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Lents International Market marks first year with harvest banquet

In addition to celebrating the success of their first weekly season, learn what these volunteers doing, in the off season, to prepare for next year ...



Alexander, one of the farmers who sold his vegetables at the Lents International Farmer's Market loads up his plate at the banquet table; market volunteer Bonny Hodge is serving up fresh, locally-produced food.

Story and photos by David F. Ashton

A room full of folks gathered at Pilgrim Lutheran Church in Lents on a cold, rainy evening a few days ago, to dine on a banquet prepared from locally-produced foods – and to plan for next year's Lents International Farmer's Market season.

The festal board was loaded with freshly-made breads and desserts, salads, casseroles, soups, pot roast – and more delicious deviled eggs than we've ever seen in one place.



Jill Kuehler, market manager, welcomes volunteers and vendors to the event.

The 'real work' begins

"This is when the real work begins," proclaimed market manager Jill Kuehler, after introductions.

"Many of you in this room have gathered with us for three years to plan and create our farmers market. You are the ones I most want to applaud tonight. Some of the very early founders of the market are still here. They are the real heroes of the project."



Megan Fehrman shows a graphic depiction of the results of her research project, an "Asset Based Community Development Map" (enlarged, right portion of photo).

First up to speak was Megan Fehrman. From research she conducted, she mapped – illustrated – the interaction of groups of various individuals who interfaced with the market.

"I participated in a 'Growing Communities' workshop called 'Asset Based Community Development'. As part of this we learned to create a 'map' all of our potential partners to strengthen all of our potential partners in our organization," Fehrman explained.

Suggestion box

Kuehler collected comment questionnaires from those attending, and read aloud from them.

The list of things they said they enjoyed included:

- The camaraderie of the market vendors;
- Friendliness of shoppers who returned week after week;
- Alexander's great produce;
- Creative ways to sell giant yellow squash left at the Community Sales table;
- Laura & Sarah's spur-of-the-moment food demonstration; they pulled together a demo when a guest didn't show up.

Things they'd like to see added or changed at the market included:

- Artichokes
- Quieter bands playing live music
- Asian prepared foods
- Stronger steering committee
- More diversity
- More farmers on committees
- More representation from across Portland
- More food vendors and craft people
- Parsnips
- More interactive chef demonstrations
- Coordination of produce at each market
- More variety



Noelle Dobson describes the committees being formed and asks the volunteers to participate in them.

Four committees formed

To turn the suggestions into action plans, Noelle Dobson organized the group onto four facilitating committees: Vendor relations; marketing and media relations; diverse community and market logistics.

As the committee tables filled, Dobson told us, "I've been involved with the market for three years as part of my work with Community Health Partnership, a non-profit group that's trying to help make communities places where you can 'eat healthy' and exercise."

Summary of this year's market activity

As the committee sessions got underway, Kuehler talked with us about this year's market.

"It went very well this year. The number of customers grew each week. We had a lot of folks from the Lents neighborhood, and a good diversity in our shoppers. There was a great diverse group of vendors – some who have not sold at a farmers market before. It was exciting to see."

Kuehler estimated the market drew 400 customers each Sunday. "It was great for our first season. We're brainstorming to come up with ways to increase our numbers next year and getting ideas about how to really establish this market."

The reason this market is important, Kuehler added, is that Lents has poor access to good quality fresh fruits and vegetables. "A couple of larger grocery stores have closed; this has decreased the amount of access people have. We really want to provide really fresh, good food to folks in the Lents neighborhood."

Get involved!

Lents International Farmer's Market committees meet monthly during the off season. Get in touch by contact them lentsfarmersmarket@gmail.com – and get involved!

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