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FEATURED

Farmers market opens with some changes

By DEBRA JENSEN-DE HART For the Daily News
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The Beloit Farmer's Market kicked off its season Saturday with a few new rules set because of the COVID-19 pandemic. 27 vendors were allowed in the market area near the corner of State and Broad streets and only 200 people were allowed in the market area at a time.

Photo by Debra Jensen-DeHart

BELOIT—Vendors at the Beloit Farmers Market on opening day were greeted by a sunny sky and comfortable temperatures on Saturday as the summer event got underway.

Equally if not more important, people came to browse and buy.

But this farmers market was unusual.

Instead of the usual 100 vendors, there were only 27.

Instead of several hundred patrons filling the 300 block of State Street and the 400 block of East Grand Avenue, only 200 were allowed at a time.

The changes came as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic sweeping the nation and the world.

“We have been talking about it for a couple of months,” said Shauna El-Amin, Downtown Beloit Executive Director, about how to reopen.

After considering the amount of space needed for people to social distance, the vendor number was whittled down as well as restrictions put in place for attendees. And vendors were placed only on one side of the street allowing for a wide berth of street and sidewalk on which patrons could walk.

Vendors wore masks and masks were recommended, but not required, for attendees.

While the DBA had provided information to the public that the opening day time slot also would be reduced by a couple hours from 9 a.m.—noon, people were lined up at the Broad Street entrance well before that.

"Someone put on Google that it opened at 8," El-Amin said.

In order to tally the number of people coming in and leaving the market, and to keep the number from exceeding 200, attendees were counted as they entered and exited at the entrance and exit points. Volunteers with two-way radios then relayed messages to each other.

Vendor Brad Paulson of Brad and Cindi's Produce, said he has been selling his produce at the market for 46 years.

As for the situation, he said: "You've just got to roll with the punches."

Although he may not be able to sell as much at the market this summer, Paulson said he has another option.

"We've never had to sell from home, but we will this year," Paulson said.

Vendor Scott Roberts (The Birds & the Bees) said he was ready for the day with his supply of eggs and honey.

"There's nothing you can do about it," he said of the circumstances.

But Roberts also said he was somewhat concerned about selling his eggs because this is the time of year he ramps up production.

But if he doesn't sell enough, "I will donate some," he said.

One vendor who preferred to remain anonymous said she wanted people to be safe but that she was concerned whether enough attendees would be allowed in to shop.

"This is tough for small businesses," she said.

El-Amin said the DBA will have to see how things go this season, if things change, some of the restrictions in place might change.

After the market had closed for the day, she said things went well.

"It was very good and well attended and people were respectful." —

The DBA will now evaluate things, talk to city officials and see how it goes week by week, El-Amin said.

Clint Wolf