Outdoor Farmers Market works to increase neighborhood accessibility to fresh produce
by Downtown Market (Downtown Market GR) on Tuesday May 19th, 2015 11:34am in Place Matters

The Downtown Market’s outdoor farmers market season starts this Saturday, with 35 farmers and fresh food artisans providing access to fresh fruits and vegetables in the heart of the city.

Kids at the Downtown Market

The Grand Rapids Downtown Market opens the Outdoor Farmers Market for the third season this Saturday, May 23, at 9 a.m. when approximately 35 farmers and fresh food artisans will open their stands in the Outdoor Market Shed. The opening will be marked with the first of the season’s “Chefs at the Market” and “Kids at the Market” series to educate and entertain visitors. Vendors will also be giving out free, reusable shopping bags with a purchase starting at 9 a.m., while supplies last.

While it’s still early in the season for most fresh, local produce, vendors will have asparagus, radishes, salad greens and kale, locally-raised meat and dairy products, locally-made baked goods, honey, maple syrup, sweet treats and more.

Tom Parker, of Bowerman Blueberries, has been vending at the Downtown Market’s Outdoor Farmers Market since it opened. Although their blueberries won’t be ready until July, he is excited to return to the Downtown Market later this summer for his third season.

“We enjoy the people at the Downtown Market and have met a lot of loyal customers who continue to support us,” says Parker. “We love the atmosphere there, and feel strongly about the growth and potential of the Downtown Market and the neighborhood.”

The Moveable Feast food truck, known for tasty homemade lunch options such as quinoa burgers and Jamaican Jerk chicken wraps, will find a home at the Downtown Market during Outdoor Farmers Market hours, and an Outdoor Farmers Market Bar will serve cocktails crafted with seasonal fruit, vegetables and herbs as well as craft beer and PBR/Old Style cans. In addition, 10 businesses from the Market’s Incubator Kitchen will be selling the products they’ve made on-site, including everything from sauerkraut and vegan sausage to cupcakes and hummus.

“We are bringing the innovative food production that is happening inside the building to the Outdoor Farmers Market, to introduce new audiences for these foods and help build markets for the entrepreneurs,” says Mimi Fritz, president and CEO of the Downtown Market. “The Outdoor Farmers Market will have vendors and foods that are not available anywhere else. With the addition of our culinary education and kids events, the Downtown Market is downtown’s summer place.”
FOOD EDUCATION

Two weekly events begin May 23 and will continue each Saturday to educate and entertain guests:

- **11 to noon - Chefs at the Market**: Aperitivo co-owner and chef Kate Leeder kicks off a series of free, weekly chef demonstrations on the patio with simple, party-pleasing crostini recipes. (George Aquino named Kate’s crostini creations the “dish of the year” in the Grand Rapids Press last year!)

- **10 a.m. to noon - Kids at the Market**: Kids will create DIY placemats to brighten up your summer table in this first of the series of free, weekly activities for kids on the terrace.

Future Chefs at the Market demos include bento boxes, herbal classic cocktails, street food, summer rolls and more, featuring collaborations with chefs and food entrepreneurs from the Indoor Market Hall and Incubator Kitchen. Kids at the Market activities planned for the summer include hands-on arts and crafts, music, dance, fitness and education activities.

COMMUNITY FOOD ACCESSIBILITY

The Downtown Market strives to make fresh, local produce accessible to all patrons.

To ensure that all residents can take advantage of fresh and healthy food, eligible Outdoor Farmers Market vendors are accepting SNAP/EBT/Bridge Cards. In June, the Double Up Food Bucks program will return, rewarding Bridge Card users by matching the amount spent on fresh fruits and vegetables, up to $20 per day. Also beginning June 6, vendors will begin accepting Market Fresh/Senior Project Fresh and Project Fresh/WIC.

The Downtown Market also participates in the Heartside Gleaning Initiative (HGI), created by Lisa Sisson, assistant professor at Grand Valley State University. The Heartside Gleaning Initiative (HGI) aims to empower the Heartside community to become healthier through improving accessibility of healthy foods, specifically, getting leftover produce to neighborhood residents in need.

At the end of the Market day, volunteers distribute crates to interested vendors (including Relish Green Grocer inside the Market Hall), and those who have produce to donate will fill a crate (or three!) and return it to the volunteers. Those volunteers then deliver it to neighborhood residents in need at Mel Trotter, Dégagé, Guiding Light and Dwelling Place apartments. The gleaning program begins June 6 and runs through the summer.

Last year, HGI received donations from 40 farmers, had more than 30 volunteers helping glean on Saturdays and distributed more than 17,000 pounds of produce, greatly increasing access to healthy food in the Heartside neighborhood where the Downtown Market is located.

While she doesn’t yet have a count of participating farmers for 2015, Sisson is encouraged with the response she’s received so far and predicts this year will be even better than last year.

“The more people who become aware of our goals, the more we find who are open and willing to help with our mission through the gleaning process,” says Sisson. “It’s really rewarding to help people learn about new fruits and vegetables, and then see them come back for more the next week because they liked it so much or made such a good meal that they never had the ingredients to make before.”

The Downtown Market’s Outdoor Farmers Market is open every Saturday through September 19, from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. For more info, visit: http://downtownmarketgr.com/outdoor-farmers-market. The Market is still searching for great Michigan produce vendors. If you’re interested in selling your locally-grown goods at the Market, visit: http://downtownmarketgr.com/outdoor-farmers-market/become-a-vendor.

The Rapidian is possible because of readers like you!

**SUPPORT THE RAPIDIAN. INVEST NOW!**

About: Downtown Market

The Market is a mixed-use facility that brings together production, distribution, marketing and education about local produce. Our indoor facility features a 24-vendor market hall, while dozens of farmers and artisans line our outdoor farmer’s market shed.

MORE ARTICLES YOU MAY ENJOY:
With designs in the works, river restoration to move toward launch

Doughnut shop’s new design creates gathering space for community

Grand Rapids festivities to promote community, entertainment for national holiday

Comments, like all content, are held to The Rapidian standards of civility and open identity as outlined in our Terms of Use and Values Statement. We reserve the right to remove any content that does not hold to these standards.

1 Comment

Add a comment...

Carol Shirey

Great info about how the Heartside community is getting improved access to healthy foods through the Heartside Gleaning Initiative.

Unlike · Reply · 1 · May 19, 2015 2:16pm