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Elm City Market in New Haven has good wishes at its foundation, literally (video)

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NEW HAVEN — The finances are in place, membership is growing and the best wishes of the community have been literally incorporated into the fabric of the building.

The Elm City Market, which is on target to open by the end of the summer, recently embedded messages from members into the poured concrete flooring for the 12,000-square-foot full-service cooperative grocery store under construction at the 360 State Street apartment complex.

"Think of how you want the market to feel or function as a cooperative grocery store, or how you hope it will help to transform the food landscape of our community — in very small and very large ways," Tagan Engel, community outreach coordinator, said in her pitch to members to send in their thoughts.



"It seemed like a fun, personal way to let people start having ownership," Engel said in an interview at the market as it starts to take shape.

About half of the 100 pieces of haki, suggestions and observations are now in the floor, with more saved for evolving art projects at the market.

“A world of flavor, at your feet,” was an appropriate one. “We set the foundation of many lives through nourishing the body with healthy foods,” was joined by a 27-line poem and a simple directive: “Sell craft beer!”

They expect the 536 membership to grow to 1,000 by the time they open with a more expansive list after that when the market is visible to people who haven't been tracking its creation.

“It started out for me as fun, but it turned into inspiring,” said Amy Christensen-Regni of the art project. She is the member and marketing coordinator for the market, as well as the wife of General Manager Mark Regni. “It infuses enthusiasm when you start feeling overwhelmed,” she said of the past few months work.

The cooperative is essentially owned by its members, who elect the board of directors. They also have a say on many aspects of the store and will benefit from special sales available to members only; once it is profitable, there will be a patronage refund.

Membership is a one-time \$200 investment for a household, which includes a group of roommates, to be paid at one shot or in \$20 increments.

Over the next three months, Elm City Market will hire 100 people for staff and management, most of them full time and all eligible for benefits. Job postings and applications can be found on their web site (www.elmcitymarket.coop) on their facebook page (<http://www.facebook.com/elmcitymarket>), or in the window of the market on Chapel Street. Applications and resumes can be submitted by email, mail, or by fax.

The lease is now in place and Elm City Market has put together more than \$7.4 million of financial commitments for interior improvements, equipment and start-up costs. This includes \$1.8 million for the owner/landlord of 360 State Street, the Multi-Employer Property Trust, a union investment group; \$1.6 million from members, other individuals and institutions with a \$4 million loan from Webster Bank.

A few of the local organizations investing in the market are: Yale University contributing a gift of \$10,000; First Niagara Community Development Corporation investing \$250,000; The Cooperative Fund of New England invested \$10,000 in the market; and many more.

Engel, a chef with almost 15 years of experience in restaurants in Boston and New York, oversees more than 100 volunteers who are helping with various aspects of planning and the membership drive. She is also chairwoman of the New Haven Food Policy Council, wrote “New Haven Cooks,” funded by City Seed, opened the sustainable food cafe at Yale University and revamped the menu at Blue State coffee house on Wall Street.

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