

Annual MCC farmers' market begins its new season

By Felicia Whatley - Staff Writer
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Leah Beckett from Beckett's Farm offers fresh lettuce, blueberries, sugar snap peas and peaches at the MCC Farmers' Market. Photos by Felicia Whatley.

The grand opening of the MCC Farmers' Market for the 2012 season took place on June 27, from 1 to 5 p.m. at the Manchester Bicentennial Band Shell at Manchester Community College. This is its sixth year in operation, and shoppers can expect the usual mix of locally-grown fruits and vegetables, friendly farmers and vendors, and live music. Most of the produce is picked on Wednesday morning, so it's hard to find fresher produce anywhere, said market manager Pat Sullivan. The MCC Farmers' Market will be open every Wednesday through October.



The market this year will feature farmers and vendors providing: vegetables, fruit, goat cheese, herbs, baked goods - with gluten free options - jewelry, dried flowers, soaps, and a menu of grilled pizza, grilled vegetables, and veggie sliders at the market-outdoor café. In addition, the MCC market includes local artists and artisans. Shoppers may purchase handcrafted work and artwork created by people in surrounding communities, including paintings, photography, soaps, skin creams, beeswax candles, fresh baked whole wheat pies and muffins, honey and much more.

Music for June 27 was provided by Jen Allen, who played jazz piano. Allen's debut solo album, "Pieces of Myself," was released in June 2011. In May 2011, Allen was chosen as one of only eight pianists in the world to participate in the Mary Lou Williams Women in Jazz Workshop at the Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C.

Farmers at the market this year include Olivia's Garden, Bottomland Farms, Beckett Farms, Sweet Pea Cheese - popular for its goat cheese - and Thompson Street Farm, which is known for its arugula.

Leah Beckett from Beckett Farms sold fresh red leaf, green leaf and Romaine lettuce, fresh blueberries, sugar snap peas and peaches. "Everything here is grown in our farm in Glastonbury," said Beckett. "We come every Wednesday and sell at the farm on Mondays and Tuesdays. Our produce is Community Supported Agriculture."

Mama Bear Foot Children's Books and R&S Jewelry also had a booth on June 27. There were two bakeries selling their breads and pastries: LaBrioche French Bakery from Rockville and Great Harvest Bread Co. from Manchester. Jean Roberts from Great Harvest Bread Company said, "We mill our own wheat and make everything from scratch. We offer homemade cookies, muffins, scones, trail mix and even dog biscuits, and we always offer something vegan, like our blueberry-

cranberry muffin.” Roberts and her husband have owned the company, located on Main Street in Manchester, for nine years. This was her first MCC Farmers' Market, but she is a regular at the Hebron Farmers' Market.

The Sustainability Team at Manchester Community College is working to promote awareness of locally-grown foods among students, staff, faculty and community residents. The purpose is to reconnect the community to the local farmers who produce its food.

Caelum Massicotte, a healthy eating specialist from Whole Foods Market in Glastonbury, was available all afternoon to talk about organic foods and healthy eating. He made kale smoothies for people to try for free. “I promote healthy eating and a healthy lifestyle by helping get people off of processed foods and onto whole foods,” said Massicotte. “The program 'Health Starts Here' is a sensible way of eating without processed sugars and oils, less sodium, sugar, and fat. As a healthy eating specialist, I help people where they are in their diets and educate and answer questions about food diets.”

He said that there are foods at Whole Foods grocery labeled “Health Starts Here,” which include 10 different types of milk like almond milk, which has less sugar and fat than other dairy milks, and about 20 different types of flour, including gluten-free. “Some people have special diets and allergies. We can accommodate that,” said Massicotte.

Massicotte has been cooking all his life, beginning at a young age when he cooked with his family. He cooked professionally in restaurants for more than 10 years. After battling through a health crisis, he realized how powerfully a healthy diet can affect one's life. Recently he received his masters in clinical nutrition at the University of Bridgeport.

Shoppers often ask if everything sold at the market is organic. The answer is, "no." Some farmers have been certified as organic; others follow an organic regimen, have not sought certification, but have taken the farmers' pledge and use organic methods on their farms.

The market warmly welcomes families and children, and there is plenty of free parking. Sullivan reminded shoppers to bring change and small bills, bring bags with handles or backpacks, arrive early for the best selection and ask questions to get to know the local artists and farmers.

For more information, contact Patrick Sullivan, of the English Department at MCC, at psullivan@mcc.commnet.edu or at 860-546-1191.

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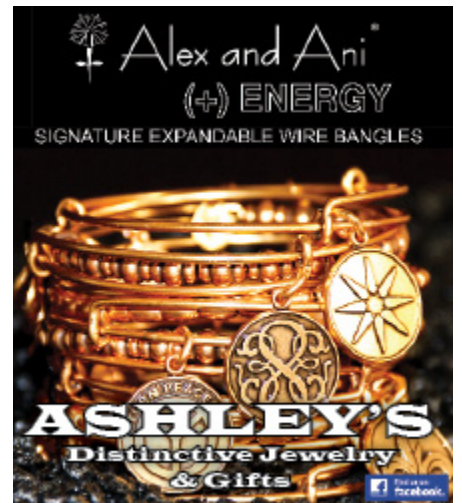
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