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Market Fights for Healthy Choices on City's West Side

By Anna Sanders

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The West End Market is on a mission. In today's struggling economy, the market hopes to promote healthy food choices at a reasonable price.

"The West End Market is more than just a farmer's market," Precious Wright, the market's program manager, says. "It provides fresh options for this community."

In its third year, the seasonal market, located in the parking lot on the corner of Church Street and Dodge Avenue from 8:30 a.m. to 3 p.m. every Saturday, aims to supply the community with healthy options closer to home.

Third-year vendor of the market, Nima Namdar, believes the location of the market is flawed, adding, "I believe that downtown would be better."

However, Ms. Wright says the market's location is ideal for the market's mission. She stresses the importance of the market as an opportunity for Evanston residents on the west side, who wouldn't otherwise visit the downtown Farmer's Market, to get affordable fresh produce.

"I think it's really good for the community in the area," says Samantha Montanaro, who has vended at the market twice. She adds that afternoons at the market are busier than in the morning.

"I think a lot of people still don't know about it," said Ms. Montanaro.

Word about the market continues to grow, but Ms. Wright says "we're still a baby."

First year West End Market vendor Sheila Hilliard said she felt attendance at market has increased since market's beginning in 2008. "It's good," Ms. Hilliard said. "More people in the community have started coming."

The West End Market is a project of Evanston Community Development Corporation (ECDC) with help from Leadership Evanston's 2008 economic development team. The market is also a result of support from Alderman Delores Holmes, 5th Ward, and the Evanston Food Policy Council.



Vendors sell crafts and food to patrons on a sunny Saturday morning.

"Ald. Holmes had a vision of the market," Ms. Wright says.

Ald. Holmes explains she wanted to bring food to the locals on the west side. "We've had a lot of hiccups, but we've been doing okay," she says, adding that she knows the market will continue to grow every year. She said the purpose of the market is not to be another Farmer's Market such as the one in downtown Evanston. "We wanted foods to be much more local," she says.

The market also provides the chance for non-food vendors to sell their goods, provided they are part of and aim to benefit the local community.

In addition to local food and craft vendors, the West End Market allows ex-offenders to sell fresh, locally-grown produce through the ECDC's Second Chance program. While the program is in its second year, Ms. Wright explains that the market's involvement with Second Chance has begun to take off recently.

"They learn things like money management," she adds.

Cozeake Nelson, Second Chance's Entrepreneurship Instructor, says the program is "going great." He explains, "They learn some things about how to plant things and handle money...I teach them how money works."

Second Chance participants also tend a garden behind Boocoo Cultural Center and Café, located across the street from the market at 1823 Church St. The produce grown is then sold at the market.

Mr. Nelson said he thinks the market's location is great. "It helps educate people on the west end." He adds, "[The market] teaches healthy eating to young people"

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