

New location a boon for Capitola farmers market



Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel

Julia Bollinger, 2, is treated to a strawberry by her mom Kim during the pair's visit to the Capitola farmers market last week.

Vendors' visibility sweetens their profits

By **SORAYA GUTIERREZ**
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Farmers Market
CAPITOLA — A visit to the farmers market's new location on Esplanade Drive is not complete without stopping by Bill "the oyster man" Callahan's stand.

"I don't want to be egotistical and say I'm famous, but I'm infamous, at least," said Callahan, who has been selling oysters for 25 years.

He describes his stand as a "slow-motion riot" where neighbors can meet to say hello, eat some oysters and enjoy the music he plays from a stereo in the back of his van.

"This is what Capitola was like 25 years ago," he said.

The market has 12 vendors at its new location this year on Esplanade Drive next to Esplanade Park at Capitola Beach. Since its move from the Capitola Theater parking lot, vendors' dollars have doubled, said Nesh Dhillon, operations manager for Santa Cruz Community Farmers Markets.

Dhillon also runs the Live Oak and downtown Santa Cruz markets, but he says there's a certain "vibe and feel" to the smaller market in Capitola.

His focus is on making the market a com-

If You Go

WHAT: Capitola Village Market.

WHEN: 2:30-6:30 p.m. Thursdays, through September.

WHERE: Esplanade Drive, next to park at Capitola Beach.

INFORMATION: 454-0566 or www.santacruzfarmersmarket.org.

munity event and to see it grow slowly. He says he wants to attract more customers from Depot Hill, the village and the Jewel Box, east of the village.

"It's a gift to the community," Dhillon says of the market. "If locals don't support it, it won't stay."

Although the market is not causing traffic problems, Dhillon says he would like to see more people walking or riding to the village. For tourists who need to find parking, he says the Pacific Cove parking lot behind City Hall on Capitola Avenue is the best option, and only a three-minute walk to the market.

Dhillon believes that when people arrive at the market and taste Callahan's oysters

or Geoff Palla's sweet Padron peppers from Padron, Spain, they'll see it's worth the walk.

Palla sells his Padron peppers for \$3 a basket and tells customers it's best to pan-fry them with olive oil and sea salt.

"Local markets like this one are the perfect outlet for my stuff," Palla said. "It's a form in which the grower can meet the public. It's a great community asset."

Callahan, who is also a science teacher at Watsonville High, sells his oysters for \$1 each and says every vendor at the market has something good to offer, from seafood to bread.

"They all rock, I just rock a little harder," he said.

The small-scale organic farmers rely on these markets to keep their business running, and by buying directly from them, Dhillon says, people are helping preserve open space and farming without the use of chemicals.

"That's why I'm so stoked to have this job," he said. "There's no other place you're going to get fresher foods unless you have a farm or garden yourself."

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