

A Fine Day For Fiddleheads

Co-op's winter farmers market draws a crowd

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By Tim Cook
Violinist A. Gabriel Kastelle entertains patrons at the Fiddleheads Natural Foods Cooperative on New London on Saturday.

New London — The Fiddleheads Natural Foods Cooperative held its first winter farmers market at its downtown location Saturday, in what many are hoping is a positive sign for the group.

A large crowd of customers milled through the building on the corner of Broad and Huntington streets that formerly housed the California Fruit grocery store. They perused a wide range of natural, organic and locally produced goods.

The winter markets, which are scheduled to run every Saturday over the next three months, are meant to be a way to attract much-needed members

to the co-op and to help “people get used to coming here,” according to co-op board President Richard “Dick” Spindler-Virgin.

The co-op endured some hard times since last April, when a number of the group's original members resigned in the wake of the firing of Richard Krasner, the co-op's one-time choice for general manager. Spindler-Virgin said the board still hasn't hired a new general manager but will be discussing the topic in its upcoming meetings.

The focus is on opening their brick-and-mortar store as soon as possible. “We really want to get it done this year,” said Spindler-Virgin, who was once the director of the Regional Multicultural Magnet School in New London. He said the opening of the store depends on how much money the group can raise to pay for necessary renovations.

The Fiddleheads market Saturday had all the makings of a typical farmers market, albeit one inside a high, tin-ceiled space with exposed brick walls. The store's floor is a rough, unfinished concrete, the walls still just raw sheetrock, and the lighting is provided by a series of incandescent light bulbs strung throughout the space.



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JoAnn Desrochers of the 18th Century Purity Farm in Plainfield explains how her produce is grown to Kay Pere of Mystic, right, at the Fiddleheads Natural Foods Cooperative's winter farmers market, in the former California Fruit grocery store in downtown New London. The market offered an assembly of organic and locally produced goodies.

But despite its rough interior, people were undeterred from shopping the assembly of organic and locally produced goodies. Throughout the day a steady crowd browsed the dozen-plus vendors who were selling products including naturally made soap, artisan cheese and locally raised beef.

Chris Hausmann of Ledyard joined the co-op Saturday. A membership costs \$175, and when someone joins he is essentially purchasing a share of the business. Hausmann signed up to be a Fiddlehead because, he said, he enjoys the sort of food available through the co-op.

“It’ll be really terrific,” Hausmann said, to be able to get organic and locally produced food regularly at a grocery instead of seasonally at farmers markets.

Thomas A. Sheridan, president of the Chamber of Commerce of Eastern Connecticut, who was at the market all morning, was confident about Fiddleheads' prospects.

“They have something good here. This is going to catch on,” Sheridan said.

Vendors, too, had a positive outlook about the co-op's future.

Nunz Corsino, who was there selling farm-raised beef and fresh eggs from his Four Mile River Farm in Old Lyme, said the high turnout Saturday bodes well for the co-op, but that people need to show continued support “to get these items on a daily basis.”

“When Fiddleheads called me, they only had to ask me once,” said Bob Noiseux of Meadow Stone Farm in Brooklyn, Conn.