

COSTUMES BY THE HUNDREDS BRIGHTEN LAST FARM MARKET

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Austin Montgomery/Beloit Daily News (From left): South Beloit twins Xander Ostiguin and Harper Ostiguin aren't afraid of any ghosts, and will protect our realm if called upon during the Halloween parade in Beloit.

BELOIT - Mild weather brought more than 1,000 Beloit area families out to show off Halloween costumes Saturday, as part of the Downtown Beloit Association's Halloween Parade.

It was the DBA's final Farmers Market of 2018, and attracted a much larger crowd compared to last year's event, with kids of all ages coming out to show off spooky, unique and colorful costumes.

The event "has a lot of momentum knowing that it still exists and we have the Fun Zone and entertainment," said DBA Events Coordinator Crystal Cribbs. "We have a lot going on still. I think this is an alternative to a lot of parents who may ... have some (Halloween) safety concerns or where they can't make it out during the week. This is during the day and they can enjoy the costumes because you can see them. At night, you can't see them. It's just so much more special."

To Cribbs, she said it seems like more families are creating homemade and more creative Halloween costumes, with this year's event letting kids ditch winter coats and hats for a range of one-of-a-kind disguises.

"It used to be all store-bought costumes," Cribbs said. "There's been an explosion in the amount of people who make their costumes. It's crazy to see the kinds of costumes that people come up with."

As kids chased sugar highs collecting sweets across downtown from area businesses, vendors at the Beloit Farmers market played the part of trick-or-treat providers in chief, dishing out sweet treats alongside the market's fresh produce and home grown goods.

Kathy and Hank Baumman of Beloit, long time vendors of the market, say they felt 2018 was a strong market year even with rainy months of June, August and September, contrasted with snow flurries from two weeks ago.

"We felt that this year business was really strong, lots of customers and a lot of our regulars came back," Kathy Baumman said. "We look forward to seeing them every year. Last week it snowed and was windy and earlier in the year it was raining. Impact-wise, it was awesome for the customers. We've been thanking everyone for their support and we've heard from them they will be happy to come back in the spring."

DBA Executive Director Shauna El-Amin said the strength of the Beloit market was only proven by the adverse conditions, with the market now seeing over 11,000 weekly attendees, spanning a visitor range from Madison to Rockford.

"It's amazing that the community comes out but also that we're seeing more visitors from outside the area too," El-Amin said. "That's awesome that everyone sees the benefit of what we have at the market. We are rain or shine. We just deal with it. We were still here and we were still open. The customers and vendors were still here."

For Brad Paulson of Brad and Cindi's Produce in Brodhead, who've come to sell produce in Beloit since 1975, this year's market presented challenges to adjust the growing and harvesting process on the fly due to the erratic weather.

"We're on sand so it's a lot more forgiving than other soils so we were decent that way," Paulson said. "I know some crops got drowned out in a lot of areas but ours didn't. Through the year everything was okay. I keep telling Cindi we've got to keep going. We've been here 44 years since 1975. It's a bad habit, if you will. I do this just because I like to. It's a passion for us and we do well down here."

The final market Saturday marks the end of season for the outdoor market, with an indoor market extending inside at Bushel & Peck's Local Market starting on Nov. 3 from 9 a.m. to noon.