

# Wednesday Windfall

Farmers' Market draws downtown residents, workers in midweek

BY CHLOE WHITE

Every Wednesday at 11am, Jane Shelton's co-workers at the Knoxville Chamber downtown remind her to head over to the Market Square Farmers' Market for her "cookie fix."

A self-professed "oatmeal raisin cookie junkie," Shelton said she has found the perfect offering at VG's bakery stand.

"I buy six cookies every Wednesday and parcel them out over the week," Shelton said. "And my coworkers know I'll be very sad if I don't get my cookies."

Shelton joins several other downtown employees who venture over to Market Square during their lunch hour on Wednesdays between 11 am and 2pm to peruse a unique selection of organic and chemical-free goods.

The most popular day for the Market Square Farmers' Market is usually Saturday 10 am - 2pm, when downtown residents tend to do their grocery shopping, but "Wednesdays are getting more popular," said Charlotte Tolley, director of the Market Square Farmers' Market.

"We have more vendors than we

used to, and there's the promise of more," Tolley said. "There are more downtown employees who are coming here anyway for lunch, so they visit the Farmers' Market too."

Larger crowds mean better business for vendors, such as VG's Bakery owner Dave Gwin, whose regular customers flock to his stand every Wednesday and Saturday for his fresh breads and sinful confections.

"The pace has definitely picked up, which is great because we're just now officially opening," Gwin said. "Our first month of Wednesdays has been as good as our peak last year."

Sandy Evans' Temptation Station Bakery has been luring customers this summer with her signature fried pies, which she claims are "better than the ones maw-maw makes."

Patsy Ellis and her husband, John, said they returned to the Farmers' market this week just to get one of Evan's apricot pies.

"We moved here from El Paso, where we always go to the open market in Las Cruces to get apricot pies," Ellis said. "These are good pies."

Stevie Savage's homemade salsa, called "Stevie's Salsa," has been selling particularly well this season, Savage said. Her "super-hot" salsa is her most popular seller, followed by mild and pineapple salsa — all recipes she developed when she lived in St. George, Utah.

"At the time, I had several teenage



CLAY OWEN/NEWS SENTINEL

Wholesale grower Greg Blankenship of Gregory's Greenhouse Productions helps Vada West, owner of Earth to Old City, as Dianne Sowell looks at plants Wednesday at the Market Square Farmers' Market

boys who eat a lot," Savage said. "I started making my own salsa and I couldn't keep it in the house. People kept asking me for the recipe, so I decided to sell the salsa."

Nonfood items are just as popular as the food items. Soy Springs Candle Company offers fragrant candles made from essential oils and 100 percent soy wax that burn cleaner than paraffin and burn 30 to 50 percent longer, said company owners Kathi Seger and Heather Chrusciel.

Jewelry vendors said that their affordable, hand-made jewelry has been selling "remarkably well," said Elsie Fain, whose best seller is her spoon jewelry.

Wholesale grower Greg Blankenship

of Gregory's Greenhouse Productions said that his Wednesday business has increased "fourfold" this year. His bedding plants, perennials, mixed container plants and herbs — especially his sweet basil — have been "selling themselves."

Farmers' Market regular Jerry Baird, who sells certified organic produce from his Grainger County farm, said he attributes the Wednesday sales boom to more downtown residents and employees, and more convenient parking.

"Mainly people want to come here to buy organics because they want to know where their stuff's coming from," Baird said. "My stuff is fresher, cheaper — that's what people want."