



TRUMANSBURG, NEW YORK, EAT LOCAL EDITION

Books and So Much More: Something for Everyone

by Cadan Ziemba

In the corner of the Trumansburg Farmers' Market, by the bathrooms and behind the manager's office, is a large white tent known as the Library Space. The Ulysses Philomathic Library has provided a space for kids at the market for many years, in various forms. Initially, this meant bringing over a cart of books for story time. But when Meredith DeCotiis took over the program in 2022, she quickly discovered that kids arriving at the market on a warm, sunny day, fresh out of school, didn't have much patience for sitting still and being read to. So one day, she brought watercolor paints. Painting was a huge hit.

Someone donated logs to be painted, and crafting began to gain steam. Meredith started bringing glue, and eventually the now-iconic library tent appeared, making it clear where the library area was.

Books are still available, and some kids will want to read or be read to. But crafting remains the more popular option, with materials that now include scratched CDs and DVDs, pipe cleaners and whatever else might spark a child's imagination. To Meredith, it doesn't really matter what kids do under the library tent, as long as it remains a place of calm and sanctuary from the rest of the market. She describes it simply as a "place a kid can come sit."

Some families have been coming to the Library Space for four or five years. Meredith has also watched new kids courageously begin crafting, slowly exploring their creative side. Often, she says, children will spectate for a couple of weeks before finally joining in.

What makes these activities unique is that they are totally unstructured. Kids are allowed to let their imaginations guide them

Meredith's Perspective

"Library outreach takes the mission of the Ulysses Philomathic ('love of learning') Library outside of the building walls by offering free programming at the market, the schools, the laundromat and beyond.

The library itself was founded in 1811 and continues to foster and support the community by offering books, movies, study spaces, meeting rooms and free programming for all ages year-round.

It is an honor for me to work here and be a part of something so fundamental to the health of our community."



Meredith DeCotiis of Ulysses Philomathic Library runs the Library Space at the Market. (Photo: Provided)

rather than following a set of instructions. Meredith says, "the idea is that they can make whatever they want."

She describes creativity as a muscle, and she has seen what strengthening it can do. During tourism season, families from out of town bring their children to the market. When these kids join

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An End of Summer Sunny Day Enjoying the Market

by Cadan Ziemba, *The Accidental Reporter*



The Grasshopper's Chicken Bowl. (Photo: Provided)



The Yardvark's. (Photo: Provided)



Hannah at Seneca Shimmer. (Photo: Provided)

On this fine, sunny summer day in late August, I toured the Trumansburg Farmers' Market, handing out the third issue of *The Accidental Reporter*. Mark Thomas laughed when he saw his image in the paper, decked out in a button-up adorned with fish. As the band played, I stood in line at The Grasshopper. I ordered a Thai Iced Tea and a Chicken Bowl.

Sitting on the grass with food before me, I was a happy lad. The dish consisted of rice noodles, carrots, cucumbers and chicken, topped with fresh herbs and served with a side of soy sauce. I poured the sauce over the dish and dug in. The chicken was well-seasoned and tender. The carrots and cucumbers were fresh and moist. The noodles were perfectly cooked. The star of the dish, however, was the garnish of fresh herbs. Cilantro and green onions carried bombastic flavor and brought the experience to another level. The dish was also served on a reusable plate, to be washed and used again rather than disposed of after a single meal.

As I ate, I listened to music from The Yardvarks. They played covers of songs from the fifties, sixties and early seventies, all infused with their own sound. My personal favorite was their version of "Don't Be Cruel," written by Otis Blackwell and sung by Elvis Presley, featuring a delightful fiddle accompaniment. I also enjoyed watching people dance to "Brown Eyed Girl" and was particularly moved by "Wild Horses."

One aspect of the market that can easily be overlooked is the vendors who

provide something other than food. After all, the Trumansburg Farmers' Market features far more than farmers. One of the vendors providing a more unique service I was able to speak with was Hannah Kuhn of Seneca Shimmer.

Seneca Shimmer is a hair-styling company specializing in braiding salon-grade tinsel into hair. Hannah entered this business looking for a way to make money while maintaining control over her hours. She has two young kids, and her husband advised her to find a job where she could decline any shift she wanted.

Hannah started taking online classes through the Fairy Hair Florida School, where she learned how to weave tinsel into people's hair. She says she has been able to bring a lot of joy to people through this personalization and style. Once applied, the tinsel can remain in the hair for about six months. Hannah still has some in hers from about eight months ago.

She has been at the Trumansburg Farmers' Market since this winter and enjoys seeing how the community has come together. She particularly likes the produce offered by Mush Love Greens.

Another vendor offering something other than food is Know Your Roots, a joint venture between the couple Debbie and Mike Biltonen. Debbie focuses on herbal remedies and tinctures, while Mike focuses on thoughtful cultivation.

Debbie has many years of experience with the Trumansburg Farmers' Market. She has been a vendor for ten years and served on the board for seven of them,

though she no longer does. As a vendor, Debbie is passionate about educating the community on the medicinal properties of plants that are all around them.

Her interest began when she was seven years old and harvested Black Birch to make into tea. She now offers classes through Know Your Roots to share this knowledge with the community. There is even an upcoming class on Sunday, September 17, which will teach participants how to make Fire Cider, a tonic that can help ward off symptoms of the flu and cold. Participants in the class will get to take home a pint of their very own Fire Cider.

The salves sold at Know Your Roots are made with honey from Waid's Honey, another vendor at the Trumansburg Farmers' Market. It is another small connection between vendors that makes the market feel less like a collection of individual businesses and more like a community.

As my interviews wrapped up, I was fortunate to encounter familiar faces, new and old. I started talking with John Wertis, a family friend. His father, John Wertis, was one of the earliest vendors at the Trumansburg Farmers' Market, back in the early two thousands.

I hadn't spoken with John since the winter, and he eagerly told me about his collection of New York-made vintage stainless-steel cookware. I told him about my plans for college. As that conversation began to wrap up, I was able to speak with Bob, volunteering under the Friends of the Trumansburg Farmers' Market orange tent.



Debbie Biltonen of Know Your Roots. (Photo: Provided)

We had met at T-Fit only a few months ago. He inquired about what people my age were doing, and I eagerly accepted his recommended readings.

It is interactions like this that make the Trumansburg Farmers' Market special. It is a place where I can see someone I've known for 20 years, someone else I've known for less than one year, and meet new people I'll get to see again next week.

The fact that the Trumansburg Farmers' Market exists truly helps strengthen the bonds between people in our community. It is more than a place to buy food. It is a place to eat, listen, learn, discover, talk and simply be around other people.

And sometimes, if you are lucky, it is a place to sit on the grass with a good meal in front of you and be a happy lad.

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in on crafting, they are often apprehensive and unsteady with the materials, uncertain what to do. Children who come more regularly move through the tent with certainty, determined to bring whatever is in their heads out into reality.

The Library Space at the market is not facilitated by Meredith alone. The Ulysses Philomathic Library is aided by youth workers from both the Town of Ulysses Youth Employment Program and Tompkins County Workforce Development. These programs help young teens, often early high schoolers, find their first jobs. They give teens an opportunity to get their foot into the workforce while also contributing to their community.

The extra sets of hands help make the Library Space so freeform at the market. When the teen workers leave, the activities

often need to become more structured to prevent chaos from seeping in on busier days.

Meredith sees the library's presence at the Trumansburg Farmers' Market as a boon to the market. If kids are occupied, their parents are able to spend more time perusing the vendors and supporting local businesses. In that small way, the Library Space does more than give children something to do. It strengthens the connections between the people and institutions that make the Trumansburg community what it is.

The Trumansburg Farmers' Market, the Ulysses Philomathic Library and the people who move between them are part of the same community ecosystem—each making the others a little stronger.



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