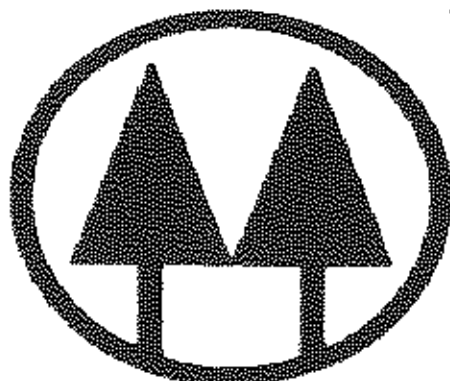


# Oberlin Student Cooperative Association

## Alumni Newsletter 2005-2006

### *A Letter from the President Caleb Baker*



This past year has been a defining time for Oberlin College. Reducing the size of the student body, eliminating faculty and staff positions, coming to terms with the fact that the new Union Street housing has remote control lights, even Oberlin's age old slogan is changing. (For those alumni not in the know, one person can no longer change the world but Oberlin is now officially Fearless!) These changes in the College are partly reflective of changes in the composition of the student body which in turn are the product of changing administrative priorities. Primarily, to attract more students to Oberlin College who do not require the assistance of financial aid. So what is OSCA's identity going to be in this new Oberlin? I really have no idea but I am going to talk about it for a little while anyway.

Basically, OSCA has always suffered from a partial identity crisis. This is the expected outcome of being an organization that tries to accomplish so much with so few resources. We have to reconcile our conflicting obligations to be at cost, to be environmentally sustainable, to support

social justice and to be accessible to all Oberlin students. We run into problems when cheap supplies are available from a company that's maybe not local or worker friendly. Do we follow the at cost provision of our mission statement or the concern for community provision of our bylaws? When making food we usually cook traditional OSCA meals which tend to use organic ingredients, few dairy products, and fewer meat products still. Does this make OSCA accessible to the diverse range of dietary interests present at Oberlin, or are we placing the food preferences of a few above the need for accessibility?

As the College reinvents itself to address its finances, OSCA may be forced to resolve some of these questions. The cost of an education is going up everywhere and this is as true of Oberlin as it is anywhere else. Is this the time for OSCA to commit to being as affordable as possible? Can we help keep Oberlin financially accessible while the College resolves its finances? Of course these questions may be moot. If the College demands another \$300,000 dollars in rent from OSCA during the next year's rent contract negotiations, then being an affordable alternative to Resfid and Campus Dining Services becomes even harder.

These are not the only questions facing OSCA in the coming year. The decision whether or not to rejoin NASCO looms over us again as it has each year since we left. Will OSCA continue to sever its main tie to the cooperative movement? Paying NASCO member dues places even more strain on our

efforts to remain at cost but doing so would help fulfill our cooperation among cooperatives bylaw. Does at-cost trump bylaw? Many OSCA members have stated that we should add an additional priority to our mission statement, a few of them are even preparing an All-OSCA vote about it. If passed, this vote would add a commitment to being an anti-racist organization to our mission statement.

Of course not everything in OSCA is going to change. Iris is still here. Harkness still has no TV. Tank still threatens to catch on fire and burn to the ground. Pizza nights are still on Fridays. And we still make the health inspector cry. Actually, we have a Food Safety Coordinator now and OSCA is making huge strides in health code compliance. Even the county inspector seems to find us tolerable. But OSCA is entering a transition period. We are defining new priorities and finding new ways to accomplish our old ones. One of the biggest obstacles facing us in this process is our lack of institutional memory. Our yearly staff turnover prevents us from knowing what debates about these topics have taken place in the past. So if any co-op alumni have ideas or remember how OSCA has resolved these questions before, send us a letter or write us an e-mail. We want your opinions, your advice, even your questions or your memories. The worst thing that can happen is that we read it and don't find it helpful. And the best thing that can happen is that I send the most informative letter writers free OSCA T-shirts.

# Then There Were Three: A New Employee in OSCA

by Guy Brown  
Food Safety Coordinator

Remember the days of naked crew and barefoot kitchen fun? Well those days are over Alumni. OSCA is running a tight ship these days regarding food safety and many changes have happened since you graduated. If you come back to OSCA for the alumni picnic and decide you would like to help cook, that is great. However, remember you are stepping into a full service industrial kitchen, so put on your hairnet and apron and get ready to make food in manner acceptable by Ohio Health Code.

In the spring of 2004, OSCA came close to being shut down by the Lorain County Health Department. We had problems with management, cleanliness, and food handling practices. OSCA was allowed to keep its Food Operation License on the condition that it hire an employee to help manage food safety concerns.

Currently, the position is a part-time position, roughly 30 hours a week, and is held by me, Guy Brown. I graduated in 2003 and was involved with OSCA for three years while I was at Oberlin College. This new position brings the employment count in OSCA up to three paid employees.

The Lorain County Health Department has been cracking down on OSCA and the way it handles its food service. In OSCA, we now wear aprons and some sort of hair restraint. I remember naked meals when I was in OSCA and I must inform you that they do not happen anymore. (Or rather, I try not to know about them if they do happen) Many other changes have been made to try to push food safety to a top priority in OSCA. We keep extensive cooling logs of leftovers and have our own labels that we use to identify all items stored. We do comprehensive trainings

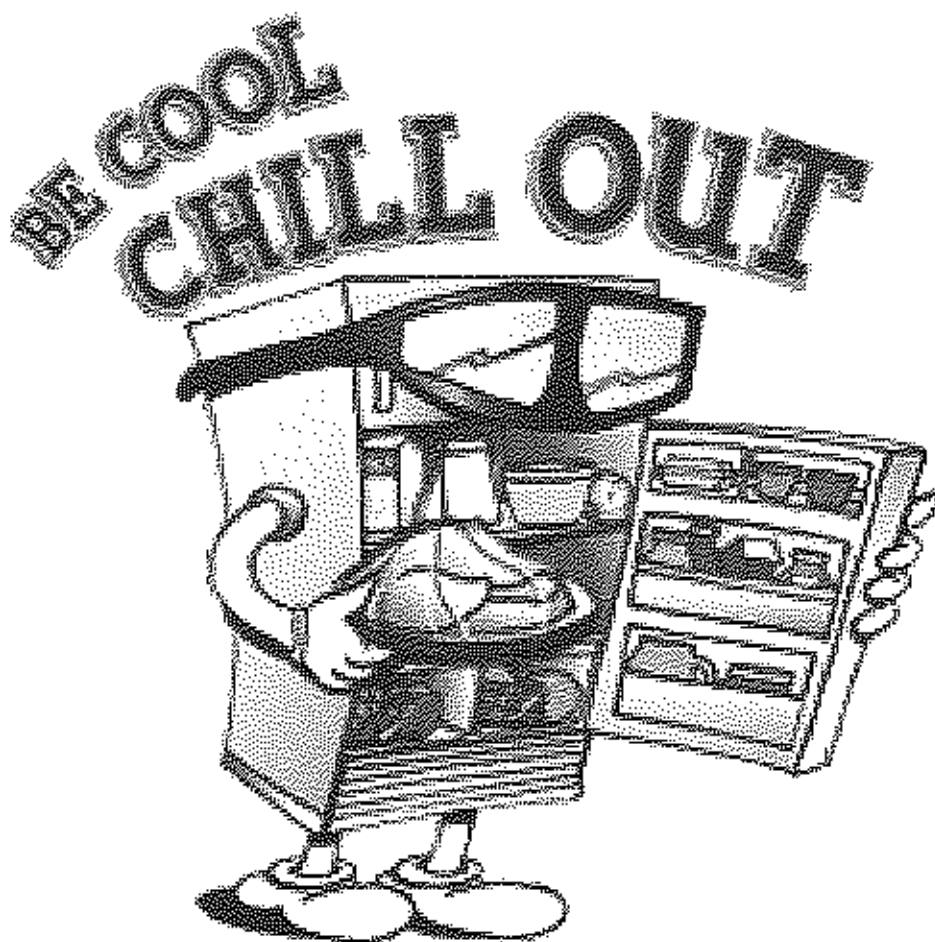
during the beginning of every semester and offer workshops to co-ops that have continual problems in certain areas.

As the Food Safety Coordinator, I conduct trainings of Kitchen Coordinators, People Coordinators, Head cooks, and Unpackers. I perform inspections of all the co-ops at random and act as a consultant of sorts to inform OSCA in what areas it needs improvement. I also serve as a general resource for co-op members and help keep our facilities running in accordance with Ohio Health Code.

Working with Operations Managers and Cleanliness and Maintenance Coordinators, our food safety awareness has risen in OSCA. The Health Inspector is

has told me that she has seen much improvement in OSCA over the last few years. We are licensed to operate like a commercial kitchen; therefore, we shall operate the co-ops as commercial kitchens.

I must admit working for OSCA is a great job. It gives me some free time and alleviates my concerns about working for the right people. OSCA provides benefits and a good wage, and working with OSCA these past two years has been a very rewarding experience. If you are concerned about OSCA losing its charm to the dreaded Health Code, do not worry. OSCA still has plenty of barefoot beer soaked pizza nights. We just do it with aprons on now.



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# Iris Hunt Celebrates 20 Years

by Corey Walters  
Membership Secretary



On March 9, 2006 at the General Management Team meeting, we had a little party for Iris. She was honored with chocolate cake and Pabst Blue Ribbon. Here are some people's remembrances of Iris from that meeting:

Iran Lalani (Treasurer): Iris knows everything there is to know about life. Iris has been super awesome. If it wasn't for Iris, I'd be a stripper on the run from the IRS right now.

Dani Indovino (Office Intern): Getting called to Iris' office is like getting called to the principal's office, you never know if it's because you've done something great or fucked up really bad. You saved my summer.

Enca Tempesta (Operations Manager): Iris is like the best Oberlin room, except when she made me cry.

Iris Hunt, who was hired as Bookkeeper of OSCA in 1986 and Financial Manager in 1992 had her 20th Anniversary working for OSCA this March. As many of you know, Iris is supremely dedicated to making sure OSCA runs smoothly and stays out of trouble. We are all glad that Iris has put up with us for so long. She has provided stability and

continuity to our great organization, which is plagued with normally such a short institutional memory, given the nature of a student run corporation where members tend to stay only four to five years. During her tenure, Iris has seen OSCA go through ups and downs, from buying properties and the creation of

our sister corporation OSCA Properties, to regrettable student decisions and two IRS audits. We at OSCA appreciate all the time and energy that she has put into making sure that students can cooperate and have a say in their own community.

# Out on the Farm: The OSCA Garden Project

by Kevin Herschman  
Farm Coordinator

For the second time in my five falls at Oberlin, I found myself unafraid of the approaching winter. The first time was when I entered as a freshman from Louisiana, eager to experience snow for the first time. Now, after spending the summer here, in a tent, Ohio no longer seems to have a completely bleak and miserable climate. The bitter winter seems to be offset by the warm (okay, HOT!), lush summer and early fall. The cold seems like a break from the heat, from weeding, and from picking tomatoes. It is also an opportunity, to shift my attention inside, both physically and mentally, towards school, studying and reading.

I spent my summer at the George Jones Memorial Farm, growing vegetables for OSCA. In this pioneer attempt at greater Co-Operative self-sufficiency, I was able to reap (and sow) the benefits of having a 70-acre piece of land (the Jones Farm) affiliated with my idealistic liberal arts education.

Together with two other stipended OSCA members, I set out at the beginning of June to grow a modest garden. With about 8 hours worth of priceless advice from Jack Hunt—a well-seasoned and attentive farmer—we began shaping beds and planting tomatoes, carrots, basil, beets, cabbage, pumpkins, squash, and even a few ears of corn.

My commute to work every morning, involved a cool walk across the wetlands to the north side of the farm. We spent most weekdays during the summer weeding, planting, pruning, bed making, and eventually, eating! With a small plot of land and a lot of time, we were able to give the garden the attention that it needed to really flourish! By the beginning of August, after I spent three days baby-sitting our



freshly planted peas and broccoli, trying to help them sprout in the hot dry weather, I became aware that I was really parenting our vegetables.

Fed by the knowledge and observations of others, my closeness to our garden, led me towards an intuitive understanding of our different plants' needs. Through our attempts at weed and pest control, I also started to gain an understanding of how systems and species interact and compete in an ecosystem—biological selection became a part of my daily life.

The second half of August felt like a state of perpetual joy! The farm was tremendously abundant, it felt like the whole world was in bloom! With the slightly cooler weather, the plants began to burst forth with fruit! Between the OSCA garden produce that had already ripened and the beautiful produce coming from the rest of the farm, everyone was eating like royalty! Never

before had I understood so completely the joy of the harvest—the sweat from working in the hot sun seems to have aged like wine as you eat a perfectly ripe tomato off of the vine two months later!

I know that my learning experience on the farm last summer represents immense privilege. I am part of an organization that had the money and generosity to allow me to learn how to grow vegetables. Not in a fool-proof apprenticeship kind of way, but in a trial by fire technique. Just as most things in OSCA, the risks are greater and the yields less materially profound however the lessons learned are priceless.

In planning the project, we anticipated being able to grow about \$3000 worth of produce to offset the \$6000 that was invested by OSCA. On the other side of that \$3000 mark, with about 50 broccoli plants yet to harvest, I can confidently say that we completed our mission!

Whether or not the project is successful in the future depends on the involvement of OSCA members. While on one hand, I hope for the garden to be nurtured into increasing states of productivity. More importantly, I hope that other members of OSCA will be able to take advantage of this incredible learning experience by bringing their ideas and questions to the garden.

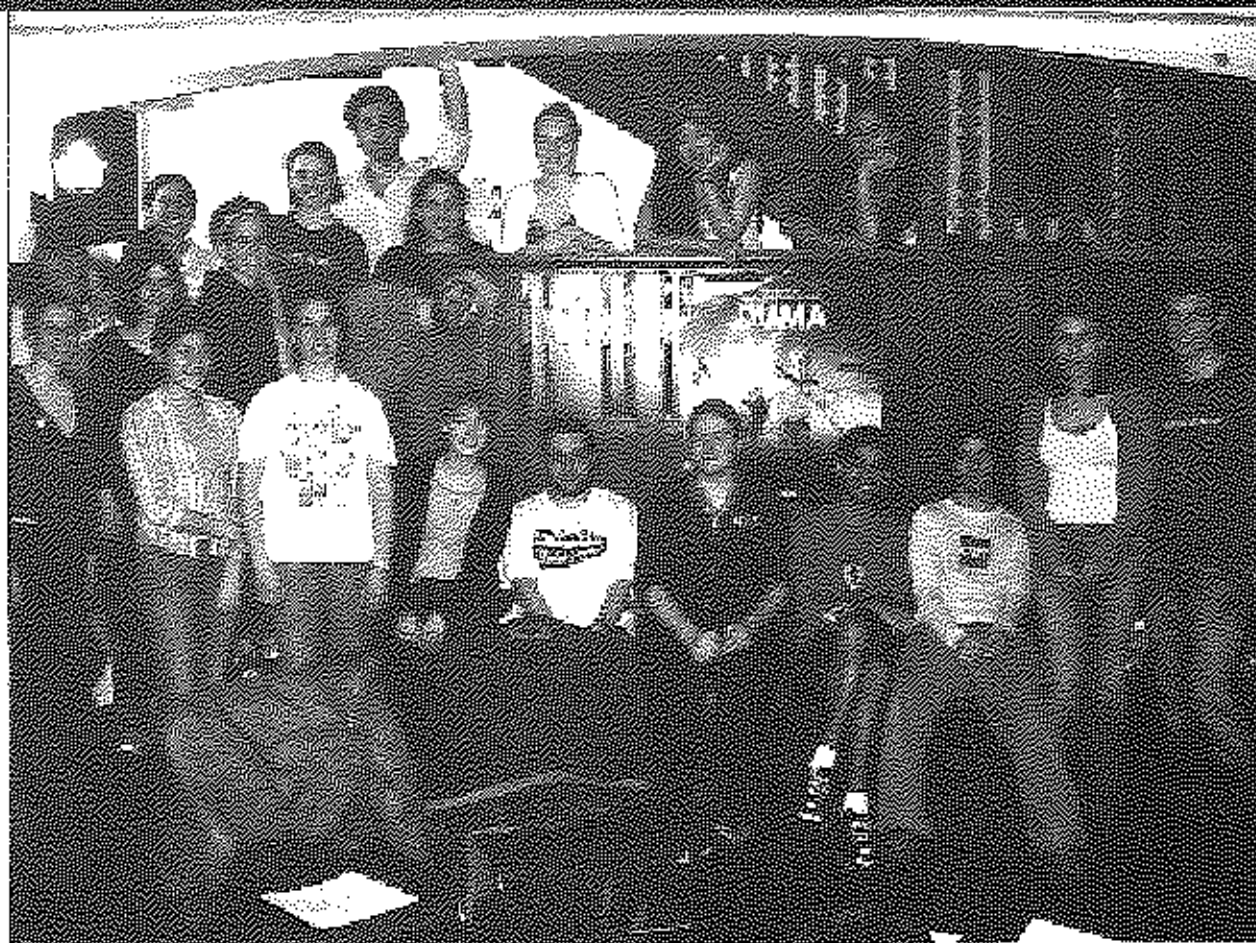


*A Summer at  
the Jones Farm*

*Please Join Us for the  
OSCA Alumni Picnic*

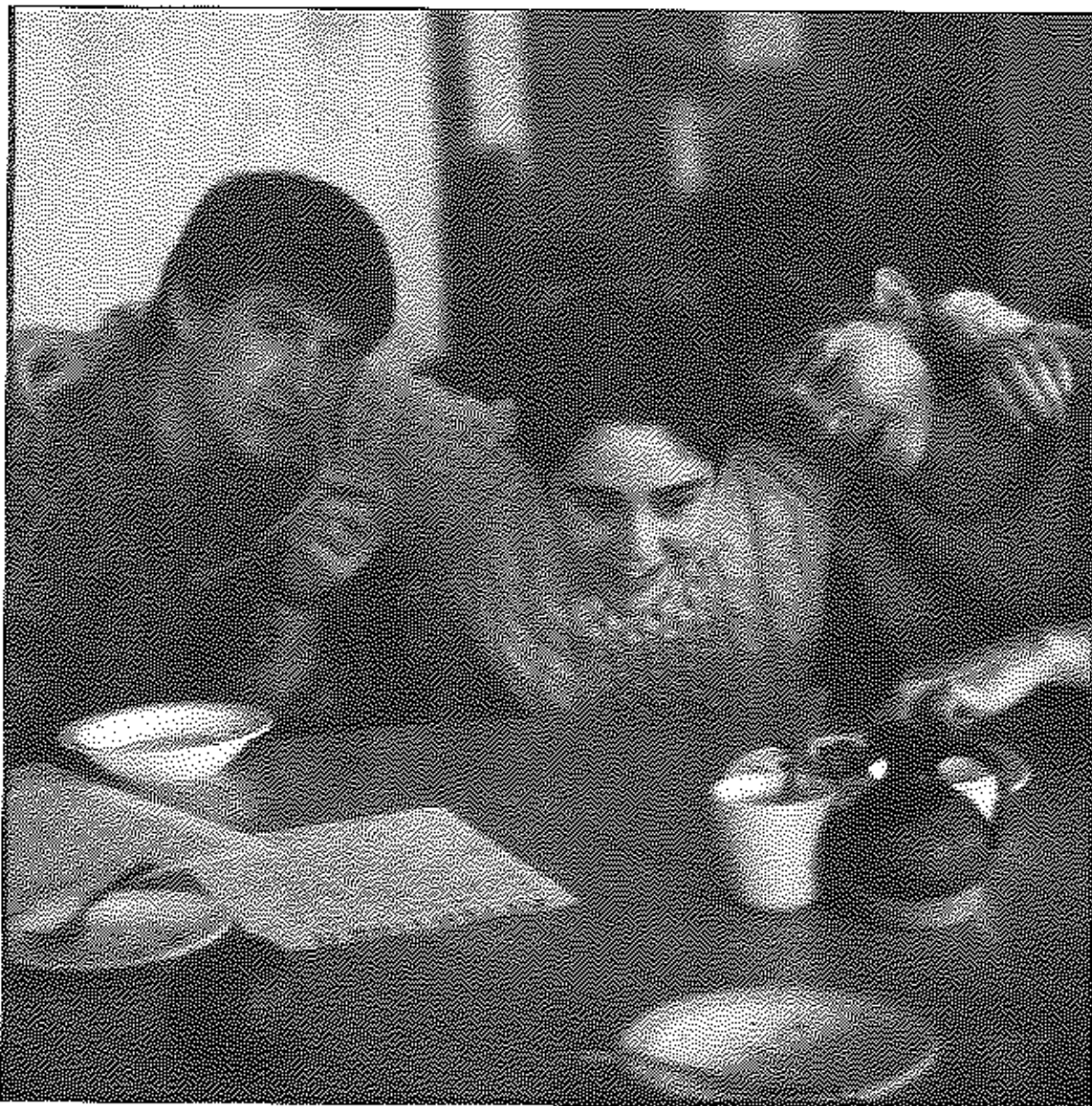
*May 27, 2006 at Noon  
at Tank Co-op.*

*E-mail [OSCA@oberlin.edu](mailto:OSCA@oberlin.edu)  
or call 440-775-8108 for  
more information*



*Spring 2006 OSCA Board of Directors*

## *Are Any of These People You?*



While cleaning and re-organizing the OSCA archives, Theory and History Coordinator Lee Butler came across more than two hundred slides of OSCA members, houses, and events taken in the mid-late 1980s. Lee took the slides to Joseph Romano in the Art History department, who graciously scanned the slides into JPG format.

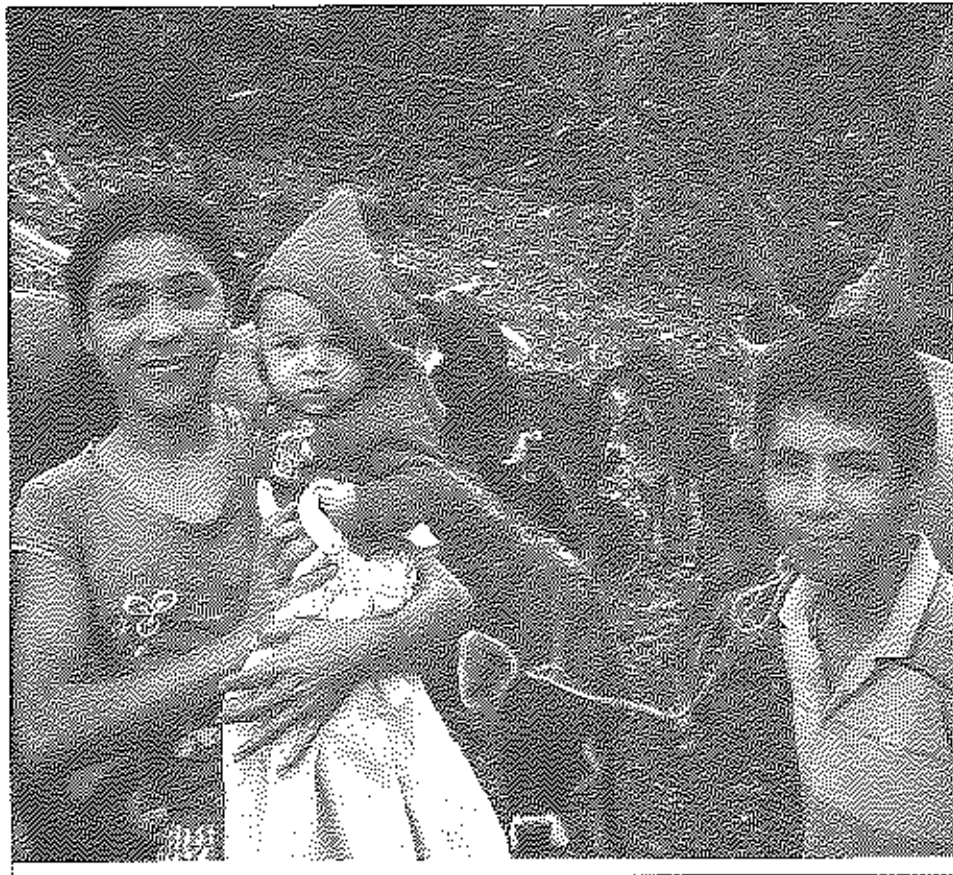
The slides were largely unlabeled and disorganized, so it is impossible to tell who is in the slides or their significance. OSCA alumni from 1986 to 1989, do you re-

member anyone taking slide photographs? Lee is trying to identify the people in the photographs; if you are coming to the Reunion Picnic on May 28th, please take some time to look through the pictures and identify yourself, your friends, and the events recorded.

If you are not attending the Reunion Picnic and are still interested in helping out, please e-mail Lee. [Butler@Oberlin.edu](mailto:Butler@Oberlin.edu), and Lee can send you some photos to look through.

# Nicaragua Sister Co-op Committee Seeks to Expand Revolving Loan Fund

by Araceli Mendiluce  
Nicaragua Sister Co-op  
Committee Coordinator



Many OSCA alumni will probably remember that we have a sister co-op in Nicaragua. For more than 10 years, we have been supporting a revolving loan fund, so that women in the community of San Juan de Limay in Esteli, Nicaragua may have access to loans for the purchase of livestock and seed.

This Winter Term a delegation of four Obies went to visit our sister co-op with the idea of expanding the existing fund. After many meetings with members in several communities, the proposal of starting a second loan fund for the purpose of education was developed. The idea is to provide micro

credits for secondary school or technical education, and at the same time promote a sense of communal responsibility in the recipients of the loans by providing community service opportunities, so that their education not only serves them but their community.

The members of the delegation could see the positive impact that our relationship has done in San Juan de Limay. It was definitely great to see the importance of cooperatives for empowering people around the world, and it was even better to see that OSCA can do so much outside the Oberlin walls.

# OSCA Supports Community Action

by Nathan Brewer  
Bill Long Foundation

On February 23rd, 31 OSCA members attended an energetic meeting of the Bill Long Foundation. Along with 25 community members, they voted to give away over \$10,000 to 21 new causes in the Oberlin community. These organizations will perform a wide range of tasks from feeding the hungry (Oberlin Hotmeals) to providing childcare scholarships to low-income families (Oberlin Early Childhood Center).

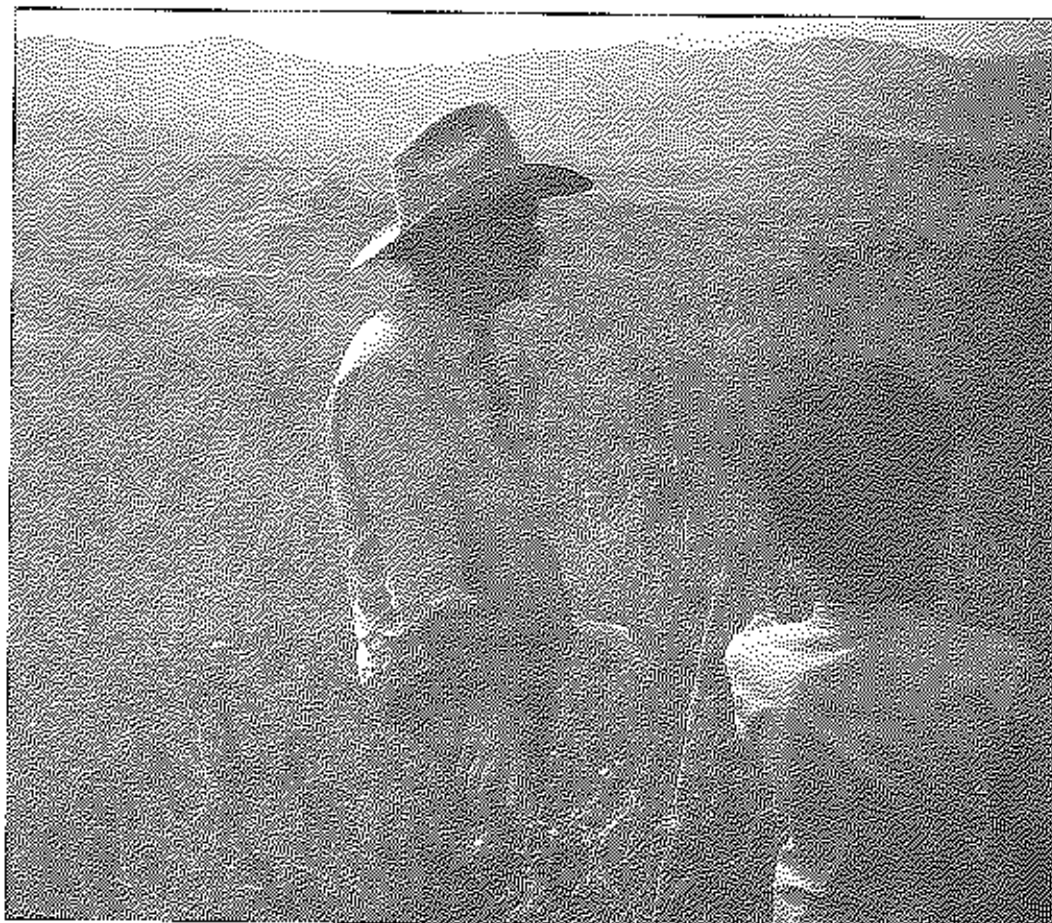
OSCA members also came out to show support for two student conferences that were requesting funding this year. Thanks to the vocal support of OSCA members, the Sexual Health Conference (sponsored by the Sexual Information Center) and the Capoeira Conference (sponsored by Oberlin Rhythms of Resistance) each received over \$200.

The relationship between the Bill Long Foundation and local co-ops has been strong from the organization's inception. Bill Long was the long-time manager of the Co-op Bookstore and the Oberlin Consumers Co-op. As the manager, Bill approved the allocation of money to help found Pyle Inn and continued to work with the burgeoning student co-op movement.

The Bill Long Foundation was eventually founded on the principles of giving and co-op ideals that he and the other co-op folk in Oberlin so strongly believed. It was these ideals that encouraged the foundation to put the major decisions of who to fund and how much to fund

*continued on page 10*





*Images from the  
Nicaragua Sister  
Co-op*



*The Nicaragua Sister Co-op Winter Term Delegation to San Juan de Limay, Nicaragua. Members of delegation: Vanna Waldron ('08), Daniel Lesser ('08), Sara Skvirsky ('09) and Araceli Mendiluce ('08).*

# OSCA Properties: We Really Do Own It

by Guy Brown  
OSCA Properties Treasurer

1985 is a song best known for its performance by the pop rock band Bowling For Soup. However, it is also the year that OSCA purchased its first property, 121 E. College Street. Over the last twenty years, OSCA has been providing co-operative living opportunities to the greater Oberlin Community and to its student members through their rooming houses. It was a big step for OSCA because it was the first time since OSCA's beginning that OSCA entered the realm of property ownership.

In 1997 OSCA Properties was born. Faced with rising costs in tuition and room and board, OSCA took a major step to actually lower board bills for its members by developing a plan of action to enable OSCA students to receive scholarships. OSCA Properties was created as a separate corporation and applied for non-profit 501(c)3 tax status. With this new tax status, OSCA's sister corporation would be able to give scholarships to OSCA members.

Today, OSCA Properties is still in business. We gave five scholarships this past semester that were valued at \$404 each. OSCA Properties uses the interest from an endowed fund to provide as many scholarships as we can each semester. The larger our fund grows the greater number of scholarships we can provide. Scholarships are very important to OSCA members; many

students choose to donate their refunds each year to help the scholarship fund of OSCA Properties.

Currently OSCA Properties is run by its own Board of Directors and has its own officers. Our membership includes our house members, OSCA officers, OSCA Properties officers, the Scholarship Coordinator, the Financial Manager, and the OSCA membership. Our membership is currently open to any one who wishes to pay \$5 dues.

Over the past two years, OSCA Properties has been trying to find our niche in regards to Oberlin College's Strategic Plan. The housing market is risky in Oberlin and we are looking at how we can best use our funds to improve our current property and to promote cooperation in the Oberlin Community. We currently provide low-income housing, in the form of a co-operative living model, to both students and community members, and for the first time Fuller is currently filled entirely with non-students. We have committed to using Green Design Standards for any future property purchases and any renovations to existing property.

The property at 121 E. College St., known as Fuller Co-op, has had some renovations over the last year to help improve its energy efficiency including an increase in insulation and new taps for sinks and showers that cut down on wasted water. The porch was repainted this last summer and this coming summer we hope to see improvements

in the driveway and the floor of the porch.

OSCA Properties and OSCA have come to realize a common purpose and both corporations have a mutual stake in the community. The officers of both corporations have taken steps to see that OSCA and OSCA Properties will always be connected by a joint commitment to cooperation and community building.

*continued from page 3*

them directly in the hands of the foundation membership.

The relationship between OSCA and the Bill Long Foundation was recently reinforced when OSCA began paying \$5 a head to cover the foundation membership fees of every student in OSCA (630 people). This contribution provides support for both the Foundation and the Oberlin community. OSCA has also provided the hands to help run the organization. The board of trustees overseeing this year's grant giving process included two OSCA alumni: Ben Ezinga ('01) and the vice president, Avery Book ('04).

If you would like to become a member of the Bill Long Foundation, send \$5 to:

Bill Long Foundation  
PO Box 141  
Oberlin, OH 4467

# Is OSCA a Social Movement?

by Dan Indovino  
Alumni Coordinator

What does it mean to be part of a cooperative?

Is OSCA just a place for good cheap food or is it also a political and social statement, an intentional community? Though this question gets asked in food policy and missed job discussions, I find it is not something that is discussed or evolved throughout our time in OSCA. Most of us will stay for at least a year, if not more of our college careers. What is it we are trying to do with this corporation?

It is our place and responsibility to ask why are we here? What do we want? And why do we stay?

While I do find OSCA a great place to find good, varied meals, I also see it as a place to grow and attain skills that are not available elsewhere on campus. For me, OSCA is a place where people can learn to work together, lead and understand other's viewpoints. From COPAO (Committee On Privilege and Oppression) discussion tables, to simple table wide discussions, I find the nature of community and responsibility spoken about in OSCA more than anywhere else.

Is OSCA part of a social movement? Nowhere else do I find myself sitting and talking to people of different majors, interests and ages.

From the canning project to the garden project, from Nicaragua Sister Coop committee to our dedication to hurricane relief, from our membership in the Bill Long Foundation to our membership in OSCA Properties; OSCA members are aware of their community and take action to better it. Looking at our alumni, I would say yes. People leave OSCA and take on leadership roles that aim to change society to be more inclusive, accessible and community based. Many of our alumni are more conscious to the importance of interaction and community in their everyday lives and more willing to create a cooperative way of solving their own problems.

## WHAT'S NEWS WITH YOU?

*New Address? New Job? Want to get in touch with other OSCA alumni? Just want to say hello?  
We'd love to hear from you....*

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Co-op(s) & years: \_\_\_\_\_

Your News: \_\_\_\_\_

Change of Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

**YES! I want to support OSCA**

I can offer a winter term project

*specify:* \_\_\_\_\_

I can offer an internship, job or housing

*specify:* \_\_\_\_\_

I'd like to visit or speak at an OSCA event

*specify:* \_\_\_\_\_

Here is my donation of \$ \_\_\_\_\_ to support the:

Alumni News Network

Financial Scholarship Fund

*Other:* \_\_\_\_\_

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