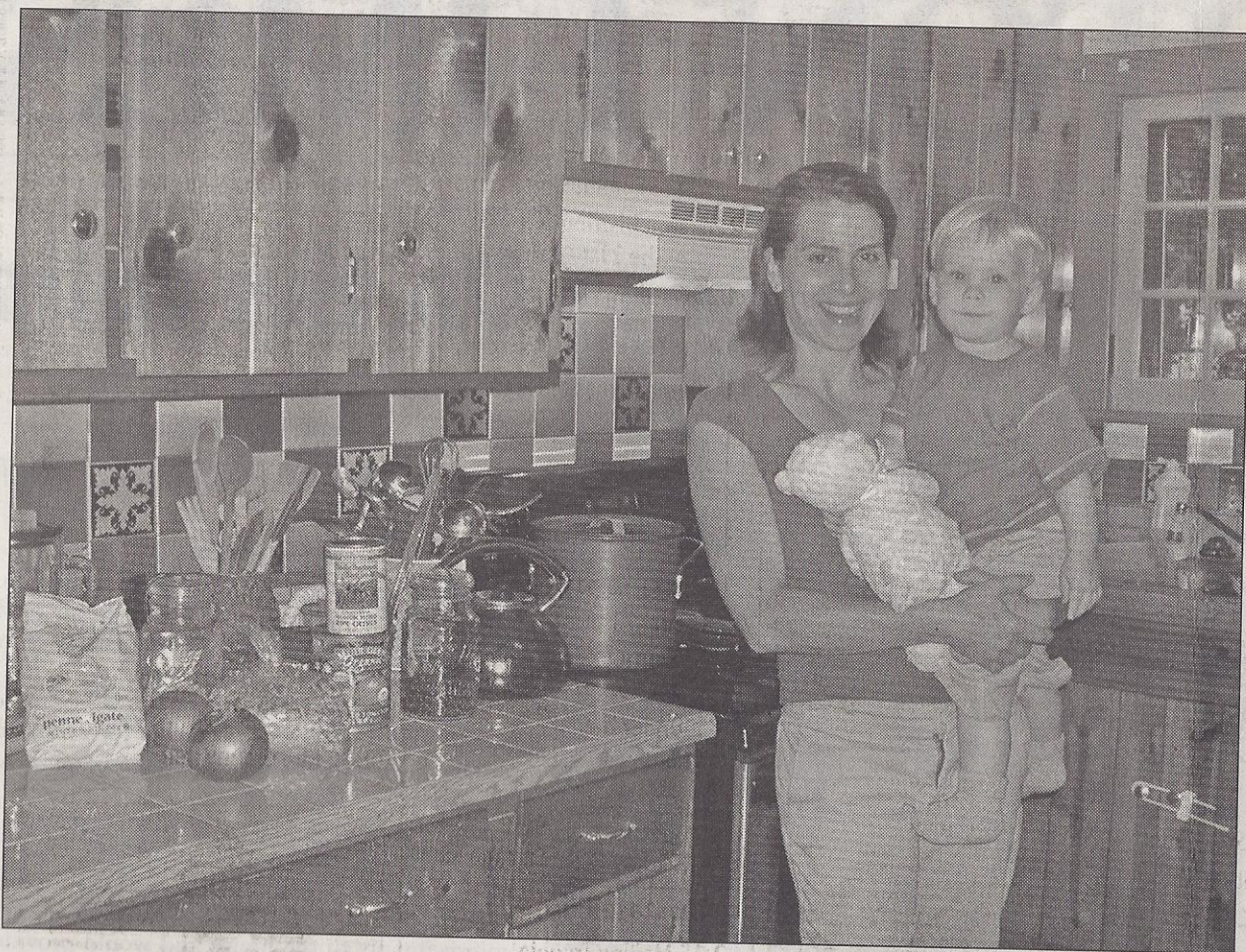


Making healthy affordable

Kingston buying club brings lower-cost, organic food to town



DIANE PINEIRO-ZUCKER

Jennifer McKinley-Rakov is organizing a food buying club and hopes to enable Kingston residents to purchase healthy products, like those on the counter, in bulk at reasonable prices. She and her son Ian await lunch in the family's kitchen.

They called her "Granola Girl" in high school. Her mother ran a café in Woodstock specializing in healthy fare. Today, in addition to working as a certified holistic health counselor, Jennifer McKinley-Rakov has taken on what could prove to be an enormous task. She is coordinating a buying club in Kingston that goes by the hopeful title "Kingston Food and Gardens."

Buying Club (<http://www.unitedbuyingclubs.com/index.htm>). Participants in this first order will contact McKinley-Rakov, pick up a paper catalog and place their orders online. In future months, members will receive their catalogs directly in the mail. United Buying Club, a service of United Natural Foods (UNF), manages over 3,000 such clubs in 34 states across the country.

the idea was born in the Ward 9 meetings, it is not restricted to that ward. Her hopes for the buying club include "one day, if it's big enough, a nice co-op here in Kingston, which would be wonderful".

She has talked to the owners of the High Falls Food Co-Op for advice and admires them a great deal. "I have a lot to learn," laments McKinley-Rakov. She also has no intention of competing with retailers in Kingston who already supply the community with healthy foods. "This isn't going to be instead of Mother Earth." She emphasizes that her intention for the club is to allow participants to stock up on "things we buy all the time, in bulk" and to enjoy the savings that group buying allows.

She still does much of her weekly shopping at places like Mother Earth, Nature's Pavilion and Fleischer's. Her family, which includes son Ian and husband Paul Rakov, participates in a Community Supported Agriculture program through the Brook Farm Project in New Paltz. They trade work hours for discounted rates on local vegetables and fresh eggs ("It gets you really in touch with the process" said McKinley-Rakov). And of course, said McKinley-Rakov, "there's nothing like our [Kingston] Farmer's Market!" She adds that many local distributors are "doing a lot of great things."

McKinley-Rakov also enjoys the opportunity to get the community together. "I don't want it to be all about getting on the computer". She sees this as well as many of the other ideas coming out of the Ward 9 meetings as being part of a bigger picture. She envisions pick-up day for orders as a chance to "see what other people are eating" and perhaps even a potluck supper. McKinley-Rakov will enter an order for a member who doesn't have internet access or isn't yet comfortable with the idea of placing an order online, but says that so far "nobody has said they can't do it online". She does admit however it's nice to have a paper catalog on hand to make personal notes on.

Is the buying club cheaper than shopping at one of the big chain supermarkets? "Cheap food is not really cheap, but it is a choice" says McKinley-Rakov. Items that many people buy frequently at natural food stores will be less expensive if purchased through a buying club, but McKinley-Rakov believes that eating whole, organic foods is "a better investment" than most of what a shopper may find at a standard supermarket. "Something is starting to shift... People are starting to not tolerate high fruc-

believes that eating whole, organic foods is a better investment" than most of what a shopper may find at a standard supermarket. "Something is starting to shift... People are starting to not tolerate high fructose corn syrup."

As a health counselor, she sees her job as showing people how to "take the steering wheel back of your own health." What to eat can be very confusing; a lot of information is available. McKinley-Rakov believes in part that "the answer is inside you — listen to your body." She adds that the average fast-living American diet is "simple food that in the long run is actually very complicated" when the results of a poor diet are tallied. "When you look for the cheap route or the shortcut, it doesn't work well."

McKinley-Rakov also advises clients on how to prepare foods they may not be familiar with, or old favorites in a healthier manner. When asked what food she feels is the most misunderstood, she immediately responds, "Kale." Normally overcooked and with pork fat added, many are turned off by the mushy texture and sharp taste. Many don't even recognize it as the bouncy greenery adorning commercial buffets. But, asserts McKinley-Rakov, when sautéed in good oils and with herbs and spices, it becomes "not only wonderful, but good for your body and full of nutrients."

The deadline for Kingston Food and Gardens' first order was Wednesday, Oct. 10 and a delivery to McKinley-Rakov's home is expected on Friday, Oct. 19.

For more information on how you can get in on future orders, contact McKinley-Rakov at 750-6442. If you are interested in her holistic health counseling services, the number is (914) 474-2676.

Cheryl A. Rice

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Both the catalog and the website contain complete product information, such as ingredients and nutritional information. Items available include bulk supplies such as rice and grains, vitamin supplements, health and beauty aids, eco-friendly household cleaning supplies and even some organic clothing. Some frozen foods and dairy are available, too. The buying club allows participants to purchase "wonderful, healthy discounted items" according to McKinley-Rakov, and although now limited to the items in the UNF catalog, the goal of the group is to eventually do "as much local business as we possibly can."

The idea for Kingston Foods and Gardens grew "organically" said McKinley-Rakov, with no irony intended, out of the meetings being held by residents in Kingston's Ward 9. "It wasn't something I was thinking about doing" says McKinley-Rakov. But the group's enthusiasm for the idea inspired her. "Wow!" she said. "Here was a group of people who wanted to get together and make changes?" She was already familiar with UNF through her mother's café and a stint of her own working in a health food store in Newburgh. She inquired and learned that UNF already had a buying club set-up in place, making things a lot easier to get going. UNF suggests that at least 10 households sign on to meet their monthly purchase minimum of \$750. So far, 30 households have signed on with McKinley-Rakov and she gets more calls and e-mails every day. "That's just the beginning." Though

counselor, Jennifer McKinley-Rakov has taken on what could prove to be an enormous task. She is coordinating a buying club in Kingston that goes by the hopeful title "Kingston Food and Gardens." The name, said McKinley-Rakov, is a "hope for the future" where available foods will include, in addition to the healthy, organic, whole foods available now, produce from community gardens that are in the planning stages in her Ward 9 neighborhood, as well as steady supplies from area farmers. The buying club's first delivery is scheduled for Oct. 19. For now, McKinley-Rakov is coordinating or- ders for healthy organic foods through the United