

Farm markets near end of good season

By Geoff Bruce gbruce@beloitdailynews.com | Posted: Monday, October 21, 2013 4:00 pm

The Downtown Beloit Association's annual Halloween parade and party is coming up fast and with it, the city will see its final farmers market of the season.

As Beloit vendors prepare to pack up their goods and take down their booths for the season, vendors at the Rockton River Market cleaned up shop last month.

Both markets had successful seasons, according to their respective organizers.

The Beloit Farmers Market found itself with familiar popularity throughout the season.

"We had about 90 vendors weekly between State, Grand, and the Bushel & Peck's parking lot," Downtown Beloit Association Program Coordinator Crystal Buhmeyer said. "We have over 100 vendors signed up with us throughout the season."

Buhmeyer also noted that she expects final attendance numbers to have increased this year.

"I would anticipate that we had more people coming in. I think we had a lot more people from surrounding communities," Buhmeyer said.

The Beloit Farmers Market was forced to contend with construction on the Phoenix Building on Grand Avenue this season, but Buhmeyer does not believe that the project affected the market in a negative way.

"We did lose some space at the beginning, but during that time we didn't yet have the full capacity of our vendors," Buhmeyer said. "It required more planning to figure out where we were going to put some vendors, but it worked out quite well."

The largest change for the Beloit Farmers Market this season was the inclusion of food stamps as a potential currency.

"It's something we had been looking into for the last couple years and we were finally able to get some grants to be able to afford the machinery," Buhmeyer said.

Under the new system, guests were able to visit the market's information booth, swipe their Quest Card, and receive wooden tokens that they could then use as currency at participating vendors.

"It's been going really great and we're really glad to have it," Buhmeyer said.

Making even larger changes this season was the Rockton River Market, which relocated after having spent its first year in the parking lot of the Rockton United Methodist Church. This year, the market took its place in Old Settler's Park along the village's scenic riverfront.

“It was beautiful, no doubt about it. Attendance grew considerably from last year to this year,” Rockton Chamber of Commerce Board of Directors member Ryan Rydell said.

Rydell estimated the market drew between 150 and 250 customers per week and noted that live music was a new addition this season that may have helped to draw more guests.

Certainly one reason for the increased attendance to the River Market in its sophomore season was an increase in vendors.

“We averaged anywhere between 10 and 16 vendors on a regular basis,” Rydell said. “There was good variety too with some crafters, produce, homemade goods, and clothing.”

Rydell noted that last year the Rockton market often saw as few as four vendors set up booths some weeks.

“That kind of a jump, now having around a dozen every week or even more, it was very cool,” Rydell said.

Looking ahead to next season, Rydell hopes the market can continue to grow at a brisk pace.

“I want to make the same jump again, I want to double our vendors and bring out more people,” Rydell said.

The chamber has no plans to change the market’s location or schedule in future seasons. Rydell believes that the market’s slot on Wednesday afternoons allows for customers to be able to visit without having to choose between the River Market and other options.

“The fact is that we don’t want to compete with other successful markets,” Rydell said. “We want to contribute to the community, not compete with it.”