

To Market, To Market

It isn't just counter-culture - it's cultural community.

It would be a huge mistake to discount Eugene's Saturday Market and Farmers' Market as simply a counter-cultural phenomenon.

If you were at market two weekends ago, you would have counted four pointy-toed pairs of mainstream Western boots — a pair of snakeskin among them; seven very stylish leather jackets, at least a dozen carefully coiffed and frosted hairdos; and more than 50 fleece jacket, vests and/or Gore-Tex raincoats. You would have counted two cowboy hats, five mullets and three sweatshirts with flower or cuddly animal appliques. You would have lost count of UO students and card-carrying, upper-middle class members of the local Go Ducks! culture.



Saturday Market is a main event for many kinds of people in this town – community and culture all rolled into one.

You would have been struck not by patchouli and pot, but by the warm, nutty smell of baked sweets and the sharp, smoky aroma of ethnic cuisine in the food court. You would have been swaying and humming along with the clear, pretty harmonies of Sweet River on stage. You would have bobbed your head to the tunes of street musicians on every corner. You would have found ceramics, textiles, paintings, photographs, jewelry, handbags, hats and other artwork available *only* through these artisans who live right here in the Eugene area. You might have fallen in love with a delicate teal teapot, or a string of fabric origami cranes.

You might have met Holly Sobela, an unassuming undergraduate studying Spanish at the UO. She would tell you, "I bought radishes, basil and bee pollen Chapstick at the farmers' booths." She would smile a little shyly and indicate she had a visitor — a woman, also smiling shyly, from Boring, Ore. You would all laugh about the name Boring. Holly would say, "I always bring visitors here... It's definitely a slice of Eugene life."

You might have chatted with Dixie Davis, an RN who comes to market 20 miles from Cottage Grove for "the unique crafts by skillful artisans." Davis, in her white jeans and Hard Rock Café denim jacket would *not* strike you as either a hippie or a "freak," but she loves those aspects about the gathering. "The atmosphere here is fresh. You look that word up in the dictionary, and that's exactly what this is."

You would have loved meeting retirees Bea and Marty Nissel, who moved here from Virginia in 1986. They would tell you proudly that their son runs J. Michaels Books. Bea would tell you, "We come every Saturday. We enjoy the produce and the flowers." They would smile, describing bookcases one of the artisan vendors made special for them. Bea would describe the market, after some thought, as "friendly and helpful."

You might have run into Dan Anderson, a banker, and Joy Strand, a telecommunications specialist, in town from Portland for a wedding. Anderson would emphasize the importance of patronizing local growers and artisans. Strand would explain, "These markets support local producers, and it's a way of staying connected with the community." They would be off to buy onions and leeks, saying, "We have no idea what we'll do with them. That's the market — you pick and choose and make something fabulous with what you find."

It would surprise you to discover Eugene's Saturday Market is the oldest weekly open air crafts festival in the U.S., having started on a rainy Saturday in May 1970 with 29 vendors. Saturday Market General Manager Beth Little would tell you, "The market allows people to understand that keeping their money close to the community [by buying at market] helps build community." She would say with pride, "The vendors are not people who sit and wait for someone to give them something. They go to their shops, to their studios, to their kitchens and create things to sell in the tradition of the public market." Many vendors have discovered great success — Toby's Tofu, Burley Design Cooperative, Jody Coyote. Little would crunch some numbers and inform you that Saturday Market generates about \$35,000 a weekend, and pulls in \$1.5 million over the course of the market season.

Thousands of people visit the Eugene Saturday Market on average every week, and yes, some of them wear dreadlocks and piercings and tie-dye. Some of the them whoop and dance in the drum circle, and the market embraces them. But to write the whole thing off as simply a counter-cultural sideshow denies the truth: that Saturday Market is a main event for many kinds of people in this town — community and culture all rolled into one. **EW**

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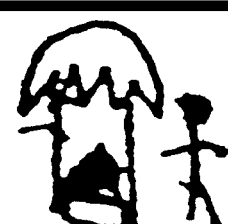
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