

Holland Marsh Farmers' Market has a home

The Holland Marsh Greenbelt Association, a "home-grown" group of marsh farmers, landowners and concerned residents, has finally found a location for its proposed Holland Marsh Farmers' Market.

Unable to find a suitable indoor, year-round site, the Association is proposing a smaller start: a seasonal market, held on Fridays from 10 a.m. to about 6 p.m. in the Barrie St. parking lot between Condy Books and 11 & 88 Convenience.

Association member Iggy Natoli came to BWG Council on Tuesday night, to present the proposal, and ask for the support of the Town, in terms of approval of the concept, and possibly financial assistance, as the market grows.

"We're trying to promote the Holland Marsh," Natoli said, noting that the group had been working with Manager of Economic Development, Michael Disano to find a location. "It's almost a sin to have the #1 growing region in Ontario, and not have a farmers' market."

Natoli, who has 8 years of experience in organizing

markets, said that he has found farmers' markets not only promote local produce, but have a spill-over effect on other businesses in the area.

"It brings new customers to them." A government study has shown that "every dollar spent in a farmers' market means \$2 to \$3 directly to the community," and, he noted, the Association's proposal has the "unanimous support of the all of the businesses directly backing on that parking lot."

Now, he told Council, "We're asking for your blessing."

Natoli was asked why the Association had decided on Friday rather than Saturday. "Everyone wants to start a farmers' market. The problem is, there's not enough farmers to go around," he said, noting that most growers interested in participating are already booked on Saturdays. "We just can't get vendors, and it's very hard to get them to go to an unestablished market."

The Friday opening will also allow the market to target cottagers heading

north up Yonge St. "For all my experience, Fridays are the best days," Natoli said.

He was firm that it would not be a flea market. "Flea is a four-letter word in the Farmers' Market world," Natoli told Council. Instead, the Association hopes to attract vendors selling fresh produce, baked goods, preserves, jams, honey, smoked meats and cheeses, and hand-made quality crafts.

Among the vendors already on board are Holland Marsh farmers John Gorzo, who specializes in sprouts and wheatgrass, and Shane Singh. Other vendors will include Haven Farms organic produce, jams and preserves, Demarea Smoked Meats, Pioneer Honey products and beeswax, Kim Boland's hand-made soaps and lotions, and Iggy Natoli's own Buncha Farmers.

While not all vendors will be local, "they must have Holland marsh produce," or unique and original crafts, Natoli promised.

The target date for the opening of the Holland Marsh Farmers' Market will be mid July - "to catch the sweet corn season."

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