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HOT

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## First Farmers Market of the season attracts fans

By HILLARY GAVAN Senior staff writer  
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Longtime customer Larry White buys some asparagus from vendor Kathy Baumann on Saturday, the first Beloit Farmers Market. White became friends with Kathy and her husband Hank Baumann who have been at the market for more than two decades. Photo by Hillary Gavan/Beloit Daily News

BELOIT — “Farmers know all the good jokes.”



That's what Beloit Farmers Market vendor Hank Baumann said as he and longtime friend and customer Larry White reconnected at the first market of the season on Saturday. The two were swapping stories about growing asparagus and strawberries and reuniting after a long year apart. Over the years Hank and Kathy Baumann have become friends with many of their shoppers. After a challenging pandemic year, their shoppers were more excited than ever to see them.

"We laugh, we talk and we visit," said Hank Baumann.

"We give a little bit of extra time to each customer," his wife Kathy Baumann said.

The Baumanns, who have been coming to the market for more than two decades, had sold out of asparagus in only a couple of hours. Their asparagus roots, which originate from Canada, are especially hardy in chilly weather and offer a strong and plentiful crop in the spring.

White said the Baumanns' booth is always one of his first stops at the market. White, who grew up on a farm, said he can spot fresh produce and it's usually found with the Baumanns.

"They are fantastic. I haven't had a bad apple yet," White said.

In the coming weeks, the Baumanns said they will be adding green onions and rhubarb to their offerings. If it stays warm, they might have strawberries by the end of the month. However, it always depends on the weather's mood.

"Farmers are gamblers," Hank Baumann added.

Despite a bit of wind and a few sprinkles, Downtown Beloit Association Executive Director Shauna El-Amin said the first market was going strong on Saturday.

“Everyone is very happy to be back. Our vendors are excited to get back outside,” El-Amin said.

There is room for a total of 71 vendors this year, which is a big increase from the 27 allowed at the beginning of the season last year, which crept up to 47 by the end of the year due to COVID-19 restrictions.

With 6 feet between each vendor and a few raindrops, El-Amin considered it a good crowd on Saturday. There was one food vendor, CoCo’s Tamales, with up to four expected food vendors planned for each week a little later in the season. The outdoor market also will have live music coming soon. The market will continue through the end of October before moving indoors for the cooler months.

El-Amin said the market was not only a boon for vendors, but a good boost for downtown businesses. She said Lucy’s #7 Burger Bar, Truk’t and Hatley’s Pub opened early to accommodate the extra foot traffic downtown.

It was a big day for many vendors. especially first-time vendors such as Joshua Regnier of Glas All Naturals cheese spreads and sauces and his son Samuel Regnier.

Lenny Korsh, who had already purchased a blueberry turnover, was seeking some spread which Regnier described as “a block of cheese turned spreadable.” There also were smaller pots for more pretzel-friendly cheese. Regnier also was selling apple cider which was not pasteurized but sterilized.

“It tastes like an apple from the tree, like biting into a Honeycrisp,” Regnier said.

Korsh said he only attended the market one time last year due to COVID-19, which he called a sad year, but was hoping to come more often this season.



Regnier said it was a great opportunity to be a vendor in the open-air market after attending the winter market indoors.

“This is my spot now,” he said of his new placement. “There’s tons of people here already.”

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Hillary Gavan