

Features

Findlay Market neighborhood farm stands offer food and friendship

JULIE MURRAY | MONDAY, JULY 21, 2014



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A neighborhood redevelopment foundation striving to change perceptions about an urban business district poised for revitalization. A public school trying to overcome cultural, language and economic barriers to teach parents how to use their food assistance benefits to purchase fresh, healthy food rather than convenience foods. An Episcopal church exploring new ways to be a faith community within their neighborhood.

Three different communities, three very different goals. But CPS' [Roberts Academy](#) in [Price Hill](#), the [Walnut Hills Redevelopment Foundation](#) and [St. James Episcopal Church](#) in [Westwood](#) have all found a pathway toward achieving their vision for their neighborhoods through a unique collaboration with [Findlay Market](#) that brings residents access

to fresh, healthy food and a place to gather in community.

The Corporation for Findlay Market is now in its second year of community partnerships to bring farm stands to Cincinnati-area communities. The project was born when Tracy Power, resource coordinator at Roberts Academy and Community Learning Center, met Karen Kahle, director of resource development for Findlay Market, at an event geared to helping parents at Roberts learn how use SNAP and EBT cards to purchase fresh local produce at Findlay Market in Over-the-Rhine. After the program was completed, Power and Kahle both noticed that none of the participants were taking advantage of what they had learned.

“Transportation was the number one issue,” Power says. “They couldn’t find a way to get to Over-the-Rhine. And there’s a language barrier as well. So since we couldn’t work out how we could get the parents to Findlay, we looked for a way to bring access to locally grown produce to them.”

As a result, Roberts Academy entered into a partnership with Findlay Market, and with the help of a startup grant from an anonymous donor, launched Findlay’s first remote farm stand in July 2013.

Over in Westwood, the congregation of St. James Episcopal Church was dreaming about new ways of connecting with the community they’ve called home for more than 100 years. Parishioner Kathy Schaeffer had an idea that hosting a farmers market at the church could be a really great addition to the neighborhood and would fit right in with creating relationships with the church’s neighbors in Westwood. The location, a spacious corner lot on Montana Avenue across the street from the YMCA with a bus stop in front, seemed ideal. So, she decided to look into it.

“I was quickly overwhelmed by logistics, supply chains and paperwork,” Schaeffer says. So she put the idea aside. But a year later, Schaeffer read a couple articles about the new collaboration between Roberts Academy and Findlay and decided it was time to dream again.

“It really seemed like this project was calling me, so I contacted Karen Kahle at Findlay Market. She told me the basic framework, and it seemed very doable. I then contacted Father Jim (Strader, the rector at St. James), who was enormously supportive and encouraged me to go forward,” Schaeffer says. She then helped the church secure a grant from the Episcopal diocese to help with startup costs.

Kevin Wright, executive director of the Walnut Hills Redevelopment Foundation, became aware of the farm stand partnerships through the foundation’s relationship with LISC's Place Matters initiative. He found in Findlay Market a creative way to help revitalize Peeble’s Corner.

“Placing a farm stand in our business district has been extremely helpful from an economic development standpoint,” Wright says. “It is helping to get feet on the ground next to where we are about to open a restaurant, and is encouraging people to re-think their perceptions of Peeble's Corner. In addition to that, it is providing healthy, locally sourced produce to our residents.”

Getting Noticed

Kahle is excited about Findlay's three community collaborations. "Each of the three farm stands is a unique little local food laboratory," she says.

The Roberts Academy farm stand, now in its second season, and the two new stands in Walnut Hills and Westwood, each have their own set of challenges. But letting people know they exist is one they all share.

"Any business startup is challenging, and we know that getting the word out about a farmer's market and getting people to make it part of their weekly routine is always tricky," Kahle says.

Wright agrees. "We've had some difficulty getting people to include the farm stand into their weekly shopping schedule, but that is slowly changing as we have taken on a more aggressive social media and door-to-door marketing strategy," he says.

Heather Wigle, a volunteer at Roberts Academy, shares her frustration. "People will tell you how excited they are about the farm stand, and then they don't come," she sighs.

"Communication is our biggest challenge," Power says. "This is a benefit to the whole community that everyone can access. It's just getting people to know about it, and convincing people to try it."

Mother Nature can also present some challenges, and indeed, the early weeks of operation at St. James saw rain on five consecutive Wednesdays. But despite the weather, business in Westwood is steadily growing.

"People are returning week after week. New people are coming each week too," says Rev. Strader. "This week, a (Metro) bus driver who passed by the farm stand jumped out of the bus (while it was stopped at the bus stop at Cheviot and Montana) to make sure she purchased some kettle corn. And she's not the only one that's heard about that delicious offering—a group of teens that got to the farm stand right at closing time put their quarters and dollars together to get a bag of kettle corn, too. The word is out!"

Growing Community

And other communities are starting to take notice. Kahle says that groups in Norwood, Bond Hill and Madisonville have all approached Findlay with interest in bringing farm stands to their neighborhoods.

But the real success of the partnerships is that the farm stands are bringing much more than just fresh produce to the neighborhoods. According to Wright, in addition to the community-building that has already begun in the business district, Walnut Hills has also recently been awarded an Interact for Health grant that will, in part, program activities around the farm stand that encourage a comprehensive approach to healthy living for residents.

At St. James, the congregation's connection with the Westwood community is blooming. "We're so grateful for our church members' support. Together with our neighbors, we might just be creating something very, very special," Strader says. "I love that people from all over are gathering here around food and friendship—much like what communion is supposed to be like."

Roberts Acedemy's Wigle sums it up best: "This is about more than peanut butter, popcorn and produce. It's about building community and bridging cultural barriers. People see bridging (cultural gaps) as a big thing, but really, it's just that we need to get to know our neighbors better and build community."

Findlay Market Farm Stands

Tuesdays, 3-6 p.m. at Roberts Academy in Price Hill, 1702 Grand Ave.

Wednesdays, 4-7 p.m. at St. James Episcopal Church in Westwood, 3207 Montana Ave.

Thursdays, 4-7 p.m. at Peeble's Corner in Walnut Hills, 767 E. McMillen Ave.

More information

at <http://www.findlaymarket.org> or <https://www.facebook.com/FindlayMarketFarmstands>

Want to find out how to bring a Findlay Market farm stand to your neighborhood? Email [Karen Kahle](mailto:Karen.Kahle@findlaymarket.org) or call her at 513.665.4839.

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