

## Fiddleheads Launches New Fund-raising Campaign

*Food co-op is hoping to double membership so it can finally open*

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**New London** — A local storefront food cooperative movement kicked off its “Open the Doors” capital campaign on Saturday, announcing its goal of raising \$1.8 million and doubling its membership size to 1,200 people.

“We’re asking people to become members because it’s the membership fee that makes everything possible,” said Fiddleheads President Richard Spindler-Virgin. “We will have a co-op in six months.”

Fiddleheads represents a push for a member-owned and community-minded healthy grocery store. The group is working to have an 8,000-square-foot storefront in New London with a bakery, café, deli and store with natural, organic and locally produced goods.

However, the project has been mired in delays and controversy. In the spring, the board dismissed general manager Richard Krasner. Members were blaming each other for stalling the project, which began four years ago. Finances were called into question.

Spindler-Virgin said the board of directors has spent time analyzing the business plan and trying to communicate with members about “not losing faith,” and their goal.

To accomplish the goal, the cooperative will be holding membership drives and will be making contact with various corporations and individuals, Spindler-Virgin said. The membership fee is \$175.

The kickoff campaign also featured the unveiling of the cooperative's new sign. A group of about 50 people gathered outside the corner of 13 Broad St., the former California Fruit building. After a 10-second countdown, volunteers took off the cloth that covered the white-colored sign with green lettering that spelled out: Fiddleheads Food Cooperative. Spectators cheered, and a few cars driving by honked their horns.

Inside the building, there were floor plans, tile samples and before-and-after photos to show work the group has done on the building.

“It's been a long haul, I know. But it's terrific for a 'funder' to see how well you've done in a crisis,” said Mary Hoyer, outreach coordinator for the Cooperative Fund of New England. “I'm thrilled to see the progress in this building.”

When the presentation ended, the group received a rousing round of applause.

“That speaks for it in itself,” Spindler-Virgin said.

Attending the event was New London Mayor Peg Curtin, Groton Mayor Harry A. Watson, Chamber of Commerce President Tony Sheridan, state business advocate Rob Simmons and local legislators, among other officials.

“This is a new model for building the inner cities. This is exactly what we need,” Simmons said. “Three cheers for leadership. ... Let's get it built, let's get it done.”

The guest speaker was Bill Duesing, executive director of the New England Connecticut Farmer's Association, talking about the current state of agriculture.

<http://www.fiddleheadsfood.coop>

New London

*Photos by Tim Cook*

