

Local farmers market sees large rebound

BY CINDE INGRAM
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HIGH POINT — Zee Evans and her daughter Hadassah carried their well-behaved Boston terriers in satchels as they joined other shoppers at the High Point Farmers Market Saturday morning.

“We buy fruits and vegetables here first because it’s fresh and it’s local,” Evans said. “We also buy flowers for our home. We get them here first before we go to grocery stores because it’s good to support local small businesses.”

Operated by the High Point Public Library, the

farmers market is growing its efforts to offer the community healthy food choices with help from local businesses — most recently a big boost from Bethany Medical Center.

“We’re now the High Point Farmers Market grown by Bethany Medical,” said farmers market manager Lee Gann. “Now we have resources. We’re not worrying from month-to-month whether we are going to have enough money to keep this program going. At the same time, I want to give credit to those who helped us get it started and made it viable.”

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Zee Evans, left, adjusts her Boston terrier in her satchel as her daughter Hadassah Evans waits to continue shopping Saturday at the High Point Farmers Market.

MARKET

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Gann and Library Director Mary Sizemore agreed the market has been returning to normal this season as pandemic regulations have loosened and more people are vaccinated. More shoppers also are using their food assistance benefits, such as Electronic Benefit Transfer, an electronic system that replaced paper food stamp coupons. Those federal benefits are delivered primarily through the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP.

"Our use of EBT has really increased, which is wonderful," Sizemore said. "We want everybody to know that people who get SNAP benefits can use them here. We accept

SNAP plus we offer Double the Bucks."

For example, if someone swipes their EBT card for \$10, they would get \$20 in tokens to spend at the farmers market.

The Double the Bucks program started in 2019 through a \$2,000 donation from Barbour Spangle Design, Sizemore said. When those funds were nearly exhausted in June 2020, the design firm donated another \$500 to keep it going. Later last summer, the Greater High Point Food Alliance donated \$2,000 and the Good Friends of High Point donated \$1,000 more.

"Bethany Medical stepped up and donated \$8,000 in June, as our balance had reached just \$166," Sizemore said. "Every time we've needed something to support this program, the community



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Farmer Andy Harris and his son Beau Harris of Sandy Ridge Orchards in Canton sell fresh peaches to customers at the High Point Farmers Market.

has stepped up in increasingly generous ways. People understand there is still a food insecurity problem."

Fishmongers' signs showed customers bought nearly all of the

fresh fish and shellfish available Saturday morning. Vendor Lauren Ostrowski noted customers could stock up to use fish in meals all week. In addition to fish vendors, the farmers market

includes local chicken/beef and pork/beef vendors, Gann said.

"We're working hard on trying to get healthy options for High Point," Gann said.

People can use their EBT for vegetables, plants and herbs, so if they want to grow their own food, they can use their SNAP benefits to buy the plants, Sizemore said.

Evan and Heather Blackerby continue to teach others how to take care of succulents and cactus house plants through their Friendship Plant Co., which can be located on a restored 1973 Ford F-250 pickup truck at the market each Saturday. The couple started their business with an intention of growing a more connected community by encouraging others to give a friend

a plant.

"People have done a good job of supporting local over the past year," Blackerby said. "People haven't given up on each other, which is awesome."

Gann said craft vendors, whose shows were canceled last year, played a role because they actively wanted to be part of the farmers market as it returned to normal.

"After we allowed them to come in June, we've been steady," Gann said.

Gann estimated 800 to 900 people had attended the previous Saturday, and said that's a fairly normal number for the market's best months of July and August.

"It's getting more and more to where it feels like it's normal again," Gann said.

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