The Power of Cooperation: More Than Just a Credit Union

At Soo Co-op Credit Union, cooperation is woven into the way we serve our members and support the communities we call home. It amplifies the impact of our community involvement, allowing our efforts to reach farther and accomplish more than we could alone.

Throughout Michigan's Eastern Upper Peninsula, our employees give their time and talents to address community needs. Whether we are teaching financial skills, supporting local schools and non-profit organizations, honoring veterans, or helping a neighbor through a difficult time, we believe small acts become powerful when people work together.

Our commitment is especially visible during our Annual All-Staff Volunteer Day. This year, more than 70 employees completed over 15 projects across four communities, contributing more than 280 volunteer hours in a single day. Employees refreshed playgrounds, weeded city flower beds, painted ballfield dugouts, improved a local museum, and completed other projects that made our communities cleaner, safer and more welcoming.

That cooperative spirit continues throughout the year. On CU Kind Day, 75 employees volunteered 150 hours by raking yards for senior citizens and hosting a pumpkin-painting activity at a local senior care home. On Veterans Day, 78 employees contributed 156 hours across four communities. They served breakfast and lunch at the American Legion, visited senior care homes, assisted with ceremonies, and supported other events honoring local veterans.

Our employees' commitment extends beyond credit union-sponsored activities. Nine Soo Co-op Credit Union employees currently serve on 13 nonprofit boards throughout our communities. By contributing their experience, leadership, and time, these employees help guide organizations that provide essential services, educational opportunities, and community programs across the region.

Education is another important part of our mission. For approximately 15 years, Soo Co-op Credit Union has helped 3,911 area high school students prepare for adulthood through financial reality fairs. These interactive events challenge students to manage a monthly budget based on a career, salary, and real-world expenses. Today, we partner with four area credit unions to provide volunteers and conduct these fairs, demonstrating that financial institutions can accomplish more when they work together.

Our financial education efforts begin even earlier. Employees visit classrooms to read to first- and second-grade students during reading month. Each student receives free copy of the featured books. Through our partnership with Bayliss Public Library, employees

participate in preschool story times, educational programs, and community presentations about avoiding scams and achieving financial wellness. Penny Penguin, our youth program mascot, helps make learning fun and memorable.

Soo Co-op Credit Union operates three student-run branches where student volunteers gain hands-on experience serving their classmates. Students apply, interview and complete the training needed to operate their school branch, with a Soo Co-op Credit Union Education Coordinator on site to provide guidance and oversight. In partnership with each school's administration, we tailor the program to meet the needs of its K-5 students. Through this experience, student volunteers develop valuable skills in cash handling, member service, cooperation, organization, and public speaking; skills that can support their academic success and prepare them for future careers.

Soo Co-op Credit Union also partners with the Les Cheneaux Community Foundation and Les Cheneaux Community Schools to support KickStart to Career, a Children's Savings Account program designed to help students prepare for post-secondary education expenses. The program was the fifth of its kind established in Michigan and the first in the Upper Peninsula. Each kindergarten student (and each new student in participating grades one through six) attending Les Cheneaux Community Schools or being homeschooled within the district has the opportunity to become the beneficiary of an account at Soo Co-op Credit Union. The account is opened with a $50 deposit from the Les Cheneaux Community Foundation, and students, parents and grandparents may continue contributing to help cover education expenses after high school.

Our investment in education continues through Soo Co-op Credit Union's annual scholarship program. Each year, SCCU awards a total of $10,000 in college scholarships to five members who are pursuing further education. Since the program began, we have awarded more than $282,000, helping members build brighter futures and strengthening the next generation of community leaders.

Our educational outreach also helps college students and adults prepare for successful careers. Through Soo Co-op Credit Union's sponsorship of the Lake Superior State University Career Services Resource Center, our HR team presents fall and spring career-readiness workshops on perfecting resumes and cover letters and developing effective interview skills. SCCU also participates in planning meetings for LSSU's annual Fall and Spring Career Fairs and sponsors prizes for selected student attendees. This partnership gives students practical tools and greater confidence as they prepare to enter the workforce.

Beginning this September, our resume and interview workshops will reach an even broader audience through a local Community Action program. Residents will receive practical life-skills training designed to help them create strong resumes, prepare for interviews and improve their ability to secure the right job. By sharing our employees' professional knowledge, we can help individuals pursue new opportunities and greater financial stability.

Soo Co-op Credit Union is also a major supporter of the Soo Locks Children's Museum, where we are working with other area credit unions to sponsor an interactive credit union exhibit. For children in rural communities, access to hands-on financial education can be limited. This exhibit will introduce important financial concepts through play, helping children gain confidence and familiarity with money at an early age.

Our employees also support local schools by volunteering at athletic events, history fairs, science fairs and booster club activities. We provide volunteers for community races, the annual I-500 snowmobile race, highway cleanups, and downtown beautification projects. We sponsor Senior Day at the Chippewa County Fair, where approximately 150 senior citizens enjoy a complimentary luncheon and connect with local health and service organizations.

When our members and neighbors face hardships, our employees respond. Through Friday dress-down contributions, employees raise funds for school food pantries, homeless shelters, senior programs, nonprofit organizations, and members experiencing house fires, medical emergencies, or cancer treatment. During the holidays, employees provide food baskets for families, collect food and toys with The Salvation Army, and purchase gifts so local children have something special to open on Christmas morning.

Soo Co-op Credit Union has also joined other area credit unions to host a community cybersecurity seminar featuring the Michigan State Police and a panel of local financial professionals. By cooperating instead of competing, we were able to provide timely education that helped residents recognize scams and protect their financial information.

The power of cooperation is not found in one event, donation, or volunteer hour. It is found in people choosing, again and again, to work together for the good of their neighbors.

At Soo Co-op Credit Union, we are proud to be more than a financial institution. We are volunteers, educators, partners, and community members. Together, we demonstrate what the credit union movement has always known: when people cooperate, communities thrive.

Thank you for the opportunity to celebrate our team's collective efforts.

Sincerely,

The Soo Co-op Credit Union Team.

Our Community. Your Credit Union.