

Garnet Valley LIVING



Thornton Farmers Market: Spreading Joy by Sharing Their Bounty

Cover photo by Claire Bunn Photography





Local Market Connects a Community

By Judy Connors | Photos by Claire Bunn Photography

Famed American poet, Walt Whitman, once said, “I have learned that to be with those I like is enough” and this sentiment perfectly describes those involved with the local Thornton Farmers Market which opens for the season on May 12th.

I first visited the Thornton Farmers Market several years ago when just a few local residents gathered to showcase their extra produce, honey and cakes. At a return visit last October, I was amazed at the growth of not only the locally sourced products available there but, most importantly, by the sense of community and warmth that the market fosters not only in its vendors but also its visitors. These people really know each other—their lives, their parents, children and pets—and, really like each other, too! Not to mention support each other. They connect not only on Saturdays *at* the market, but all year long *because of* the market.

“There is definitely a strong sense of community engagement at this market,” says Donna Wetterlund, owner of Bruno’s Bits, who discovered it when it was smaller and located on the lawn at Rose Hip Barn. “It was a friendly group of neighbors that wanted to share their bounty of vegetables, flowers and prepared foods within their community.” But, since its founding in 2006, “It’s grown in size and popularity as the surrounding community embraces the idea of shopping locally and eating fresh. Small towns are great that way... supporting each other and valuing the convenience of a local market! Shoppers are neighbors and friends. Vendors are neighbors and friends.”

Thornbury Township, Delaware County supports the Farmer’s Market in various ways—another indication of the recognized value that the market brings to the sense of community here. Vendors now set up each week on Cannon Field, located at 330 Glen Mills Road, which is owned by the township, who also supplies a port-a-potty facility which helps the market attract visitors who stay, shop and socialize. The market is a Saturday morning event for a lot of local residents who also volunteer and participate in township sponsored events and run into each other around the area. Each participant at the market has a heart-warming story to tell about their involvement and the joy it brings them. Currently, the market boasts over 25 vendors with goods ranging from produce, jams, jellies, pastries, plants, fresh cut flowers, garden pots and supplies, dog treats, skin care products, honey, oils, artwork and new this year, an on-site pizza oven for lunch and the list is growing as word gets around what a central part of this community the market has become.

Erin Greener of Erin’s HomeSewn first got involved about nine years ago by helping a former vendor, Lila Achuff, load her car every Friday night so she would be set for the market the following morning. “She encouraged me to join the farmer’s market so I began selling cookies, mini-pies, and pies in a jar. In later years, I made quiche and other food items utilizing another vendor Richards Egan’s delicious apples and pears, along with roasted beet tarts from Rocky’s supply.” The market has also supported and encouraged Erin as her priorities shifted once children came along. “As I grew to have children, my challenges changed and I took up sewing. So now I sell home

sewn products such as adult and children aprons and various items for children.” But the impetus for these vendors is not solely commercial. It is about encouraging and inspiring market visitors to try something new and spend time doing so with their families. “We’re a family not only dedicated to helping each other but also providing for the community,” Erin says. “For me, I hope that my wares are an inspiration for a parent to cook with their children. For example, selling a children’s apron and asking that little child what they will make with their mother or father. To me, aprons are a symbol of helping in the kitchen and spending time together cooking for family and/or friends. We’re all so busy, myself included, but having my daughters stand on a wooden stand (built by one of our former vendors) and peel the garlic or pull off the thyme leaves is heartwarming. And they are so proud to have helped with dinner! This is the type of love we want to encourage in the community.”

These sentiments are echoed by Edie O’Neill who credits the market with helping her and her son connect and find a shared love of baking. “I really love the Market. The relationship between my son and I is a strong part of our business. Families love that we work well and enjoy being in business together. We have customers from many different areas and it tends to connect them to us and each other in an expanded community. I enjoy being in the outdoors, seeing what my fellow vendors are offering, and meeting new people. I believe it does strengthen the sense of community. We get a lot of customers who are new to the area and the Market is such a welcoming place that they feel at home. It is astounding how many people have not tasted truly fresh and locally sourced foods, and it is very rewarding to introduce them to healthier versions of old favorites.”

Many of the market goers seek out their goods and supplies weekly, shopping with the same vendors for years. Theresa Peoples-Minor and her husband, Timothy, own Urban Essence Salon & Spa and are makers of a

handcrafted line of bath and body products, all natural and made in their home. “My husband Timothy and I got involved with the farmers when Donna approached us at another farmers market and asked if we would be interested in joining. We attend the Thornton Farmer’s Market because it feels like home. My husband and I are not just weekend vendors, this is our job and coming to this market every Saturday is like coming home. Our participation in the community brings awareness about skin care. Not to mention on occasion we have formulated products specifically for some of our customers. The market customers are very diverse and they are loyal. The customers look for ‘their vendors’ every week. This farmers market is family oriented.”

That feeling of “being home” is what attracts vendors and shoppers to the market. “I fell in love with the charm of the vendors, the quality of the offerings and the idea of playing, working and producing within the same local circumference,” comments Donna Wetterlund. “Produce and products are grown and made on the same soil where families and children are nurtured and thrive. We are a Saturday destination for many families.”

And there is a lot to do for families with small children: eat lunch under the canopy, select their weekly flower arrangement, and pet the alpacas all while learning how products are made and grown locally. Not to mention shopping for ingredients for family meals and

products at the produce and spice vendors on site.

“I’ve been canning for approximately eight years and have been a vendor at the market for six years,” says Lisa Falcone of Yes-I-Can. “The market is like a big family, everyone goes out of their way to help each other. Having the community stop by every Saturday to purchase and enjoy your products is such a wonderful feeling. We work so hard all week long and to see the joy on their faces is priceless.”

Bringing smiles to many visitor’s faces is local photographer, Nate



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Seagraves of Funky Photos, whose keen eye and unique skill set is displayed weekly at the market. His local area landscapes and scenery shots, all taken with his iPhone 7S and mounted ready for immediate display, attract art lovers and locals alike looking to take home a one-of-a-kind piece of art capturing memorable and close-to-their heart locations.

The market has become a gathering place too where shoppers stroll leisurely and chat with vendors about everything from their products to world views. Children and their parents receive an education and engage in play- chasing the butterflies attracted with the monarch waystation and milkweed garden, participating in the kids' activity table and sticking their heads in the face-in-the-hole board for fun photos.

Helping the broader community as well is part of the market's mission. Donations to library fundraisers, church auctions, dog walks and even global charities have been made by the Thornton Market vendors. JB Redding, a 60-year resident of Thornbury, believes her participation in the market is multi-layered. "I bring my humor and a taste of old Thornton/Thornbury/Glen Mills with stories of my lifelong connection to this community.



Funky Photos display booth at the market

Delaware County Family Photographer



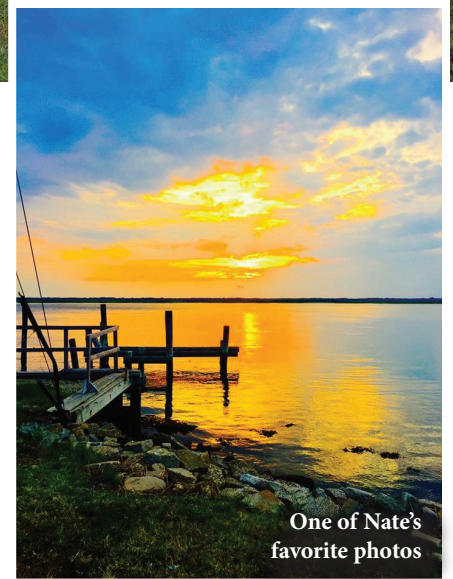
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But my food and signature ginger tea have spices from Asia, Africa and America stressing the importance of a global community and giving - my booth helps support orphans and education in East Africa."

The Thornton Market vendors feel they not only have the market experience in common but share a deep interest in encouraging their community to shop where they live and appreciate the talents that exist locally. They are a mix of small business owners and hobbyists doing what they love, supporting each other in season and during the off season and are constantly impressed with each other's skills, talents and the results that are on display at the market each Saturday.



One of Nate's favorite photos

Mark your calendars for opening day, May 12th and prepare to be amazed, too!

Do you know a neighbor who has a story to share? Nominate your neighbor to be featured in one of our upcoming issues! Contact us at jconnors@bestversionmedia.com.