

Eau Claire Downtown Farmers' Market

by Donna Fortin



Beginning in 1980, the Eau Claire Farmers' Market moved several times from a shopping mall to a downtown city parking lot and back to the shopping mall. As the number of vendors grew from 15 to more than 60, it became more and more difficult to find a suitable location. In 1994, the Eau Claire Farmers' Market moved to the London Square Mall. Philip and Judith Chute, local berry growers, formed the new Downtown Farmers' Market.

The downtown location was quite popular with vendors and citizens alike. The market started with approximately 20 vendors and grew to approximately 40 vendors by 1999. At this time the city of Eau Claire



began the design process for what was to become the new Phoenix Park. This turned out to be an ideal situation for the Downtown Farmers' Market, because the citizens of Eau Claire wanted to provide a permanent market site in the new park. As plans to turn a redevelopment area at the confluence of the Eau Claire and

Chippewa Rivers into a city park, it became clear that a covered facility that protected shoppers and vendors from sun and rain would be a dream come true.

Convinced a covered facility was the answer to the variable Wisconsin weather, the Chutes began taking their vacations to look at covered farmers' markets all over the country, from Las Cruces, New Mexico, to Halifax, Nova Scotia, collecting more than 350 photos. The next step was funding. The city of Eau Claire was awarded a \$225,000 federal grant for the purpose of building the pavilion. The remaining funds were raised by donations from Farmers' Market vendors, foundations, individuals, local businesses, and the city of Eau Claire. The result is one of the most beautiful pavilions in the United States. This pavilion is one of three covered markets in the state of Wisconsin; the others are located in Milwaukee and Stevens Point.

The Downtown Farmers' Market is devoted to small farmers, providing an opportunity for regional growers within a 50-mile radius an opportunity to sell their freshly grown produce. There are a few exceptions. Knowing that shoppers like to have something to nibble on with coffee, one of the vendors, Marie's Original Bakery, will offer goodies from her newly built Bakery Bike, an invention that allows her to ride to the Farmers' Market with freshly baked croissants and morning buns. Other exceptions include coffee, ice cream, and Michigan peaches, since peaches are not grown in the Eau Claire area.

A seven-member Board of Directors governs The Downtown Farmers' Market Association that recently



Sixty-seven vendors fill the pavilion built specifically to house the Eau Claire market. Here a beautiful selection of vegetables awaits buyers.

hired Deidra Barrickman as manager. "I have been a vendor at the Farmers' Market for the past ten years," Deidra says. "I believe the Farmers' Market is wonderful for Eau Claire and surrounding communities." Deidra sells fresh shiitake mushrooms and works many hours talking about the market to vendors and shoppers, as well as growing and preparing her own shiitake mushrooms. (See sidebar for an easy way to prepare these delicious mushrooms.)

At the heart of the market are more than 30 Hmong family farmers, including Lee Xiong and Kou Vang. Lee's mother has been selling at the Market since 1985. About two years ago Lee and her husband Kou began assisting Lee's mother, as well as selling flowers themselves. "We sell a variety, such as sunflowers, snapdragons, and many different kinds of bouquets," said Kou. "While all the produce at the Market is not always certified organic, not

many chemicals are used in growing them," continued Kou. "The vegetables taste really fresh."

On a typical Saturday, approximately 4,000 shoppers find fresh berries, vegetables, flowers, meats, honey, cheese, goat-milk soaps, mushrooms, coffee, baked goods, and plants from about 65 vendors. Shoppers come from many areas, including Mondovi, Durand, Fall Creek, Augusta, Chippewa Falls, Altoona, Bloomer, and more.

"A good market depends on every vendor making a contribution," says Phil Chute. The result of those contributions after 14 years is a thriving Eau Claire Downtown Farmers' Market. No longer do Eau Claire Farmers' Market vendors have to put up and take down tents to display their produce; the new Phoenix Park Pavilion shelters shoppers and vendors "come rain or come shine."



Protected from the sun and rain, shoppers can stroll through the market in comfort.

• IF YOU GO •

Eau Claire Downtown Farmers' Market
Phoenix Park Pavilion, Madison Street Bridge,
Eau Claire, WI
www.eacdowntownfarmersmarket.com
May 3, 10, 17, 24, 31
June 7 thru October 29

Saturday 7:30 – 1
Wednesday 7:30 – 1
Thursday 12 – 5

Other farmers' markets in the Eau Claire area:
Festival Foods, 3007 Mall Drive, Sundays
8 – 1
Oakwood Mall, 4800 Golf Road, Mondays
11 – 4

GRILLED SHIITAKE MUSHROOMS

(courtesy of Deidra Barrickman)

Washed and stemmed shiitake mushrooms

Marinate in equal amounts of melted butter and olive oil.

Garlic and soy sauce to taste.

Put on grill next to direct heat, cap side down. Flip after five minutes and grill until golden brown. Enjoy!

FRIENDSHIP BLUEBERRY MUFFINS

(courtesy of Judith Chute)

This recipe uses a smaller berry, the "Friendship" Berry, which was developed in Friendship, Wisconsin.

½ cup margarine

1¼ cups sugar

2 eggs

1 cup sour cream

1–2 cups blueberries

1 teaspoon vanilla

2 cups flour

1 teaspoon baking powder

½ teaspoon baking soda

¼ teaspoon salt

Cream margarine and sugar. Add eggs, sour cream, and vanilla. Add dry ingredients. Stir just until mixed. Fold in blueberries. Fill muffin cups half full. Sprinkle with cinnamon and sugar mixture (¼ cup sugar mixed with 2 teaspoons cinnamon). Bake at 375°F for 20 to 25 minutes.

Makes 18 muffins.



An online extra!

www.bountifulcupboard.com