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Market makes mark in city

by JENAY TATE / Editor and Publisher

Positive model for other towns

Tuesday was the last day of the season at Norton's Friends and Farmers Market. I felt kinda blue as market time neared, knowing that Tuesday afternoons would seem mighty empty until next summer's harvest time.

For four months, people have looked forward to market day. Every week, the parking lot was filled with farmers, home gardeners, bakers and crafters who drew people from all walks of life to downtown Norton. The city hasn't seen the likes of this kind of regular attraction downtown since I don't know when. Unlike a previous attempt some years ago, this endeavor has real staying power, thanks to vendors and the hard work of dedicated and organized volunteers.

In addition to being a fun gathering spot, the market turned an otherwise empty parking lot into a place of real commerce. While most shoppers were local, throughout the summer I noticed people who lived in other towns. Norton's effort was modeled after the market in Big Stone Gap. It occurred to me other towns might benefit from organizing a similar venture on different days from those in Norton and Big Stone Gap. People attracted to the farmers market are potential customers for other local businesses, who ought to capitalize on the opportunities presented by new and increased traffic to their downtowns.

Gathering and shopping is what downtowns used to be about before better road networks and shopping centers drew people out of town. Farmers markets have a real role to play in bringing back that flavor to these important places in our communities.

Something else happened weekly at the Friends and Farmers Market — learning. At the market, people have face-to-face interaction with farmers, gardeners, bakers and crafters. People share recipes, growing tips and preparation ideas. Tonight, I'll be trying some White Lady turnips prepared the way



farmer Roy Mullins of Wise recommended — sliced, unpeeled, and mixed in with potatoes. Got those at the farmers market, too.

This week, I ate my first paw-paw. For as adventuresome as I am about new foods, I never would have sampled that ugly fruit except for the farmers market and a friendship I struck up there with Laura Lawson of Lee County, who assured me they tasted like a cross between a banana and an orange. I'm here to tell you the paw-paws were exactly as portrayed and delicious.

Special activities to occupy children as parents shopped and regular presenters enhanced the market experience. Master Gardener Sharon Daniels demonstrated a new shape — round — for hanging baskets. Extension specialist Susan Herndon talked about pressure cookers, a must in home-canning of fresh vegetables from the market. The chef from the Troutdale Steakhouse warned against overcooking salmon. We learned from him that, next to eggs, fish is the most over-cooked food.

Because of Norton's Friends and Farmers Market, I feel enriched by lessons learned, friendships kindled and fresh food grown and made locally. Hats off to all those who made it happen. I look forward to next year and recommend the experience to all.
