I am to have been given the opportunity to serve this incredible organization to the best of my ability. I am forever indebted to the current membership for their enthusiasm and cooperative spirit, but also to our alumni, who made it all possible and set us up to succeed. Thank you.

In Cooperation,

Emma Dorst
OSCA President 2009-10

All-OSCA Pizza Night – Spring 2009
Pyle Inn Co-op
Please Join Us
for the
**OSCA Alumni Picnic**
and 60th Anniversary Celebration
May 29, 2010
Saturday - Noon
Old Barrows Co-op

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**Curious About Recent Changes in OSCA?**

Here are some recent policies approved by the OSCA membership and Board of Directors:

- **NASCO Subsidies Proposal** – increased the amount of money we allocate for members to attend the NASCO conference
- **Confidentiality Proposal** – created a much needed and very thorough Confidentiality Policy
- **Name vs. Identity Proposal** – helps ensure anonymity in evaluating staff and employees
- **Missed Job Proposal** – holds us all more accountable to one another
- **Appointments Proposal** – streamlines the way we conduct staff appointments
- **Personnel Committee Minutes Proposal** – increases organizational transparency
- **Staff Evaluation Proposal** – ensures that all staff are provided with constructive feedback from the appropriate people
- **Trans Housing Proposal** – allows Transgender folks who are unable to get special accommodations from the College to jump the OSCA wait list
- **Officer Accountability Proposal** – holds the Officers more accountable to the membership and the Board
- **Sexual Offense Revision Proposal** – improves the substance of the OSCA Sexual Offense Policy
- **Wait List Proposal** – revises the wait list application form to more accurately reflect current policy
A Message from the President-elect

My name is Dylan Rees – actually James Rees, but call me Dylan (this has thrown more than a few people off). I arrived at Oberlin College as a mild-mannered Ohioan with a penchant for physics and math and just enough knowledge of kitchen operation and food preparation not to burn my toast. OSCA, in fact, had been an afterthought – there was an opening in Harkness in the summer before my freshman year and I had learned just enough about the co-op during my prospective student visit to be curious about the cooperative lifestyle. What I found in Harkness, however, was a unique camaraderie and a pride in my own participation in the community – both of which outlasted the initial novelty of the experience.

Now devoted to the community that had welcomed me to Oberlin, I lived in Harkness again as a sophomore, this time as an HLEC (a community facilitator of sorts). The more I gave to OSCA, the more OSCA seemed to give back – with every new responsibility I assumed, the lessons I learned (and the dedication and creativity of the people around me) became all the more rewarding. As a junior I lived and ate in Tank, taking a position that allowed me to facilitate communication between OSCA and College staff and to work with them directly in the ongoing OSCA/OC rent negotiations. Now, as this process draws to a close, I have found that my freshman-year curiosity has led, in time, to the substantial honor of my election as OSCA President.

My work as the OSCA/OC Liaison this year acquainted me with much of the work and responsibility that the job of President entails and set the stage for the year to come. I have had the privilege of working with a very competent and motivated OSCA Board of Directors, who passed far-reaching reforms to OSCA policy ranging from creating OSCA staff contracts to creating a process for self-identified transgender and gender-variant students to jump the wait list into OSCA. The variety of knowledgeable and dedicated OSCA staff with whom I collaborated along the way left me with high expectations for the work ethic of the General Management Team. In addition, my involvement in the creation of OSCA’s new rent contract with the College left me with a thorough and pragmatic understanding of the way that OSCA fits into the larger framework of the College itself.

OSCA’s productivity this year has only allowed us to set our sights higher for the year to come. The celebration of OSCA’s 60th anniversary at the end of Spring semester promises to stoke our members’ passion for cooperative living and re-unite current members with former ones, bringing into focus the trajectory of OSCA throughout its history. Meanwhile, the re-structuring of OSCA’s member education system promises to better integrate new members and alumni with OSCA’s short- and long-range planning. Finally, OSCA members look toward the future by researching and discussing potential future projects that speak to OSCA’s strengths – including the possibilities for an OSCA farm and a co-op grocery store.

To reflect on OSCA’s flourishing 60-year history is to contemplate the everlasting ingenuity of Oberlin students (and youths in general) and the strength of the cooperative ideal. The great honor of being OSCA President is to be able to continually witness this ideal in action and to communicate it to the world.

In Cooperation,
Dylan Rees
Harkness Heritage

Harkness Head Cook Neva Fowler-Grace ’12 talks to her mom, Velia Fowler ’74, about what life was like in Harkness days past

Don Gest and Velia Fowler outside Harkness, May 1973

Neva: So when were you in Harkness?
Velia: My junior year, ’72 to ’73. I actually joined OSCA as a sophomore – freshmen weren’t allowed to live in co-ops – and I was in Keep that year. I was president of Old Barrows my senior year. I remember that Monique [her younger sister] was in Tank for some time, and Josie [her other younger sister] was in Old Barrows after I graduated, I think.

N: Were those all the co-ops?
V: I think so. Well, there was also Pyle, but it was very small, only about 20 people, I think. Harkness was the biggest – 90 people or so. And Harkness was different from the others.

N: How so?
V: Well, all of the other co-ops paid a cook to make their meals. The co-ops had been run for quite a while this way. The students just helped cook, like setting the tables, cleaning up… and they did their house chores of course. But it was nothing like the way you all cook now. Harkness was different though! Harkness was the newest co-op – it was only in its second year when I joined. It was the first co-op that didn’t have a hired cook, it was vegetarian (except on faculty nights), and it was trying to be completely organic. It was really an experiment! There weren’t millions of organic cookbooks, no tradition of how to do any of this… so we were just trying to figure it out.

N: How did the jobs work? What was your job in Harkness?
V: I think everyone just signed up for their jobs at the beginning of the semester. We didn’t have “interim” at all. We elected the president, the menu planner, and the food buyer… but everyone else just signed up for shifts. I was a head cook on Thursday nights my first semester, but I honestly can’t remember a single meal I cooked because the menu planner decided on all the meals.

My second semester I was a bread baker, and I kind of liked that better. The thing about the bread baker was, we bought these huge burlap bags of whole grains from this company Deaf Smith, and we actually had to grind it into flour. We really were making everything from scratch. We had this little room behind the kitchen [the current gluten-free dry goods room] where we had an electric mill. Maybe they had gotten it used, because it was really hard to adjust the gears to grind the flours to the right consistency… if it was too fine it would clog the mill, but if it was too coarse the bread would come out like lead – and this was with one hundred percent whole wheat flour too. Before we got the hang of it we had a lot of leaden bread… the main thing I remember about baking bread was fighting the mill.
N: And did people make lots of other things from scratch?
V: I think so. We had tofu makers but they were just figuring out how... and I think one job was growing bean sprouts. In Keep there was actually a beer-maker and wine-maker job.

N: What were co-op discussions like?
V: I only remember having meetings once a week or so. We used consensus, but it was nowhere near as complex as yours is now. The only issue I really remember having fights about was meat. Instead of pizza night once a week, we had faculty night – and we had to cook two separate dinners, one vegetarian and one with meat. But many vegetarians didn’t even like the idea of meat being cooked in the kitchen. There really were quite acrimonious co-op meetings with everybody arguing about that.

N: That’s amazing! It seems like nothing’s changed. What were the other co-ops like?
V: In Keep they were all bicyclers and hikers. I made all these friends there who were in the outings club. We’d make food in the co-op to bring on our hiking trips...

Especially this thing called logan bread that never got stale because it pretty much started out stale. Lots of rice and beans, and bulgur wheat. But anyway... Keep... I remember lots of big parties. We’d play the Rolling Stones top notch, and my room was right above the lounge, so you really had no choice but to join the parties. I don’t remember that much about the other co-ops. I do remember Tank was the artists.

N: And how did your experience in OSCA affect you later?
V: OSCA made me think that this is the only way to live. In later years I’ve often wished there was a co-op I could join and tried to find one nearby... it’s just a great way to meet and hang out with people. It’s my ideal way of running a household and a lab [she’s a cell biologist]. I don’t really run my lab that way, but it’s a model for an organization – to have everyone give their input on a decision, to have everyone working toward something. And I guess OSCA also influenced all the food I ate! I had grown up eating Pepperidge Farm white bread and pork chops... but I came home from college, and my mom said I changed all the food in the house.

Ways to Stay Involved in OSCA

- If you’re not already on it, join our mailing list (both U.S. mail and e-mail)
- Talk to your friends / family / neighbors about co-ops and Oberlin
- Find other OSCA members by joining the OSCA Alumni Facebook group
- Come to OSCA events during alumni weekend
- Submit to the next OSCA Alumni Newsletter
- Join the OSCA Alumni Council to advise the OSCA Board and reconnect with other alums (e-mail osca@oberlin.edu)
When someone asks, “What did you do for Winter Term?”, I don’t know where to begin. It’s almost easier to define it by what it is not. It is not a service trip, not a vacation, and not relief work. Since 1993, OSCA has had the privilege of working in solidarity with the National Union of Farmers and Ranchers, or UNAG, in the impoverished, drought-stricken region of San Juan de Limay, Nicaragua. Each year, OSCA — by student vote — sends between two and five thousand dollars to support a micro-loan fund for unionized female farmers. Every other Winter Term, OSCA sends a small delegation to Nicaragua to live with the women, understand their struggles firsthand and strengthen our relationship. We call ourselves the Nicaragua Sister Partnership.

What does a hippy student co-op in Oberlin and Nicaragua’s strongest union have in common? On the surface, very little. To start with the obvious, they are Nicaraguan farmers and we are U.S. college students. They struggle to send their children even to the local elementary school while we work (or not) to pay our way through one of the most expensive and prestigious liberal arts schools in the country. We get huffy when the co-op eats all vegan chocolate cake before we can snag a piece; they live with the threat of real hunger.

Throughout the trip, these differences were heartbreakingly visible. One day I noticed that my friend in the village had split the band of her rubber sandal. Anyone in the U.S. would have thrown the pair away and bought a new one. Her mother had painstakingly sewn the sandal back together with a needle and thread. Countless moments like this made me ashamed that my (and my country’s) prosperity causes and depends on the suffering of others.

When I was asked to give a speech at the union’s departmental assembly, attended by over 400 farmers, representatives from the government and many reporters, I tried to find our two organizations’ common ground. I didn’t mention all the similarities I thought of, as some are less-than-flattering. (For example, both OSCA and the UNAG struggle to boost attendance and participation at meetings.) I talked instead
about the core values of both organizations, how we both believe that nutritious and plentiful food, clean water, a dignified living space, accessible education and a healthy environment are rights, not commodities. How we are both dedicated to promoting equality of gender and race, democratic decision-making, and local and international cooperation. I closed the speech with assuring the organized women that, unlike many other groups who have pulled out their support, OSCA is with them for the long run, dedicated to our relationship and their wellbeing.

Our relationship with the UNAG is evolving and difficult to define. At our final meeting with the Junta Directiva, or governing board of Limay, I really understood why we call our relationship the Nicaragua Sister Partnership. As we sat in my host mom Jacinta’s kitchen eating yucca and cabbage salad and discussing ideas for improving the loan fund in the future, I felt like a true partner, fighting alongside the UNAG because we want the same things for the same people, people we now know intimately. The lasting personal relationships drive our work, something many international organizations cannot claim.

That is why one of the most influential women in Nicaragua keeps a picture of a bunch of Oberlin students by her bed. That is why my committee and I will spend the rest of this year educating the campus about the hardships facing our partners in Nicaragua and what we can do about them. That is why we can’t ever let the trivialities of college life push from our minds what we saw and learned last month. The women of Limay are counting on us.

For more information, or to support the work of the Nicaragua Sister Partnership, write to osca@oberlin.edu - Attn: NicSis.

State of the Pyle Inn Address

Pyle has been full of good food and fellowship. Favorite dishes have included: green tea ice cream, “Plan X” (a gingerbread house modeled after Pyle), eggrolls, roasted beets with onion, orange and garlic pesto, pizza with spicy maple butternut squash and arugula, dates stuffed with goat cheese, walnuts, and honey, and braided cardamom bread.

Our theme nights (speed dating night, pant-less night, and boy-band night, just to name a few) have facilitated friendship among our 100 members. Nice weather brings co-opers to the Asia House courtyard to enjoy the sunshine and cherry blossoms. President Marvin Krislov joined us for a meal last semester and told us we were “the most civilized co-op.” Pyle has become active and engaged in the all-OSCA community, producing high turnouts in all-OSCA votes. We take pride in our cleanliness, as we have passed all of our health inspections.

Noah Schwarz ’11 tells us “This kitchen is not a kitchen, but a suit of armor you are about to don, on your first joust to win the hearts of the people of Oberlin.”

Behold, Plan X !
Special Meals for Special People

Special meals have long been an interesting way for co-opers to plan fun or fancy meals outside of the normal cooking schedule. Often themed and always unpredictable, everyone has a great time putting these meals together.

This semester, Harkness voted to have a once-weekly “Loud Hour,” where residents are encouraged to make as much noise as possible. Finn Maloney, Hayley Sabo and Will Wickham join in the fun.
Co-op Dorm Saves Money

by Sarah Schaffer ’10

Sheila Meyers (’52) lived and ate in Pyle Inn, Oberlin’s first cooperative, for its first two years of operation after it opened in Fall of 1950.

She was attracted by the lower costs – after one semester, Pyle Inn boasted a fifty percent savings on room and board – and also the potential for independence. “At Pyle Inn we decided everything,” Sheila said. It was very different from life on the rest of campus, especially at a time when institutions of higher learning so firmly embraced in loco parentis.

This is, of course, still a point of distinction for OSCA. Co-opers are proud to grapple with and shape the policy that governs their lives each semester. It follows that another thing that hasn’t changed since those early coop years is an affinity for the long discussion – I can attest to the fact that Harkness dining has remained true to its roots in this way. “We had an entire meeting in the evening that lasted for hours about what to name a cat,” Sheila said. They eventually decided on “Trotsky.”

I once assumed that the co-ops of the fifties enjoyed nothing of the ‘radical’ characterization that is sometimes attached to the movement today, but I’ve since learned that even then, cooperative living represented a progressive vision of life that attracted students of a certain mind. “We had pinko commies in there,” Sheila said. “We had very political people.” She, herself, once ventured into the “commie meeting” held Sunday mornings. The 1951 Hi-O-Hi characterizes Pyle Inn as “probably the most active and reactive dorm, politically.” It continues, “The prevailing political wind is liberal in keeping with cooperative tradition. ‘Joe
Hill,’ for instance, is sung at least as often as ‘Down the Street.”

In Sheila’s time, Oberlin enforced a dress code throughout campus. She still remembers the signs in Rice prohibiting women from wearing pants. However, the ’51 yearbook reveals that this rule wasn’t always adhered to. A picture of Sheila vacuuming – in pants! – is captured as part of a two-page spread titled “Co-op Dorm Saves Money.”

Sheila now lives in Baltimore Maryland where she enjoys, among other things, playing clarinet, acting in community theater, and her grandchildren. She thinks that, what with the state of equity and retirement savings, retired folks ought to start living cooperatively, too.

Sarah Schaffer was kind enough to retrieve these photos as scans from the Oberlin College Archives. 1951 HI-O-HI, pg 126.

HELP OSCA OWN IT!

OSCA and OSCA Properties are currently conducting research to determine the feasibility of an OSCA-owned co-op building within Oberlin. In the next year or two, OSCA is looking into the possibility of building or renovating a building that would house a small kitchen and a community grocery store and that would follow green building and energy standards to the greatest extent possible. If you have architectural or building expertise and would like to assist OSCA in planning its future, we’d love to speak with you! Contact us at osca@oberlin.edu for details.
Tank Turret Tradition
by Catilin Roseum '11

Julia Maier, a sophomore from Pasadena, California, speaks fondly of her dad, Mark Maier '73, and his ability to cook delicious rice, a skill he perfected during his years in OSCA. Julia is the third generation in her family to attend Oberlin and be part of a cooperative lifestyle. In the spring of 2008, she received the turret room in Tank Co-op through the housing lottery. Seconds after the lottery, she called her parents in glee and discovered that she had chosen the same room that her father had in 1971! Julia spent the summer admiring Mark's old pictures of the turret and becoming increasingly excited about her new fairytale-like home.

Mark lived in the turret room in Tank in 1971, when it was a triple, with friends Bob Walker and Richard Moseson. At the time, the turret room ceiling was painted a beautiful color collage, he said, "lit by a strobe light box with different colors timed to 70's music." The college has since painted over the pattern, but Julia and her roommate have hopes of recreating the mural and restoring the historic integrity of the room. His senior year, Mark ate in Old Barrows with his friend Rita Belserene, whose son, Joe Duprey, is in his first year at Oberlin.

Julia's grandfather, Henry Maier, attended Oberlin in the 1940s, and although the co-op system as we know it today did not yet exist, he spoke to his sons about buying food and cooking and eating as a group. Henry lived in Pyle Inn, not yet a co-op.

Julia's dad recalled learning to cook in OSCA - although, in those days, the co-ops hired cooks to help in the kitchen to make lunch and prepare the main dinner course, and the co-ops purchased many more pre-made products. Other exciting things Mark remembers about OSCA: "The one time I made a pot-sink soap coffee cake when I thought the soap was vegetable oil; vegetarian lasagna served as meat and not noticed by the carnivores; races to button up the navy wool pants that were popular at the time; picking the locks with paper clips (Julia has been having trouble with her lock and she knows who is to blame!); daring to venture to the basement to use the electric potato peeler; Sunday dinner when the refrigerators had to be emptied and we ate what leftovers we dared; sleeping on the ledge outside the room; sitting in the turret room, reading economics and thinking I'd never understand it; inviting my mother and my economics teacher to dinner on the same night -big mistake!"

As if three members of the family weren't fun enough, Julia's aunt (Liz Tennant) and uncles (Peter Maier and Scott Maier) also attended Oberlin and participated in co-ops. Her aunt, Liz Tennant, lived in Keep Cottage (they have not verified if they lived in the same room!). At that time, Keep was an all female housing co-op, but was co-ed for dining.

Liz's husband, Peter Maier, ate in Keep. At that time, Keep was also still a co-op where the meal was served to co-operators patiently seated at tables - a little different from the serving tactics employed in the co-ops now, which range from quiet lines to raucous free-for-alls.
Ahh, the smell of pizza on a Friday night … Rae Eaton ’13 puts the finishing touches on a pizza waiting to go into the oven. Other pizza cooks test dough and practice fractions in the flour.

Alex Fine, Nicole Balin, Billy Ferrer, Caitlin Roseum, and Rue Oseas cheer for joy during OSCA open-up. Who knew Fairkid had an ice cream maker?!

A kitchen prepper leaves a message for the head cook using chopped radishes
Oberlin students gather on the porch of Tank to play any instrument they can find – including the spoons and jug. Garrett Robinson, Erin Lobb, Sara Sasaki, Doug Goldstein, Paul Denison

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Tofu Tofu Everywhere

All-OSCA Tofu-making is still a very important part of co-op life. Every Sunday, a fearless team of co-opers (usually two from each co-op) gathers in the Harkness kitchen to make tofu for all of OSCA.

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Jenny Miller ’13 and Matt Gold ’12 making tofu in style
Starting OSCA Local Foods
excerpts from a letter to The Review - Oct. 2008

A little known secret is that OSCA is responsible for bringing “local foods” to the Oberlin College campus. Even before the project was labeled “local foods,” the first campus co-ops were concerned about the origins (and quality) of the food that they served. Around 1988 (with grant help from David Orr, founder of the Meadow Creek Project, prior to his move to Oberlin) five OSCA students produced a documentary, together with a 73-page research study entitled “Local Foods and the Oberlin Student Cooperative Association,” to kick off OSCA’s local foods project.

Later, in the mid-1990s, as the College was considering a developer’s offer to buy what is now the George Jones Memorial Farm, OSCA members quickly mobilized and opened their voices and wallets to save that important wetlands area. Their support enabled an ad-hoc committee to make a counter-offer to the College for that piece of land. Subsequently, the land was leased to the New Agrarian Center, which oversees the Jones Farm and its numerous local foods projects, including a large garden plot that OSCA has used to educate members how to farm and to produce food for the co-ops. OSCA is currently considering buying land for its own farm.

It’s worth noting that OSCA’s percentage of local foods purchases has steadily risen from then to the present, reaching 35% in recent years.

Remember that crazy local produce?
Caitlin Roseum ’11 and Sophia Weinmann ’11
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