

COMMUNITY GROWN

Spencer Creek Growers Market brings together local farmers, chefs and artists BY AMANDA BEDORTHA

Some of us get overzealous in the spring, plopping handfuls of seed in the ground only to find ourselves with an overabundance of produce in the summer and fall.

A great option for backyard growers and hobby farmers, as well as crafters and other food producers, is selling at the Spencer Creek Grange's Growers Market. Spearheaded by Genie Harden, the market, now in its third season, features an array of seasonal veggies, locally grown berries, meat from pasture-raised animals, honey and farm-fresh eggs.

Located just off the Lorane Highway, Spencer Creek's inviting atmosphere — pleasant music, friendly vendors, room for the little ones to run around — is a wonderful place to spend an afternoon. And the sense of community spirit is palpable.

"We are comprised of farmers, artists, musicians and chefs ... all looking to have fun doing what we love," says vendor Heidi Branchesi of Chezem Creek Gardens. "As a vendor who sells vegetable plant starts, houseplants, perennials, and seasonal produce, I have met many of my neighbors and have strengthened my communication with them."

Three years ago Harden approached Branchesi about becoming a vendor at the market. "As a landscaper and part-time farmer with a farm stand at the end of my driveway, I jumped at the opportunity to be a part of the neighborhood market," Branchesi says. "Many other neighbors showed interest and here we are in year three of a successful neighborhood market!"

Harden started the market with a mission to provide a venue for neighbors to sell their locally produced agricultural items. The market emphasizes sustainable and healthy growing practices while encouraging and supporting local food production efforts through the fellowship of community.

Recently, Harden moved out of her managerial role at the market and into the Grange's kitchen. For a hearty and healthy lunch, stop by Café Le Grange, located on the lower level of the grange hall. Harden and Margot Hale, the "mastermind behind the falafels," spent one year experimenting and developing recipes that used as many local products as possible. The result is a small but tasty lunch menu offered on Saturdays that includes falafel wraps, dolmas, muffins, soup and a market salad featuring house-made dressing.

The fantastic falafels and dolmas (concocted by Hale) are a popular item at the café. "We are really sticklers for detail," Harden says. "I developed the flatbreads, which are made from wheat grown locally at Hunton's Farm and milled at Camas Country Mill. I cultivated the natural yeast growing on the wheat to make a locally grown sourdough, so it is in fact a leavened flat bread."

Harden and her family joined Spencer Creek Grange six years ago, looking for a place to socialize with other families. "It has been a great place for me to grow as a human being, and I think I have learned to be more open and respectful than I used to be," Harden says.

"Through this neighborhood market, I have become a member of the Spencer Creek Grange and become more involved with the community," Branchesi says. "I love it and look forward to future years of growing food for our customers." ■

Homestead, Meso Mutso, Chezem Creek Gardens, Camas Country Mill, Laughing Salad Farm, Waterbury Farms, Let It Grow Farm and many others can be found every Saturday from 10 am to 2 pm at 86013 Lorane Highway. For more information visit spencercreekgrange.org



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