

Letter to Editor of Durango Telegraph Tuesday, September 2nd, 2014, by Root Routledge

Re: DNF Member Petition, August 27th, to remove DNF Board — updated information brief
Petition, located online and at DNF, is open for DNF member-only signing until midnight Sunday September 7th

Democratic institutions cannot survive without participation of their members; nor without access to open communication with members. It's the right of Durango Natural Foods Co-op members—indeed our obligation—to take responsibility for our co-op in a democratic way to protect it from impacts by Board decisions not in the members' interests. Yet this Board, which is accountable to the members, controls access to the membership and the only perspective they hear.

“Whistleblowing” is the courage to walk the path of truth and integrity. The DNF Board fired our well-liked and competent Co-General Manager Kimberley Wiggins Thursday, August 28, for doing just that. At the request of myself and Pat Blair, long-time DNF members initiating this effort to save DNF from further damage, Kim sent out an “urgent member alert” DNF email-blast to all members, with our cover-letter and links to our member-initiated petition to remove the Board, and a supporting analysis that debunks the Board's claims. Kim was fired 24 hours after it went out. No reason was given to Kim or the staff. With our petition underway, this threat continues with staff working in fear of losing their jobs if they say anything.

These efforts threaten to stifle free speech and assembly and limit our ability to collect petition signatures. Pat has been staffing a petition signing table at the entrance to DNF since Monday. She has been told by the “new GM,” Brian Gaddy, that she couldn't do that and was asked to leave. Board president Geoff Wolf came by later and tried to get her to move inside to reduce her visibility, which she refused to do; saying: “I'm a member of DNF; this is property we own and we have a right to assemble and a right to free speech. I'm not leaving.” We call on the co-op membership and DNF staff to stand in solidarity at this crucial time in DNF's 40-year history by speaking out and signing the petition. Our intent is nothing less than a management “reset” at DNF.

Misrepresentations by the Board is the core ethical justification for our petition. The Board's claim that “merging” with La Montañita Co-op is an “attractive opportunity” holding “many advantages” for DNF members was a ruse, not based on fact or analysis; and though now tabled due to our efforts is still a future possibility and so is not a moot point. See related *Herald* articles August 13th, 19th and 28th and *Telegraph* article August 28th for more details.

The word “merger” is itself a misnomer and misrepresentation, since what is really going on were this to go through, is a full sale of all of DNF's assets, name, marketing images and intellectual property to LMC. The only “benefit” DNF members would get is credit toward membership in LMC. We would not be “merging” or “joining” LMC, since DNF would no longer exist as a local member-owned independent co-op with a local voice, the very roots of our Co-op at its foundation. There would be no “we”. “Durango Natural Foods Co-op” would only be a store front name on a store to be owned and managed by an out-of-state co-op conglomerate.

The Board has made the unsubstantiated claim that “this transition will be great for our members, customers, and staff;” but not once have they been explicit about what those benefits would be. No facts or analysis about DNF's current value to its owners, its financial health, or future prospects. All of that you will find in the supporting analysis to the member-petition. We know that LMC would have bought all of DNF for simply the cost of our property mortgage, \$278,000; no funds to members. Yet, we hold property assets with a book value over \$650,000. And if one factors in the market value of DNF members' assets, as well as its value as an ongoing business, our DNF co-op has a net worth of at least \$1,000,000. The only one getting paid anything would be the bank for the mortgage; LMC would simply inherit the entire million dollars of DNF value for nothing.

A thorough financial analysis, along with the strategic plan put together by our Co-GM's at the beginning of 2014, show that we are a well-run organization in excellent shape for the future, having created and pursued "a readiness for growth" strategy. This, along with the sense of belonging to and owning a local co-op with a local voice, and all the relational benefits that go with that, are the values DNF members would lose with a sale of everything we currently hold.

Our report is at: <http://AlpineAnalytics.com/reports/dnf/DNF-PETITION-to-remove-Board-SUPPORTING-ANALYSIS-8-27-2014.pdf>. A two-page document is also available as: ".../Open-Communication-to-DNF-members-8-31-2014-Root-Routledge.pdf".

In the interest of stability, the petition contains a vote-option for an interim Board consisting of Pat and Root until elections can be set up to bring other Board members on. Neither of us are attached to being on the Board for any other reason than to protect DNF and our members' interests in the interim. Reinstating Kim would be our first decision.

If enough member signatures on this petition, which is what it will take, bring things forward where some future collaborative engagement can ensue with integrity, nothing would please us more. The petition (only DNF members can sign) is available online at <https://durangonaturalfoods.wufoo.com/forms/petition-to-remove-dnf-board/>, and a paper version at DNF, through September 7th.

Root Routledge, 20-year DNF member
Pat Blair, 40-year DNF member
Durango

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Blair was the general manager of DNF from 1974 to 1983. She and her family started the non-profit Rocky Mountain Retreat, dba Turtle Lake Refuge, run by Katrina Blair. Reach Pat at 970-759-5458, or email at PRBlair@Bresnan.net.