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Local markets

By Brenda Himelfarb
Vail CO, Colorado
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On any given weekend, June through September, a steady stream of customers follow their noses – canvas bag in tow – to the delectable fragrances of fresh produce and blooming flowers to be found at farmers’ markets in the Vail Valley.

Shoppers spend time strolling through the markets, flanked by vendors selling a variety of goodies, from cheese and crepes to jewelry and clothing, depending upon the market, the day and even the town.

And that’s what makes the experience so much fun. Different market, different diversion — always an adventure.

For instance, the six-year-old Vail Farmers’ Market is not just about fresh produce; it’s a synthesis of everything that feeds the soul. Music, art and, of course, a variety of savory edibles from beginning to end that puts one’s will power to the test.

“It’s really a festival,” said Rick Scalpello about the Vail Farmers’ Market. He’s responsible for it and the Edwards markets. “You’d have to look pretty far to find a farmers’ market that has the entertainment the caliber that we have in Vail.”

Stretching for almost a quarter-mile from Vail Road through Meadow Drive to Slifer Square, the market has 115 tents that feature such things as freshly picked and made products, fish, cheese and bread as well as artists and musicians. There are children’s activities like face painting and a railroad train ride and Jazz@the Market, spotlighting many local musicians.

“The market has been a pleasant surprise,” Scalpello said. “When I got here seven years ago, the business complexes

Produce for farmers’ markets is usually picked the day before or the morning of the market.
Photography by Preston Utley



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and landlords along Meadow Drive wanted to bring more foot traffic to the area. I'm happy to say that the market has brought business to the entire village."

These days, the Vail Farmers' Market and Art Show is a weekend highlight — a regular schmooze fest. More than 100,000 people attended the market last year, nibbling their way along the street, stopping to visit with friends, pet a friendly dog, listen to some music or find a spot to people watch.

The Edwards Farmers' Market, on the other hand, is a low-key, more traditional market. Aimed primarily at locals and second homeowners, there are no kids' activities or live entertainment but, rather, an array of fresh everthings from produce to pies.

Voted "the best place to stock your picnic basket" by the Vail Daily readers, the Edwards Market is four years old.

Unlike the Vail Market, which is frequented by tourists and conducive to hours of wandering, most people are in and out of the Edwards Market within 30 minutes.

"Instead of buying, say, a bag of peaches," explained Scalpello, "most people will buy three or four bags of produce, then meat and fish, take it back to their cars, which are parked nearby, and then come back and buy some more. They're shopping for the week, not just for a few days."

The Minturn Market, in turn, is a sort of community gathering.

"This offers kind of a sense of Old World intimacy," said Ashley King, Economic Development Director for the Town of Minturn. "It's very eclectic and, of course, there's the town itself.

"So you have the market vendors, you have artists, you have food and then you have a kind of charm of the back alleys of Minturn and its tight quarters that makes it special and unique. The whole set-up of the market is very meshed and mended with the businesses in town."

The market has roughly 100 tents that include everything one might expect from a farmers' market: delicate salad greens, melt-in-your-mouth breads and pastries as well as artisan cheeses and fancy condiments — and handmade clothing and jewelry, glassware, linens and live music.

"This market is a good example of how community builds," observed King. "You bring art and a stimulus to a community, create an event and people come and meet each other and feel a little more attached to their home."

In the end, that exactly is what each market brings for a few hours each weekend: a spirit of community that brings neighbors together.

And the great food experience is really the icing on the (organic, whole grain, homemade) cake.

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