

# Farmers Market finds a new home

Steve Tool

Wallowa County Chieftain

After the Thursday, April 4, Joseph City Council meeting, the Wallowa County Farmers Market found itself adrift, cut from its moorings at Joseph Avenue after nearly a decade at the spot.

Market manager Emily Aumann and president Nathan Slinker didn't have time to pout. With only six weeks or so until market opening, they had to find a new location and get the word out. The sudden decision by the city council came long after the market had paid for print advertising in a variety of publications that gave the Joseph Avenue location as its address.

The city did not offer to compensate the market for the troubles. Not only that, the city also threatened to take transient fees from the market, something it declined to do in the past. The council voted in 2017 to permanently wave all transient fees for the market. During a recent trip to city hall to get a copy of the ordinance regulating transient/vendor fees, Aumann discovered she would have to pay for them. When she asked for electronic copies, the clerk told her the price would increase over the paper copies.

Knowing the market had to move, Slinker and Aumann went to work, eventually striking a deal with Stein's Distillery to use its private parking lot as the new market site. Slinker explained that over the course of last summer several of the vendors had approached him about using the Stein's site. After the April meeting, the market board began to discuss options, which included Stein's. The board decided to contact him.

"He was great," Slinker said of distillery owner Dan Stein. "He was really supportive and said he'd love



Nathan Slinker



Emily Aumann

## IF YOU GO

WHERE: Stein's Distillery parking lot; local parking available

WHEN: Opens May 2

to have us down there and offered the use of utilities. I felt like, when I talked to him, that he would go the extra mile to provide things the market would need, which we appreciate."

Aumann said that with the abrupt move, a number of details needed attention. For example, the market is looking for a place to store its trailer that holds market materials.

"That's not something we did in the past, because we had a working relationship with the Baptist Church," Aumann said. She also noted she would have to reorganize a new booth layout for the vendors at the new site. "It's just a new space with new configurations and new dimensions and trying to organize a good flow of customers and highlight the produce vendors, find an electric source for the musicians, where vendors can park their vehicles if they need to park close to their booth and where to park so they're not in the customer's way — those are the main things."

Regardless of the claims of the city, the market received virtually no notice on the relocation. When the Chieftain got its council agenda about two days before the meeting, it called the market to get a comment on relocation and took the market by surprise.

"It wasn't what we were expecting," Slinker said. According to Aumann, board member Kelsey Juve had put in a request to the city to appear on the agenda for the yearly street closure request. Juve heard nothing for some

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Market president Nathan Slinker

time and called to see if the market was on the agenda and was told yes without elaborating that the market was on the agenda for an entirely different reason than the initial request.

After the meeting bombshell, the market found itself



Photos by Steve Tool/Chieftain

Dan Stein of Stein's Distillery offered the Wallowa County Farmers Market a new home in his parking lot after the Joseph City Council ousted the market from its previous location on Joseph Avenue.

the unexpected recipient of a broad swath of community support and offers of new locations.

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Because of the short notice on the move, the market is successfully scrambling to get its ducks in a row before its May 25 opening

weekend. Aumann noted that a lot of prioritizing started happening because of the market's limited time and resources.

"All the stuff we'd have normally done in three months, basically, we're doing in three weeks," Slinker said. "But we'll get it all done. We have a lot of vendors applying and a lot of vendors that are excited to be in a new spot. We're looking forward to starting and moving in a new direction."

Dan Stein, co-owner of Stein's said he happily offered the market a spot in his parking lot. Stein said that a couple of vendors had approached him last

year about using his parking lot, and he readily agreed. He added that Slinker had recently called to confirm the offer. After measuring the lot, it was agreed that it would fit about 15 vendors with some local parking available.

"They're easy to work with, and I've known a lot of them for years," he said. "They'll be another draw to businesses down here; even if it's only a few days, it'll make a difference."

Despite the rocky road to its new Stein's Distillery location, Aumann and Slinker are still trying to forge a working relationship with the city.

"We'd like to have a productive relationship with the city," Slinker said. "We're still going to be in the city, and we'd like to have the support of the city and the council."

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