

Farmers market kicks off season on Southington green



Paul Seltzer, farm manager of New Hartford based Gresczyk Farms, stacks strawberries while setting up the farm's tent at the Southington Farmers Market on the Southington town green, Friday, June 23, 2023. Dave Zajac, Record-Journal

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By Rachel Wachman, Record-Journal staff

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SOUTHINGTON — Dozens of local vendors packed the Town Green on Friday to kick off summer with the first Southington Farmers Market of the season. Slated for each Friday from 3 to 6 p.m. from now until Sept. 22, the market features local farms, bakeries, food trucks, artisans, musicians, florists, and organizations such as Hartford HealthCare and the Main Street Community Foundation.

"There's something for everyone," organizer Jolene Miceli of Activate Southington said.

The market strives for accessibility and aims to promote healthy living by bringing locally grown products to the center of town and providing artisans a space to share their work, according to Miceli. Representatives from Hartford HealthCare also have a stall where people can come to consult them.



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Miceli has been involved with the market since it evolved from a stand in the Plantsville section of Southington around a decade ago. After she joined the effort with Activate Southington, an initiative which organizes the market and strives to improve the health and wellness of the Southington community, the market moved to the Town Green and grew in size.

Miceli said this year is the largest version of the market yet, with 25 to 30 vendors each week and a total rotation of nearly 40.

Fellow co-organizer Denise Napoli explained that this year the market features a series of focus days to give different Fridays a theme, such as Community Day, Art Day, Bee Day, Eco-Friendly Day, Back to School Day, Seed Saving Day, and Fitness Day. For Community Day, held on the market's opening Friday, the Southington Police Department, Fire Department, and Public Library joined the vendors on the Green to share more about their work in town and interact with community members.

"With different focus days and a variety of vendors, we can bring the market to the center of the community," Napoli said. "It makes it more accessible, and social media and word of mouth have made people more excited....It's a great opportunity to support community vendors while the vendors support you."

Months of planning

Co-organizers Napoli, Miceli, and Donna Ayer worked for months to create a market schedule, decide themes for different Fridays, and coordinate with vendors, community partners, and sponsors.

For Community Day, the Southington Fire Department arrived with a fire truck and red plastic helmets to hand out to children. Firefighter Logan McInnis explained that the Fire Department's presence at the market offers an opportunity to educate members of the community.

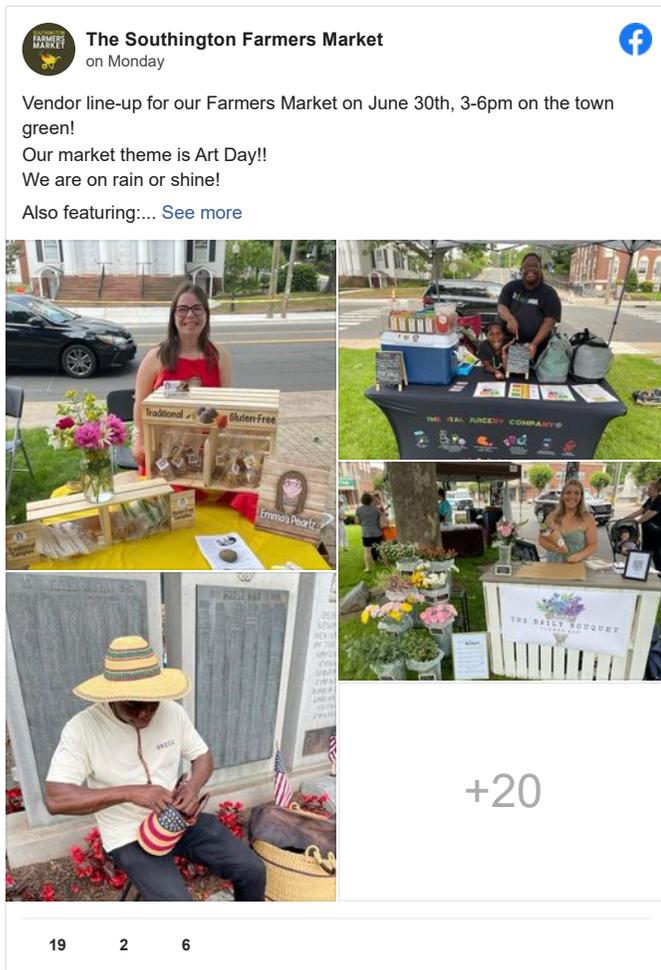
"It starts young," McInnis said. "A lot of young kids see this stuff and they like the trucks. They can learn from a young age about fire prevention and maybe even consider a career in fire prevention."

Also geared towards education, the Southington Public Library hosts storytime at the market from 3:30 to 4 p.m. Molly Virello, Head of Children's Services at the library, looks forward to having time to read with children at the market throughout the summer.

"It's such a fun way to meet families where they are, especially when making a trip that the kids aren't always excited about...but while their mom is grabbing spinach for dinner, the kids can participate in storytime," Virello said.

The market always becomes a highlight of Virello's summer because it allows her to bring the library into the community.

"Some of the vendors will even sing with us during storytime, which is always extra fun," Virello said.



The presence of children at the market also provides the Early Childhood Collaborative of Southington, who has had a stall at the market for four years, with the chance to meet more members of the community.

“It’s a way to connect with families with young children,” said Joanne Kelleher, Executive Director of the Early Child Collaborative. “During the pandemic, families with young children were so isolated and were not able to connect with other families with young children or with resources. We’re here to offer information and support in building those connections.” For artisans, the market serves as a venue to share creative passions in a supportive environment.

‘Not just a transaction’

Artist Laurie-Lynne Zlotowski loves selling her work locally. Her art combines vintage metal and modern clay that she transforms into jewelry and gifts to bring to many markets in many towns in Connecticut. As a Meriden resident who lives close by, she feels particularly at home at the Southington Farmers Market.

“My designs are unique no matter where I go, but I know I’ll be accepted here, and it’s nice to show people what I do in the community,” Zlotowski said.

She also enjoys the interactions that people can have with vendors and emphasized how wonderful it feels to build connections with those around her.

“It’s not just a transaction,” Zlotowski said. “It’s a social activity where you get to check on your neighbors. You get to put your money locally.”

Musician Terri Lachance of Terri & Rob Duo played at the opening market day alongside Bruce Hazard. Lachance, who teaches second grade in Cheshire, contacted the Southington Farmers Market three years ago to ask about adding a musical component, as no musicians previously played at the market. She and several other local musicians have been performing there ever since. This year, different market Fridays feature different performers.



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"It's such a beautiful community," Lachance said. "People are so lovely. It's the perfect situation."

Lachance often brings smaller instruments for the children who visit the market to pick up and play while she performs.

"They've been kind and appreciative," Lachance said of the people at the market.

First impressions

While some contributors have been involved with the market for years, others just joined the roster for the first time. Edward Quish of Perkins Pure Sugar House in Bristol decided this year to sell his maple syrup at the market.

"Being there, interacting, making new friends, it's all very rewarding," Quish said. "People like local. They like to know where their products are coming from. We're local. We tap local trees in Bristol. It's pure Connecticut maple syrup."

Zlotowski highlighted the value of the local produce available at the market and said she enjoys shopping there, in addition to selling her artwork.

"Eating in season reduces your carbon footprint and is better for the environment," Zlotowski said.

Indeed, for some people, the fresh produce drew them to the market in the first place.

"I enjoy the fresh vegetables and the music," Sandy Nyren of Southington said. "I like to support our local farmers. Without them, we'd have nothing to eat."

Another resident, Dawn Morello, attended the market for the first time this Friday. During her time at the market, she shopped at different vendors and wandered through the rows of stalls.

"I've lived here for 14 years and have never been able to make it until now, but I've always driven by and wanted to go," Morello said. "I'm big on local. I loved the vegetable stand today."

To stay up to date with the market, follow Southington Farmers Market on Facebook.