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## Stamford ACE Hardware goes co-op – becomes employee owned!



**NEW OWNERS - The six-member employee-owned cooperative of Railroad Avenue Supply Co., Inc. in Stamford posed for a picture on Wednesday, as the new cooperative ownership took effect. Pictured from left, are: Stefano Bagnardi, Kelly Chien, John Bonhotal, Ralph Beisler, Bob Shafer and Sarah Weishar.**

**Contributed photo.**

**Stamford –** Stamford’s ACE Hardware Store announced an ownership change this week that will keep the store in Stamford for years to come, and will guarantee local ownership and management for the future. The long-established and well appreciated hardware store has undergone a quiet transformation over the past several months. Quiet, but

momentous never-the-less.

On January 1 the former owner, and employees, Stefano Bagnardi, Kelly Chien, John Bonhotal, Ralph Beisler, Bob Shafer and Sarah Weishar, became the new owners of the Railroad Supply Co. worker cooperative. When asked what changes the customers will notice, Kelly Chien replied “Customers won’t notice any change at all – that’s the point.”

Wayne Stinson agreed. "As a long-time customer I couldn't be more pleased to learn that the store will become employee owned. When I heard Ralph was considering selling, I suggested that the cooperative model would be an excellent alternative to a private sale. I'm really excited that this was the best opportunity for everyone, including customers like me who want to support locally owned and controlled businesses." Said Stinson, adding “Happy New Year and good fortune to the workerowners of the Railroad Supply Company Co-op!”

The Railroad Ave. Supply Co. as it has been legally known for three decades, and previously branded as a Western Auto outlet, has been owned by the Beisler family for over 50 years. Henry and Dorothy Beisler bought the business in 1963. Their Son Ralph and his wife Susan took over the business in 1975. This latest transformation brings new ownership to this important community asset.

Last year Ralph offered the business for sale and the staff soon began investigating the possibility of buying the operation themselves. Ralph enthusiastically joined with the staff in researching how the transfer might be accomplished. Having done their homework and made the decision to move forward, the Cooperative Development Institute of Northampton, Massachusetts was engaged to help them with the details of creating their worker cooperative.

“Selling to employees is a great, time-tested way to preserve small businesses and the jobs they provide in rural communities,” said CDI’s Rob Brown, who guided Beisler and the employees through the conversion to a worker cooperative. “The business owner is rewarded for a lifetime of hard work, local control is preserved, and importantly, employees who have helped build the business now have an ownership stake in the business.”

Brown is the Program Director of CDI’s Business Ownership Solutions, which assists business owners and their workers in evaluating whether transition to employee ownership can meet their needs, and guiding businesses through a transition to a worker cooperative. “It’s a great satisfaction to know the business will continue beyond my tenure,” said Beisler.

As news of the sale spread, others in the region lauded the decision. While many local stores have succumbed to big box competitors like Lowe’s and Home Depot, local areas suffer when this occurs. Finding the co-op solution was great not just for the owners but for the community at large.

The store opens at 8:00 a.m. Monday through Saturday and at 9:00 a.m. on Sunday. It closes at 6:00 p.m. weekdays, closing at 4:00 p.m. on Saturdays and at 1:00 p.m. on Sundays. More information is available by calling 607.652.7103

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**Sean O'Shaughnessy**  
845-287-0000  
sean@seanoshughnessy.com

**CATSKILL CONCRETE CONSTRUCTION**  
1000 Route 9W, Catskill, NY 12414  
845-287-0000

This small advertisement is a horizontal banner. On the left, there is a small portrait of a man with a beard. To his right, the text 'Sean O'Shaughnessy' is written in a bold font, followed by the phone number '845-287-0000' and the email address 'sean@seanoshughnessy.com'. On the right side of the banner, there is a photograph of a large, two-story brick building with a white roof, surrounded by greenery. Above the photo, the text 'CATSKILL CONCRETE CONSTRUCTION' is written in a bold font, and below it, the address '1000 Route 9W, Catskill, NY 12414' and the phone number '845-287-0000' are listed.