

Oshkosh Life

The key to y

World War I Aircraft on Display
REPLICA PLANES
Rescue Adoption
HELP HOMELESS PETS
Youth Make Waves
ROBOTICS TEAM

June 2014

Growing for 20 Years

Farmers Market Celebrates a Milestone

Two Fresh Decades

Take a look back at the history of the 20-year-old Oshkosh Saturday Farmers Market.

by *Karlene Leatherman*
Community contributor

In 1994, Master Gardener Jan Putzer asked the question “Why isn’t there a farmers market in Oshkosh?”

That summer, Riverside Park was chosen and area vendors were invited. The Master Gardeners took turns staffing for the 20 Saturdays.

Putzer put in many volunteer hours making sure everything ran smoothly, talking to vendors and taking care of publicity. The market proved successful in that it brought to the customers many seasonal, home-grown and fresh vegetables. No crafts were permitted.

A move for the market

After a survey in 1997 on ways to improve the market, the comment that stood out was the location. People felt it was hard to see the market behind the Huber building. The committee

decided to seek a more visible area in the downtown.

The corner of Division Street and Church Avenue was decided upon and permission to use the parking lot was given in 1998.

The market grew. Ten or so regular vendors serviced the Oshkosh public every year. There was a unique blend of herbs, organic beef and organically grown vegetables present. The market was very viable in that it brought people to visit the downtown, socialize and maybe visit the downtown business district all in a morning stop.

A quote, written by an unknown author, was found in some of the market’s historical paperwork: “If we look to the future, the market has the potential for overhead canopies, flower baskets and restaurant vendors. The market needs a permanent place to grow. With the support of the city and our downtown, the market can be a real plus.”

In 2001, the market uprooted from the Division and Church parking lot and moved to the City Hall parking lot. The Oshkosh Chamber sponsored the Oshkosh Farmers Market with directors Mary Ruppenthal, Kathleen McDonald, Mary Ellen Grahn, Barb Tress, Rosemary Eiden, Tom Wrochota, Judy



Farmers market attendees take a gander at some bees that were displayed by a market vendor.

Photo courtesy of Karlene Leatherman

Schultz, Michelle Robbins and Jeanne Crane.

The market grew again, adding more vendors.

In 2002 Mary Ruppenthal left the farmers market committee and the chamber had no one from the committee that wanted to take over.

There would not be a market in 2003. Judy Schultz wrote a letter to the City Manager and City Council asking permission to continue to use the City Hall parking lot. It was approved and there was a market for 2003 with Schultz at the helm. There were no fees collected. The Chamber discontinued sponsorship; they were sponsoring a Wednesday market.

The market's revival

In 2004, Ruppenthal came back on board. Ruppenthal and Schultz again asked the city for the use of City Hall parking lot, but were denied due to lack of insurance.

At a weekend neighborhood party, Schultz and husband Don were asked how the market was going. They discussed the insurance issue. The following Monday morning Schultz received a call from John Holdorf. Thanks to the Southwest Rotary, the insurance issue was resolved, and there was a market for 2004.

A committee was formed. Schultz was the financial person who took care of the money, budget reports, vendors' lists, and put together the rules/policies brochure and the ads/fliers. Ruppenthal took care of the meetings, events, public service announcements, music and being there early on Saturday mornings.

In 2006, Schultz resigned and turned the financial end over

to a committee member, Kathy Wittenberg.

The market continued with 20 to 30 vendors each year with not only fresh produce, but some craft items, periodic special events and entertainment. The market was known as the Oshkosh Saturday Farmers Market.

In 2004, Dennis and Karlene Leatherman were invited to bring their Classic Country line dancers to the market to provide entertainment. They were well received and were invited back for the next three years.

In 2007, the Leathermans joined the committee to help computerize the market and in 2008, they became the market administrators, managing the applications and publicity.

In 2009, Ruppenthal's husband John became ill and Mary needed to find her successor, as she would not be able to continue as manager without John. (Note: John has since recovered and it is now Mary that is struggling with health issues.)

New managers for the market

The Leathermans assured her that they would be there to take over when the time came for her to resign. Late that market season, Ruppenthal stepped down as manager, but continued on the committee as advisor and an occasional market vendor. The Leathermans took the reins as managers. The vendor count increased from 30 to 52 in 2010 and music was added to every market. The need for increased (electronic) visibility was apparent and Leesa Adams developed the market's first website.

Impending changes to the City Hall parking lot and Church

Continued on next page



The market features various theme weeks throughout the summer, and it provides a great place to meet up with neighbors and friends.

Photo courtesy of Karlene Leatherman

Continued from previous page

Avenue required the market to find a new location. Several locations were considered, including the Leach Amphitheater parking lot, Riverside Park and the St. Vincent dePaul parking lot, but none were able to provide the consistency that the market needed.

In fact, Paul VanAuken's University of Wisconsin Oshkosh Social Ecology class did a study on what location would work best for the market. None of these were a good fit for the market.

It was Kris and Sarrah Larson, owners of Becket's Restaurant, who suggested North Main Street, which was currently being renovated. The basement of the (former) Wagner Opera House, now Great Estates and Winnebago Bicycle was the storage area for the market's equipment.

Market on North Main Street

On June 4, 2011 Mayor Burk Tower cut the ribbon for the market at the newly renovated 400-500 blocks of North Main Street.

The vendor count was doubled and the city embraced the market's new location. The Oshkosh Police Department estimated 10,000 to 12,000 visitors each week (nearly four times the attendance than that of the City Hall parking lot).

Music continued each week, which was graciously sponsored by the UW-Oshkosh Credit Union. On November 30, 2011, the market became incorporated as Oshkosh Saturday Farmers Market, Inc. and a board of directors was formed.

In 2012 the market expanded a half block west down Church

Avenue, adding more vendors, with approximately 125 vending each week.

That July, the market partnered with the Oshkosh Area Community Foundation Corporation Inc., which allowed tax-deductible donations to be made to the Farmers Market Fund. (The market is currently in the process of establishing its own 501(c)3 status.)

Adding a winter market

The community went through withdrawal after the summer market closed. There was a desire for more: a winter/indoor market.

The Larsons again answered the call. Mayor Burk Tower cut the ribbon for the first Oshkosh Saturday Farmers Market, Inc. - Winter on Nov. 3, 2012. Becket's atrium hosted 40 vendors on the first, third and fifth Saturdays of the month, from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. from Nov. 3, 2012 through April 20, 2013. Kathleen Witman and Michelle Schmid-Schultz co-managed the first season.

The need for a permanent headquarters and easier access to equipment turned the Leathermans' eyes toward 547 N. Main St., the former sales office of King Clift Auto.

The property had been for sale for many years and was finally purchased by Brian Wagner and Eric Hoopman of Peabody's and the fit seemed to be perfect. In May 2013, the lease was signed and the market now had a home, along with some great parking.

In 2012, the market expanded another half block west on

Music and More

Musical acts, live entertainment and theme days are scheduled as part of the 2014 farmers market.

Schedule for the Summer

June 7

8 a.m. Summer Market - Opening Day

9 a.m. Dornan

10 a.m. Sign Dedication and Ribbon Cutting - 547 N. Main St., Oshkosh

June 14

9 a.m. Dr. Kickbutt's Orchestra of Death

9 a.m. Kids' Day

June 21

9 a.m. Mekan River Ramblers

June 28

9 a.m. Shady Grove

July 5

9 a.m. Mike Malone Trio

July 12

9 a.m. TimberMoon

9:30 a.m. Cooking Demo - Mahoney's - Chef Ryan Nolan

July 19

9 a.m. The Guilty Wanted

July 26

9 a.m. Mekan River Ramblers

9 a.m. Community Blood Center - Blood Drive

Aug. 2

9 a.m. Sly Joe and the Smooth Operators

Aug. 9

9 a.m. "Railroad" Ron and Bob

9:30 a.m. Cooking Demo - Gardina's - Chef Dane

Aug. 16

8 a.m. Oshkosh Fine Arts Association - Art at the Market



The sign dedication will be held on June 7.
Photo courtesy of Karlene Leatherman

9 a.m. Kenny "Bee" Birschbach

Aug. 23

9 a.m. 50% Folk

Aug. 30

9 a.m. Tin Sandwich — *Information from oshkoshsaturdayfarmersmarket.com*

20

In the first year of the market, 1994, the market was held at Riverside Park. This year marks the farmers market's 20th year.

FINDING A MARKET PLACE

- **The market began in** Riverside Park but it was hard to see behind the Huber building.
- **In 1998, the** market moved to the corner of Division Street and Church Avenue, where it flourished.
- **The summer of 2001** brought another new location for the market: the City Hall parking lot.
- **Several locations were considered** when the City Hall parking lot was set to undergo changes, but none seemed like they could work.
- **In 2011, the market** moved to the newly renovated blocks of North Main Street.
- **In 2012, the market** expanded a half block west down Church Avenue.

Church Avenue to Division Street with approximately 130 vendors each week.

The increasing popularity of the market forced the managers to limit the craft vendors to bi-monthly vending.

Logistic problems necessitated a venue change in 2013 for the winter/indoor market.

“A guy walks into a bar ...” goes the old joke, which is exactly what happened. One evening, the Leathermans saw lights on at the (former) Eagles Club on Washington Avenue. The door was open; they went in and heard a familiar voice behind the bar. Two hours later, building manager Scott Lind and the Leathermans agreed to relocate the winter/indoor market on the first, third and fifth Saturdays of the month at (the newly named) Washington Hall. Approximately 45 vendors attend each market.

The Roxy serves food on the balcony, which provides a great view of the market and the music on stage, which is sponsored by the UW-Oshkosh Credit Union.

Thanks to the generosity of the Downtown Rotary, a new sign at 547 N. Main St. will help the market celebrate its 20th year. On June 7, 2014, the King Clift Auto sign will be replaced with a new Oshkosh Saturday Farmers Market sign.

Hopefully, people will now refer to this area as the Farmers Market parking lot rather than “the old King Clift parking lot.” A sign dedication and ribbon cutting will be held on June 7, at 10 a.m.

It is at this same time that we reflect back on an article in the Oshkosh Northwestern on May 15, 2001 on the move to the City Hall parking lot:

“(Rosemary) Eiden said the new home will, hopefully, be only temporary. She said the committee overseeing the 12-vendor market would like to plant itself where downtown Oshkosh’s crumbled Walgreens store is now — the future ‘Market Square’ centerpiece of a proposed downtown renovation. I think that’s where the city would like to see us. What the committee would like to see is a mini-Madison market, if you will, where they close down the streets and people can roam



Karlene and Dennis Leatherman manage the Oshkosh Saturday Farmers Market.
Photo courtesy of Karlene Leatherman

around. But that’s a few light years away. The market has about 12 regular vendors. The vendors are hopeful of increasing their numbers to about 20 to 25, Eiden said.”

A great market

We didn’t need to wait light years. In fact, in 2013, the Daily Meal listed the Oshkosh Saturday Farmers Market as 44th in the list of the 101 Best Farmers Markets in America.

The summer market runs every Saturday, June through October on the 400 and 500 blocks of North Main Street and the 100 block of Church Avenue.

The winter market runs the first, third and fifth Saturdays, November through April, at Washington Hall, 405 Washington Ave.

Music/entertainment is at every market and is graciously sponsored by the UW Oshkosh Credit Union.

The Oshkosh Saturday Farmers Market, Inc. is 100 percent volunteer run, including its managers.

Since the move to North Main Street, the need for volunteers is great. Our greatest volunteer is Don Dillman, who was officially named as assistant manager in 2012.

The Leathermans have received the Chamber of Commerce Alberta Kimball Community Service Award, the City of Oshkosh Community Partner Award, the first non-Rotarian recipients of the Oshkosh Southwest Rotary Paul Harris Award and the 2013 Tourism Partner Award.

The market has been voted as the Best Family Event in Winnebago County for the past 2 years.

Be proud Oshkosh. We are.

For more information on the Oshkosh Saturday Farmers Market, Inc., visit oshkoshSaturdayfarmersmarket.com.

Like this story? Tell us why.
hibumagazine.com/survey