



Fun and fund-raiser for grocery store Organizers seeking donors for Chatham Marketplace co-op

Originally published in:

Chapel Hill Herald

Saturday, February 14, 2004

Edition: Final

Page: 1

By Kara Eide chh@heraldsun.com; 918-1035

PITTSBORO -- Chocolate, music and festivities will continue even after Valentine's Day.

Organizers of Chatham Marketplace -- Pittsboro's future grocery co-op -- will hold a celebration and fund-raiser Sunday at the General Store Café.

The 5 p.m. event will host Michael's Music DJ Service of Durham and sales and samples of Raleigh's Ooh, La, La Chocolat. There also will be a special event menu at the café.

The providers are donating their services and products for the fund-raiser, said Melissa Frey, the initiator of the Chatham Marketplace concept.

"We've been quite frugal with our expenses," said Frey, who's also president of the co-op's board of directors. "These events are all low-budget."

The grocery store will be owned and operated by local residents, who show support and attain ownership through donations of \$100 per adult. The board's goal is to have 500 owners before opening in August. They currently have 208.

The co-op has successfully organized local growers and investors, but the store still doesn't have a definite location, Frey said. A possibility under negotiation is the Chatham Mills site, just north of downtown Pittsboro at 480 Hillsboro Street.

The location covers 80,000 square feet. But Frey said the co-op wants to lease only 4,000 to 6,000 square feet of the property, which is within walking distance of downtown but not in the heart of it.

Frey said she hopes the Valentine's event will generate more local interest, help raise donation money and attract more market owners.

"We'd like to certainly finish reaching our donation goal: \$2,500 in straight donations," said Frey.

The co-op already has received \$1,500 in gifts from two local businesses, and Frey said she expects the event's auction items will raise the additional \$1,000.

The items to be auctioned are a metal sculpture by local artist Eddie White and a two-night stay at Siler City's Laurel Ridge Bed & Breakfast.

"When you have a small business yourself, you realize how important it is to support other small businesses in your community," said David Simmons, innkeeper of the bed and breakfast.

He and his wife, Lisa Reynolds, opened Laurel Ridge in November 1993, and have "had fun ever since," Simmons said.

His family buys the bulk of its groceries at national chain stores in Siler City, Simmons said. But whenever he can, he drives to Carrboro to shop at Weaver Street Market, a co-op where they have an ownership share.

"That's just too far on a regular basis to go," said Simmons, who has to drive 35 to 40 minutes to get to Weaver Street. "Going to Pittsboro is a very easy 18 minutes from my house."

Simmons said he will shop at Chatham Marketplace at least a couple of times per week, and is excited to invest more in his home county.

"I certainly hope Chatham Marketplace will allow me to keep all my funds here in Chatham County, because they'll have the kind of stuff that I need," he said. "We're an integral part of Chatham County, and we hope the marketplace becomes an integral part of Chatham County."

That's the hope of Frey and the board of directors as well, as they schedule fundraising events for the next few months and try to settle on a site.

"Personally, it's hard for me to not have a location firmed up yet. That's a real priority," said Frey, who has been learning from Weaver Street Market and its manager, Ruffin Slater.

Chatham Marketplace won't be as big as the Carrboro Weaver Street Market. Instead, it'll be more similar in size to Weaver Street's branch in Southern Village, Frey said. The Chatham co-op also will have a café and small seating area.

With the owners representing a broad demographic, Chatham Marketplace gets its most fervent support from "folks that are very health conscious, that are aware of local life and community culture," Frey said. "They want to see our downtown stay vibrant."