

# Meriden farmers market closes season with biggest draw of year

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MERIDEN -- With a little help from a new partner, the Help Me Grow campaign affiliated with the city's Community Health Center, the Meriden Farmers Market closed its season Saturday with its biggest draw of the year.

A Halloween-themed finale, infused with additional activities funded by Help Me Grow, a program of the Connecticut Office of Early Childhood, attracted a morning crowd of several hundred to the downtown Farmers Market location at the corner of State and Cedar streets.

If the adjacent apartment residents didn't know about the festive event, they heard about it when DJ music resounded in the vicinity of the Mill Street housing complex, trumpeting the early morning market.

Entertainment, food, pumpkin painting, Halloween face painting, and volunteer costumed characters from the Wallingford Trail of Terror greeted those shopping for fall harvest items from two farms — apples, pumpkins, squash, sweet potatoes and peppers.

"I think this was nice before the end and the cold," Tyeasha Montgomery said as she waited for her two daughters, Eryka Coleman and Nevaeh Clark, to finish painting pumpkins. "This was a lot of fun for the kids."

Montgomery, who said she frequents the local Farmers Market, said she learned about the family oriented Halloween event through a Facebook posting otherwise she might not have attended because of the chilly temperature Saturday, but she had her two-year old daughter bundled up, and she was smiling and enjoying the activities.

Jennifer Smith of Meriden's Community Health Center and campaign coordinator for Help Me Grow, was busy registering 42 families at the market site.

"It's awesome," Smith said about the turnout. "We try to piggyback on what's happening."

"I'm very pleased about the outcome," Smith said, "but it's more about raising awareness."

Help Me Grow is a statewide public awareness and outreach campaign designed to increase awareness of the need for universal development screening and connecting children at risk for developmental and behavioral problems.

Screening periodically monitors the development of children from birth to five years of age, a critical time in preparing them for success in school and life, according to the program's literature.

Smith said funding allowed the program to sponsor the final day of the Farmers Market season, to participate and help promote with additional advertising.

"The difference today, was we partnered with another group that brought additional activities," said Pam Fields, market master.

"They promoted it through Community Health Center," said Fields, who estimated the turnout at four time the usual 50 to 75 participants at the weekly market.

"We're trying to reach out to different families," said Smith, who noted Help Me Grow participated in the recent fly-in event at Meriden Markham Airport in South Meriden two weeks ago, but her registration efforts at the downtown location at far surpassed those at the fly-in event.