

Downtown farmers market to expand

Santa Cruz exchange will mark 20th anniversary with Earth Day celebration

Farmers Market

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brate the 20th anniversary by expanding the market.

"When the market first started, it was in response to this vacuum that occurred in the downtown corridor," said Nesh Dhillon, market operations manager. "The farmers market came to symbolize the community coming together. It gave people a reason to come downtown after people were so shell-shocked."

Locally grown produce, flowers, baked goods and cheeses gradually drew people out of

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The downtown Santa Cruz Farmers Market will expand on Wednesday.

SHMUEL THALER/
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SANTA CRUZ — It's been 20 years since Route One Farms owner Jeff Larkey banded together with other farmers to grow the downtown farmers market from the rubble of the 1989 earthquake.

"I remember our first site on the corner of Cathcart and Pacific where the old Ford's Department store was," Larkey said. "There was still linoleum on the ground."

On Wednesday, the local growers will reunite to cele-

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their homes, and toward downtown. As the demand for quality, local and organic foods grew over the years, expanding the market became a clear necessity.

The market behind Toadal Fitness on the corner of Lincoln and Cedar streets will now stretch to Cathcart Street, making room for an additional 20 vendor spots. The new market will regularly feature live music, valet bike parking, arts and crafts, cooking demonstrations, a hot prepared food area, information space for non-profit organizations and expanded restroom facilities.

"It's been a long time coming," City Councilwoman Lynn Robinson said. "What this means is that there will be more of an opportunity for people to meet more farmers, vendors and to discover local artisan foods and have it

all in one spot. What these farmers have done over 20 years is maintain a sustainable and vibrant business that people love to come to and shop at. That's something to be really proud of."

On Wednesday, the eve of Earth Day, a celebration will include a performance from local bluegrass band Harmony Grits, speeches and a proclamation from the City Council and cooking demonstrations by local chef Jozseph Schultz. More than 20 local organizations representing agricultural, marine, food policy, community outreach and education and environmental issues will share information about the importance of sustainable farming.

A photo history of the past 20 years will also be displayed on the back wall of Toadal Fitness.

"The farmers market had a key role in establishing downtown as a symbol of not giving up," Mayor Mike Rotkin said. "It is great to be able to expand to meet the huge demand.

There will definitely be room for more vendors."

To help with concerns about parking, a Veggie Valet is planned to make its debut in the near future, where market customers can leave their groceries with designated staff members while they pick up their cars. The free curbside pickup system will allow drivers to grab their groceries and go, rather than lug them to nearby parking garages.

"We need to have a center where people can go and hang out downtown and feel like a part of the community," said Joe Shermer of Dirty Girls Produce. "I think this expansion will allow us at the market to fulfill the educational side of our mission by setting up educational talks with people from local restaurants, have cooking demonstrations and show people how to successfully shop at the farmers market."

For information about the new market layout visit www.santacruzfarmersmarket.org.