

Market...from Page 1A

said. "We couldn't be more excited for the opening day and the new season, we've got a great crowd, everybody is in a great mood, and it's just wonderful to be here because everybody loves the Farmers Market."

The Farmers Market has come a long way since it began 10 years ago at the Union County Courthouse with just 30 vendors. The Market moved to its current location six years ago. What was once referred

to as a "pole barn" soon came to life and forced continued growth. Its popularity became a phenomena and forced an expansion to allow for more vendors along with an increase in traffic and parking.

"This place is just amazing," said Barry and Karen Olson of Franklin, NC. "We've been here once before, but for whatever reason, we didn't stay long, so this is the first time that we've been able to take our time and really



Young folks raising money to take part in the upcoming Dream Ride Experience. Photo/Lowell Nicholson



Upwards of 5,000 people visited the opening day of the Union County Farmers Market on Saturday, June 3. Photo/Lowell Nicholson

enjoy ourselves. This place is a real treasure."

Cummings still marvels at the Market's humble beginnings.

"When we started at the courthouse all those years ago, we had 30 vendors," said Cummings. "At the new farmers market, we have 84 stalls and most of those are full all the time."

According to Cummings, on any given Saturday, the market could see anywhere from 2,000 to 5,000 people coming through, both locally and out of state, to come see what all the Farmers Market has to offer.

With this large influx

of visitors comes an increase in local, even regional, economics. Cummings added that oftentimes, not only will these marketgoers visit the Farmers Market, but they will also visit local restaurants and retail locations. And this does not include the impact it has on those who sell their goods at the Market.

"Every year we do an evaluation of the Farmers Market," said Cummings. "We want to determine the impact of our Farmers Market. So, we ask our vendors how much money they generate on any given Saturday."

"What we found was, on average, our farm or produce vendors bring in around \$369 per week. Our craft vendors bring in somewhere around \$356."

Last year alone, the Union County Farmers Market generated \$600,000 for its Saturday openings - all of which went directly to the vendors.

"Basically, the Farmers Market was generating this money for the people who were selling the product," said Cummings. "If you combine that with what we do at the canning plant and what we do at the yard sale on Fridays, the Farmers Market was generating between \$1.1 and \$1.3 million for this area just last year."

"We try to balance what it does for the vendors and what it does as a tourist attraction."

Union County Farmers Market features vendors from Union County and the continuous counties, including Towns County, Fannin County, White County, Lumpkin County and Clay and Cherokee County, North Carolina.

"There's a reason why our vendors must make their

Cancer Support Group

The Union County Cancer Support Group will host a monthly community cancer support group on the first Wednesday of each month beginning at 12:30-1:30 p.m. The sessions, which will be held at Coosa United Methodist Church, will focus on support and the sharing of experiences of life after diagnosis. All cancer diagnoses are welcome, active and in remission. Caregivers are also encouraged to attend. Pre-registration is preferred but not necessary.

For more information or to register, please call Pat Cook at 706-781-1908 or xp-cook@windstream.net.

Union County Food Pantry

The Union County Food Pantry hours of operation have changed. We will now be open Monday-Friday 9-11 a.m. and 1 to 3:30 p.m.

We are always closed on federal holidays and for inclement weather.

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products in these areas," said Cummings. "You see these big grocery stores that advertise locally grown foods, but locally grown to them is anything from the Southeastern United States. To me, locally grown means locally grown, right here."

"That's where our crops come from. There are a few exceptions but those are for crops that we don't grow in Union County or any of the continuous counties."

Peaches, apples, pecans, muscadines, watermelons, pumpkins, cantaloupes and strawberries are the exceptions that are not native to the area. Watermelons can be grown locally, but do not come into season until August, so vendors are allowed to bring outside melons up until that point.

This Saturday is Ornamental Plant Day at the Union County Farmers Market with the Egg-stravaganza on Tuesday, June 20th and the American Cancer Society Dessert contest on June 24th.

The Union County Farmers Market is open rain or shine every Saturday from 7 a.m. - 1 p.m. and Tuesday from 2 p.m. - 6 p.m. through October and features locally grown produce and plants, food and baked goods, handmade crafts and entertainment.

The Union County Canning Plant will open in July and remain open through Oct. 12th on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 6 a.m. - noon. The canning plant is also open on Wednesdays in August and select days in November.

For more details on the Farmers Market you can visit: www.ucfarmersmarket.com or by phone at (706) 439-6043.



Paul and Shirley Cummings, parents of Market Manager Mickey Cummings, celebrated their 60th wedding anniversary over the weekend, married June 4, 1957, Iuka, Mississippi. Photo/Lowell Nicholson