

Market Manager Report

Presented April 18, 2019

Operations

- Parking lot between Market and Kerrytown repaved this week
- Gutters scheduled to be replaced this month, waiting on certificates of insurance

Daily artisans moving to 3 “extra” annual stalls - update

Market infrastructure update

Food Truck Rallies – Bloom Meadworks participating; starting in June MI Theater will be showing movies on blowup screen after rallies end for the night; Zero waste required.

Registration now open for City workplace CSA pickup

Library partnership: 100th birthday exhibit July and August, reception in July, Market part of the Summer Games

Market to Chef update

Farm to table dinner planning April 30

Welcome new staff member Germaine Smith and promotion for Becky to Assistant Farmers Market Manager II & Outreach Coordinator

In the news – *All About Ann Arbor* published article “Ann Arbor Farmers Market celebrates 100 years this summer”

Ann Arbor Farmers Market celebrates 100 years this summer

By [Meredith Bruckner](#) - Community News Producer

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Shoppers at the Ann Arbor Farmers Market on a cool day in 1968. (Credit: The Ann Arbor News archives courtesy of oldnews.aadl.org)

ANN ARBOR - The Ann Arbor Farmers Market will celebrate its centennial this summer.

The original market didn't look anything like what it is today. In fact, it started as a curb market outside the old courthouse on Main Street where farmers would back their horse drawn wagons or trucks against the sidewalk and sell their produce.

The curb market began in May 1919 and was started by the Community Federation -- a group consisting of members of women's organizations -- to cut out the middle man and bring down food costs.

In those days, one could find flowers grown by Adolph Weiner, an Austrian immigrant and former chief gardener for Emperor Franz Joseph. Other families sold vegetables and fruit they grew on their farms on Packard and Broadway.



A mother and her young daughter admire a lily at the farmers market in June 1958. (Credit: The Ann Arbor News archives courtesy of oldnews.aadl.org)

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Other produce, like dairy products, eggs, honey and chickens, could be found at the market. It wouldn't be unusual to see geese, ducks and turkeys, as well.

"They used to hang muskrats from the trees and you could buy their hides," said current market manager Stephanie Willette. "It's actually changed a lot from then to now."

The City Council, or Common Council as it was called back then, took over the market in 1921 and the Ann Arbor Farmers Market has been a city-run market ever since.

After testing several locations, including the old Ann Arbor YMCA on Fourth and William, the market made Kerrytown its permanent home in the late 1930s.

Market hierarchy

Another way the market has changed is its vendor seniority system.

"In the past, it was first come, first served and then you would get your choice of a stall," said Willette. "Stall space is very competitive, because depending on where you'll get your stall, you'll probably see a lot more customers. So now, it's based on seniority of when you signed up. And as vendors retire, the idea is you move up in seniority."



Shoppers stroll through the market in July 1969. (Credit: The Ann Arbor News archives courtesy of oldnews.aadl.org)

There are two types of memberships at the market: annual stalls, which receive a permanent space, and daily members who can choose which available stall they want on a given day.

In the summer, the market boasts up to 75 vendors on market days, while in the winter, only 20 brave the cold.

Part of Willette's job is assuring there's a diverse mix of produce and goods.

"We're actually really picky about who we accept," she said. "Because if you're accepted, we'll never turn you away, you're in the market forever or as long as you want to be. And if you show up and you want to sell, we're never going to say we're full. You'll get a spot."

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Photo: Destination Ann Arbor

"When we deny applicants, it's mainly because we already have that product and we tell them to check back in. We look at quality and capacity, so you need to be able to serve a lot of people if you come. In the summer, 13,000 people might come through in a day. So, sometimes if you're just beginning your business, I'll recommend trying a few other smaller markets out first, get your footing, and then you might want to come here."

While admitting vendors is in her control, what's out of her control is when they choose to retire.

"It comes in waves, and for a really long time, nobody was retiring," said Willette. "And that's difficult, too, because when a permanent stall retires, one of the dailies who doesn't have a permanent stall gets that stall."



Annie Elder and Paul Bantle pose for a picture during their last season as vendors on Nov. 29, 2017. They passed the Community Farm of Ann Arbor onto a younger generation of farmers, who continue to sell at the market. (Photo: Meredith Bruckner)

"Now we're at a point where a bunch of them are retiring because they're all at that age. We're seeing a lot give up their stalls right now, so we're trying to get new ones in."

Willette said the market gets an average of 20 to 30 new applicants each year.

The case for a winter structure

In the winter months, the market gets an average of 3,000 visitors a day and vendors bring space heaters to keep warm and keep their produce in their trucks so it doesn't freeze.

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"This is another reason why we fight so hard for an indoor space," said Willette. "We really need one."

City Council approved plans for an indoor space in 2016, but due to budgetary constraints, the market hasn't been able to move forward with construction. In the meantime, Willette said they are exploring cheaper ways of winterizing the structure, like solar-powered heating panels in the existing aisles.

"There have been several attempts to build a more winterized structure and it's never quite panned out. There are plans for doing that from the 80s and then there's today's plans," said Willette. "It hasn't taken off yet, but it's interesting to look at the vision back then and the vision now."

Centennial celebration

To mark 100 years of the Ann Arbor Farmers Market, the Ann Arbor District Library will be putting on an exhibit in July, showcasing old photos of the market's locations and produce over the years on large panels. Part of the market's collaboration with the library will also be contributing oral histories of current vendors to the archives.

"We'll be doing interviews with a number of the vendors and putting them on our website and the library's website," said Willette. "We're going to highlight some multigenerational vendors. There are some that have been here for several generations. Their grandparents can remember the market in the 30s and 40s."



Children pose with a sign that says, "Free! Lovable Kittens" (not pictured) at the Ann Arbor Farmers Market in August 1969. (Credit: The Ann Arbor News archives courtesy of oldnews.aadl.org)

A 100th birthday bash is planned for Aug. 31 and Willette said she is finalizing the details.

"I'm trying to get the Ann Arbor Symphony Orchestra to come and they also do an instrument petting zoo for kids," she said. "We'll have ice cream and I'm trying to get banners with old photos to hang in the space."

Another centennial feature is a large farm-to-table dinner in the fall that will stretch through the center of the market. Guests will enjoy a feast prepared by local chefs using ingredients from the market.

"I can't believe I'm a part of an institution that's been around for 100 years – it's humbling," said Willette. "I'm trying to do it justice."