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### Cooperative Living on the West Side

by [Anna Miller](#)



They live under one roof, sit down to dinner together, and take turns with cooking, shopping and chores. They're like a fully functioning family, but none of them are related. Terra, Ben, Lydia and Harmony are the members of Buffalo's newest housing co-operative. And together, they're fixing up an old house in a historic West Side neighborhood and making it a home.

The house on Fargo will be Buffalo's second Nickel City Housing Co-op, spurred from the success of the original house on North, a historic Allentown mansion that was founded in late 2000 and is now home to 16 people from all walks of life.

For whatever reason people are drawn to the cooperative living environment, what they find is a singular, almost utilitarian community in which every member contributes their part to make the house a better place to live. The moral of the story, their [website](#) reads, is: We're all in the together.

?'It's fun, you're set to meet so many interesting people,' said Terra, who helped found the second house. 'You get involved with the community, and you're helping to sustain Buffalo by keeping young people here.'

Indeed, members of the co-op range in age from 22 to 31 and are all involved in

and committed to the community, within their house and in the city at large. And they're not only choosing to stay in the city, they're working to restore historic old homes that were otherwise forgotten - the North Street mansion was slated for demolition before they got their hands on it.

Members each pay rent ? around \$240 a month for a spot in the new house ? and also chip in a monthly fee for food, utilities and upkeep. Food is fresh, organic and often locally grown (community supported agriculture from a nearby farmer). And, get this, because they take turns cooking dinners, members will come home to a hot dinner five nights a week.

Co-op members are their own landlords and all house decisions are made by consensus, guided by the basic tenant that there is some insight or wisdom in a group that is stronger than that of any individual in the group.

In this case, because it is their second house, the community extends beyond the front porch on Fargo Avenue. They've created a ?sticky council? to promote cohesion between the two houses through different activities and potluck dinners ? doubling the family instantaneously.

And they are all working together fix up and repair the old house ? so it's a constant learning experience, especially if you're unfamiliar with construction or organic foods. In a group so large and diverse, how can you not learn from the unique souls you're sharing your home with?

If you're interested in checking out the new house, feel free to call 881-7843 and make a date.

*Photo: Members of the Fargo co-op, with visitors from their sister house on North, in the new kitchen they built.*

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m. eaty January 7, 2007 01:36 PM

I like to go to the Wednesday night potluck at the original house (208 North St.)! I'm not a vegetarian or anything but the food is usually pretty good. It starts around 7 pm. It is requested that you bring a vegetarian or vegan dish to share. Wine or beer is always welcomed too. ? I like it because they are always so welcoming to new people. It looks like a super cool place to live.