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Farmers markets offer fresh start to summer

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The Aurora Sentinel

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AURORA | According to the calendar, Monday marked the official start of summer.

But for some Aurora shoppers in need of fresh and locally-grown produce, the season didn't officially start until Tuesday morning when the Aurora Farmer's Market opened near East Florida Avenue and South Havana Street.

Al Mazzotti, who runs Mazzotti Farms in Hudson and organizes farmer's markets around the metro area, said the first day at the Aurora market was off to a fine start.

"It's the first day and it's great, just great," he said as shoppers perused the dozen or so booths stocked with fresh produce and other items.

The market near Havana and Florida is one of a handful of farmer's markets around the area. At Southlands Mall near Smoky Hill Road and E-470, the farmer's market started May 15 and is open from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. every Saturday until this fall. Nick's Garden Center at 2001 S. Chambers Road also has a fresh produce market open daily as well.

At the market on Havana, Tuesday marked an important day because it marked not only the first day of the 2010 farmer's market season, but also the market's first day at its new location.

For the past few years, the market was open every Tuesday in the parking lot of the old Fan Fare building near Havana and East First Avenue. Before that, the market was in the parking lot of the old Buckingham Square Mall before that shopping center was razed in 2007.

The old Fan Fare building wasn't the best venue for a farmer's market, Mazzotti said.

"We just couldn't draw the customers," he said. "We were dying up there."

Mazzotti, who runs a different area farmer's market each day of the week, said he was looking for a new location in Aurora since Buckingham was torn down.

This year, Mazzotti said he decided to jump at an offer to host the market in the parking lot between the old Aurora City Hall and the Wells Fargo bank tower at the southeast corner of Florida and Havana.

"Everyone is impressed with the first day," he said. "We were afraid sitting back off the main road what would happen, but I think our advertising hit people."

Many of the vendors at the new location are the same from last year, including John Herian, owner of Rocky Mountain Rice Company.

Herian, who has been selling rice, olive oil and balsamic vinaigrette at farmer's markets around the area for more than a decade, said he was a little worried about how far the market is from the traffic along Havana.

"But people seem to be finding it OK," he said. "It's been a pleasant surprise."

Juanita Ramirez of J and J's Gourmet Salsa said she, too, was glad to be in the new spot.

"That location was just awful, people had a hard time getting into the place," she said of the market at Fan Fare.

Even with the new spot, Ramirez said the repeat customers from past years didn't seem to have trouble finding the market.

"It's been really good, all the regulars found us," she said as customers looked over her salsas and tamales. "I think today I did better than I did all summer over there."

One of those regulars who found the new market was Barbara Kittleson.



Alicia Cartwright picks out some fresh herbs June 22 at the Aurora Farmer's Market. (Gabriel Christus/ The Aurora Sentinel)



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Kittleson said she often went to a farmer's market in Denver instead of the Fan Fare location because she didn't like that spot much.

Tuesday afternoon, Kittleson said she was glad to have the Aurora market in a new location.

"I'm a little prejudiced, I live in Village East," she said.

Others at the market Tuesday were first timers.

Alicia Cartwright, 22, and her boyfriend, Jarod Salo, looked over the flowers at Mazzotti's booth with their dog, Hunter, a border collie and Labrador mix.

Cartwright said she had never been to the Aurora market before, but shopped regularly at other markets during the summer.

"I try to go whenever I have a day off," she said. "I like buying locally, and it's more fun than going to the grocery store."

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