

The First-Ever SaltAir Market

Mother Nature did little to cooperate with the soft opening of the SaltAir Farmers' Market last Saturday, but this did not deter the 200 or so enthusiastic people who came out! But Mother Nature will have her way, and many of the farmers were unable to pick their crops due to the recent rain. Jack Simmons of Crescent Moon Farms was there, complete with mounds of beautiful, delicious, and picked-that-morning produce. He also brought shopping bags already loaded with seasonal produce: mustard greens, leaks, collards, sprouts, radishes and arugula (popular in France and Italy for ages and now a very popular green in the US and Great Britain) for those who have signed up for the CSA (Community Supporting Agriculture). We are all patiently awaiting the wonderful berries and tomatoes to come into season as summer approaches!

Also on hand were beautiful ceramics, Tupelo honey, fresh seafood including shrimp, clams, flounder and oysters with Ed's Red, baked goods, a variety of tomato plants, fresh herbs and custom SaltAir shopping bags. Jodi and Antonio of Provisions were on hand for a cooking demonstration while Randy and Barry provided live music.

It truly was a festival atmosphere, with people coming and staying around to visit and enjoy the event. Mayor Mel and Helen, Waterfronts Jim Garth, EDC's Tom Graney, Republican Party Chair Gary Ross, Chamber President Ralph Roberson and TDC director Paula Pickett were there. There were people from Tyndall AFB, Cape San Blas, Indian Pass, the Beaches as well as out-of-town visitors.

We offer hearty congratulations to the Market Board: Amber Davis, Jodi Perez, Sandra Chafin, Kim Harrison, and Dr. Jennifer Taylor of FAMU. We offer our sincere gratitude to Dr. Taylor for her dedication to this project and for her role as the contact person to the growers. Thanks to the City of Port St. Joe for approving the event and providing city property for the location. Thanks to Paula Pickett of the Tourist Development Council for providing funding for marketing and advertising. The PSJRA is fortunate to have the opportunity to support the market by funding the market research through Waterfronts Partnership and providing additional funding for the purchase of tables and tents, the market's non-profit application, scholarship programs for vendors, and other programming, including live music. The primary criteria for the Redevelopment Agency to provide seed money to the market was founded on the statistics that farmers' markets also increase business in the adjacent retail areas. Later that day, I visited three shops, one in each block of Reid Avenue, to ask if the traffic increased during the market. One shop estimated a 150% increase in traffic, and the two others noted steady and "robust" traffic—definitely more than a typical Saturday morning.

One last note on the fresh produce subscription program: You may wish to know that the number of participants in the CSA program is limited, and 16 out of the possible 25 have already signed up. Please call Amber Davis at 541-3981 or email her at amber@saltairmarket.com to reserve your spot. As a member, you will receive fresh produce every Saturday (pick up from 11 to noon at the market location on Costin Blvd. and Reid when the market is not open) at a cost of \$100 for five weeks.

The grand opening of the SaltAir Market is scheduled for Saturday, April 19, from 9 AM until noon. Come early and stay for all the fun—and while you are downtown, shop all around Port St. Joe to take advantage of special sales and promotions. Everyone wins!