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## Get ready for farm fresh fruits and veggies in city

By Leigh Tauss

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**MERIDEN** — Former Mayor Mike Rohde remembers picking and eating palm-sized strawberries right from the vine while working at his first job on a farm in Rochester, N.Y., as a teenager. According to Rohde, to this day they are still the best strawberries he has ever tasted.

“I picked and ate so many strawberries I thought I would never eat one again,” Rohde said.

Fifty-four years later Rohde channels his passion for fresh food by helping run the Meriden Farmers Market, which will open July 12th in Cedar Park at 77 State St. and run through mid-October.

The market will be open

from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Saturdays, providing city residents with a supply of freshly picked fruits and vegetables.

This year the market will feature a wide variety of products including corn, tomatoes, peppers, apples, peaches, lettuce, squash and cabbage.

All of the food is fresh picked that day, according to co-founder Ed Peczynski. “Whatever produce is there was in the ground that morning,” said Peczynski.

The produce is provided by two local farms, Beckett Farms in South Glastonbury and Gotta’s Farm in Portland. Peczynski said the workers on those farms wake up before sunrise to harvest the food so that it can be delivered via truck to Meriden in

time for the market to open at 9 a.m..

For Peczynski, the most essential function of the market is not only to provide fresh and nutritious food to Meriden residents but also to help keep local farmers in business.

“You need people to buy the produce to keep the farmers in business and you need farmers in business so you can have fresh produce for people,” Peczynski said.

“It’s a cycle,” said Peczynski, “you have to get the cycle moving.”

Peter Burch, who maintains the market’s website and Facebook page, said he loves that the market provides people with healthier food.

“Anything we can do,” said Burch, “to improve the nutri-

tion of our folks in Meriden.”

The market will also feature freshly baked bread from the Sanremo Bakery in Berlin, as well as multiple other vendors selling homemade goods such as jams, pastries and jewelry.

Rohde said last year several musical acts were featured and guests this year can expect more performances.

For families with young children, Rohde said Cedar Park is, “a grassy area for kids just to run around and play in.”

Burch said, “both adults and kids have good time.”

The farmers market was founded four years ago by Rohde, Peczynski, Mark Kosnoff and Dennis Barry. Barry died in April of this year, a loss Rohde said was a big

blow to him and the other co-founders.

“He was really the spirit of the whole thing,” said Rohde, commenting on Barry’s “bright energetic light” and positivity which really “fueled the enthusiasm for the market.” Rohde said that Barry’s legacy will live on through the farmers market and that this summer there will be some kind of memorial to commemorate Barry’s involvement.

The local non-profit organization The Arc oversees the operations of the market. The Arc will be providing its own hydroponically grown produce, according to Rohde.

Aside from the business end of things, the farmers market is run entirely by volunteers, like Rohde and Pe-

czynski, who work for free.

According to Rohde, last year the market averaged about 200 visitors per day, with people lining up first thing in the morning to get the farm-fresh food.

For Burch and Peczynski, the tastiest feature of the market is the fresh corn.

“When the corn on the cob comes in the summer I’m the first one in line,” Peczynski said.

Rohde is back on strawberries, having overcome his temporary aversion, and although he said nothing can compare to the ones from his youth he looks forward to enjoying some freshly picked ones this summer.

For more information go to [www.meridenfarmersmarket.org](http://www.meridenfarmersmarket.org).