

Downtown Norfolk's farmers market helps residents 'keep it local'

By **Jordan Grice** -
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(Left to right) Karen Husselbee, Marketing Director at the MacArthur Center, and Mike Cullipher, Owner of Cullipher Farm. (Jordan Grice/ Southside Daily)



(Left to right) Eli Lomogda and his dad John play while his mom picks up some fruits.(Jordan Grice/ Southside Daily)



Business was booming as residents stocked up on fresh goods. (Jordan Grice/ Southside Daily)



The majority of the fruits and vegetables at the downtown norfolk farmers market was grown in Virginia Beach at Cullipher Farm. (Jordan Grice/ Southside Daily)



Resident Kathleen Banfield and her dog Kasey made a new friend as the community came together Sunday morning for fresh produce, yard games, and live music. (Jordan Grice/ Southside Daily)



(left to right) Lucy Erwin and Riley Pinzon playing yard games with Erick Pinzon while his wife shops at the new farmers market in downtown Norfolk. (Jordan Grice/ Southside Daily)



Bill Armstrong, President of the Tidewater Bluegrass Music Association. (Jordan Grice/ Southside Daily)

NORFOLK — As Ken Good walked his dog by the MacArthur Center Sunday morning, he couldn't help doubling back after smelling fresh peaches.

Workers were setting up tents and unloading crates of apples, corn and more as they prepared to open the first farmers market in downtown Norfolk.

For Good, the discovery proved to be a pleasant addition to his Sunday plans. "We recently moved into the area," he said. "We've been here for a couple of months, and it has been a bit of a food desert, so this is fantastic to be able to come down and get some fresh produce right here."

Like Good, dozens of residents flocked to the courtyard behind the mall, on the corner of Freemason Street and Monticello Avenue, where green tents from Cullipher's Farm housed crates of green beans, tomatoes, blueberries, melons and more.

The majority of the produce on display was grown by Mike Cullipher, whose farm is in the Pungo and Back Bay area. One exception was tree fruits, such as apples and peaches, which came from West Virginia and Pennsylvania.

"Everything we have a connection to," Cullipher said. "It's all regional and they're friends of ours who have family farms just like us."

The downtown market's debut came relatively quickly. Karen Husselbee, marketing director at the Mall, approached Cullipher in July.

According to Husselbee, the mall's Live 360 program hosts interactive programs within the community, and it teamed up with Cullipher to launch a new shopping and social experience for people in the area.

"It really is about building community partnerships," she said. "There wasn't a farmers market downtown, and the residential population of downtown is growing so much."

The market opened at 9 a.m., with a steady flow of customers who came from all over the city and Hampton Roads, Husselbee said.

Advertising for the market began around Friday, and word spread among residents through social media, according to Cullipher.

That's how John Lomogda and his family heard about the market. Lomogda, who is used to traveling out of the downtown area to purchase organic items, said he and his wife were excited to hear about a new market opening up within walking distance.

"We've been to Cullipher Farms before for blueberry picking and strawberry picking, and I knew their produce has always been really good, so when we saw that it was coming here we definitely wanted to come out and support it," he said. "We love to try to keep it local as much as we can."

While his wife made her way through the tented area, Lomogda played yard games like corn hole, checkers and connect four with his son Eli. Live bluegrass played in the background and people shopped and relaxed in the sun.

Bill Armstrong, president of the Tidewater Bluegrass Music Association, sat picking his banjo and singing his tunes.

"I'm so very happy that the MacArthur Center was kind enough to allow us to come out and jam today," he said. "I plan on making this my Sunday morning event."

The downtown market is slated to set up shop every Sunday through November.

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