

Readers' Choice Awards

BEST GROCERY STORE

Astoria Co-op Grocery

Astoria, Oregon

Runner-up: Fred Meyer, Warrenton

Honorable Mention: Mainstreet Market, Warrenton

By NANCY MCCARTHY

For 41 years, the community has called the Astoria Co-op Grocery its own, and winning the Readers' Choice Award for Best Grocery Store only confirms locals' affection for it, said Zetty Nemlowill, co-op marketing director. More than 3,500 owners have purchased shares for \$200, which can be paid in \$25 annual increments. But anyone, whether they are owners or not, can shop at the co-op.

"People really like great food, and we try to provide high-quality, fresh, natural food," Nemlowill said.

About 100 local vendors supply the store with produce, meat, bread, pies and other goodies.

"We try to work with as many producers and farmers as possible," Nemlowill said. "We pick up our fish from Born-

stein's (Seafood), and we do a lot of farm-direct purchases, so there is no middle man."

A grab and go deli offers from-scratch soups made with organic ingredients, sandwiches, wraps and salads.

The store is also involved in the community and hosts monthly Beers to Your Health lectures in partnership with Fort George Brewery.

In addition, the co-op works with local charities through its "Beans for Bags" project. Every time a shopper brings a reusable bag, the co-op takes the nickel it would have spent on a bag and gives it to a local charity. A bean — representing the nickel — is given to the shopper, who can put it in one of three jars designated for the charities. For the first quarter of 2016, those charities are The Harbor, NAMI (National Alliance for Mental



Photo by Nancy McCarthy

Staff at the Astoria Co-op Grocery, led by general manager Matt Stanley, front, take pride in providing quality food, working with local farmers and giving back to the community.

Health) and the Lunch Buddy Mentoring Program.

With some private grocers increasingly focusing on organic foods, the co-op is facing more competition than ever. That's why this year, the store is improving its pricing.

As a member of the National Co-op Grocers, the Astoria Co-op has more buying power and can often beat the prices in larger stores, Nemlowill said.

All profits stay in local hands, she noted. "They come back to the community."

Among the top projects in

a five-year strategic plan recently adopted by the co-op's board of directors is the store's expansion. The board is still seeking a location, but the co-op has already raised \$30,000 toward the project — \$20,000 more than its original goal, and more fundraising efforts are in the works.

"That level of support shows how eager the community is to have the co-op around," Nemlowill said.

Astoria Co-op Grocery is open from 8 a.m. to 8 p.m. daily at 1355 Exchange St.

BEST BAKERY

Blue Scorcher Bakery & Cafe

Astoria, Oregon

Runner-up: Danish Maid Bakery, Astoria

Honorable Mention: Cottage Bakery, Long Beach



Photo by Joshua Bessex

The Cream Cheese Danish and mini Cardamom Almond Roll are just some of the choices available at Blue Scorcher Bakery and Cafe in Astoria. Order a fresh, organic, made-from-scratch pastry from the deli-style counter, then enjoy it with a cup of fairtrade, locally roasted coffee from Astoria Coffee Co. as you browse the Scorcher's eclectic magazine selection or take in the view of the Columbia River from the historic Fort George building, located at 1493 Duane St. The worker-owned cooperative uses organic, often stoneground flour to bake several kinds of bread, including traditional French breads, naturally leavened hearth loaves, yeast-risen pan breads and enriched specialty loaves. Also enjoy seasonal breakfast and lunch plates from 7 a.m. to 4 p.m. daily.

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