



Bill David, longtime market vendor sells produce and jelly



Laura Roe displays her homemade jewelry



Charles R. Hegwood Community Market: It's more than fresh produce

Each Tuesday and Thursday throughout the year, you'll find a number of vendors set up at the corner of Howard Avenue and Hopkins Boulevard, selling a variety of items from produce to plants to baked goods and homemade arts and crafts. For many, it's a way to make a living. For others, it's a hobby and a way to meet people and be part of a community. That community is known as the Charles R. Hegwood Community Market.

"What it means to me to be part of this market is everything and then some," said Tina Cowart, manager of the Community Market. "I have met people from all over the world. I have prayed with people and shared so much laughter. Oh my word, if I could bottle all the laughter up and sell it, I would be rich."

If you frequent the market and talk with the vendors, Tina's words sum up what time spent under the I-110 overpass in downtown often feels like.

Take a stroll down the aisles, talk with the vendors, and pick up some produce, often at its freshest, being sold at the peak of the growing season. The vendors take pride in what they are selling, and many are grown locally or made at their homes, some even on-site, instead of miles away or from another country.

Shopping with local vendors also helps to



support local farmers and small business owners and keeps the money in our neighborhoods.

"The benefit of markets, as I see it, is that it is a hands-on approach," Cowart said. "It's one on one. Being able to take your time and visit with people. There is just something about being outside with the sun shining and the wind's gentle push while shopping with the vendors. It is so much greatness wrapped up in one big package."

As for the visitors, you have the regulars that bring a shopping list and pick up essential vegetables for their weekly meals, while others shop for fresh, locally-grown, and handmade items, often free from chemicals and pesticides. And most all benefit from the affordability. Several studies have shown that produce grown and sold locally is cheaper than those sold at stores.

The market in Biloxi is nothing new. It has been around for decades. The concept arose in the 1940s when a group of farmers

gathered together and organized the Biloxi Farmers Market. According to the Daily Herald, the organization consisted of members who held meetings and discussed plans to establish a community curb market.

In 1976, Mayor Jerry O'Keefe announced that the city would work with the Department of Agriculture and Commerce to initiate a farmers' market. It opened a short time later at the Biloxi International Plaza, now known as Point Cadet Plaza, which is located off Cadet Street in East Biloxi.

The Sun Herald reported on May 13, 1977, that there was a tremendous interest in the Biloxi Farmer's Market and that the site was "a place where producers can bring a small crop in for direct selling to the consumer."

The interest allowed the city the opportunity for a market manager. In 1978, Charles R. Hegwood was hired in the Biloxi Parks & Recreation Department after retiring from Notre Dame as a high school teacher and coach with more than 35 years of experience. Hegwood was tasked with developing and overseeing the Biloxi Farmer's Market.

It was something he took with pride. Hegwood valued the vendors and the market. He would visit various local markets and gather advice from



other market managers as to what he could do to improve and help make the "farmers" successful.

"He taught me that the vendors, meaning farmers, beekeepers, and homemade products, are a blessing to everyone and are made with love and care," Cowart said. "He said that is what makes this country great."

In December 1995, the city renamed the market in honor of Charles R. Hegwood.

The resolution states: "Coach Hegwood put his heart and soul into developing the farmer's market program, bringing it from a small gathering of fruit and vegetable vendors to the greatly expanded market," and "the City of Biloxi desires to establish a fitting tribute to an educator and public servant who has done so much for his city and thousands of its citizens."

The market continued to be set up at the Point Cadet Plaza for years. There was even a time when vendors sold more than plants, produce, and homemade goods.

"I remember going to the market at Point Cadet with my great-grandmother as a kid," Mandy Lawrence Hornsby said, "and seeing all the livestock they used to sell."

Added Cowart: "We used to have vendors that sold chickens under the large oak tree near the parking lot."

All that stopped on Aug. 29, 2005, when

Hurricane Katrina heavily damaged the area. Soon after, the market reopened under the I-110 at the corner of Howard and Hopkin and has remained there ever since.

"I started managing the market when it reopened off Howard Avenue," Cowart said. "It took a little while for people to find us and draw the crowds again. The vendors now look forward to the visitors and the added festivals each year."

Currently, the Parks & Recreation Department presents four festivals a year at the market. They include live music, informational and demonstration booths, food trucks, hourly giveaways, themed activities, and of course, the market vendors.

The market is open Tuesdays and Thursdays from 6 a.m. to 2 p.m., weather permitting. As for future festivals, they are set to take place July 6, Sept. 7, and Oct. 12 from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m.

► Keep up with market vendors and events on Facebook and online at biloxi.ms.us/pr.

