

Sense of family and community part of RSF Farmers Market vibe

'We are creating relationships,' say new owners of weekly meetup at Del Rayo shopping center

BY KAREN BILLING

On Sunday afternoons at Del Rayo Shopping Center, the parking lot comes alive with the Rancho Santa Fe Farmers Market.

"It's a vibrant, living feeling ... it transports you, it's not just a parking lot," said Diane Haworth, who along with Michael Varbaek took over the market in January and infused it with their special energy and a focus on longevity.

Every Sunday from 9 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. at Del Rayo on San Dieguito Road, up sprouts the market, filled not just with aisles of vendors in tents, but fresh flowers spread throughout and bistro tables under umbrellas where the owners hope people will sit and stay a spell.

"Every Sunday, we're trying to create a symphony — all the instruments have to be in tune," Varbaek said. The market "soothes the soul, it's nurturing. In today's society, there's a huge need for that, because it doesn't exist. There's a lot of go-go-go."

He said the market is still an undiscovered gem in the community and he wants people to know what's right under their noses, "a pleasant surprise waiting to happen."

"We have so many people come up to us and tell us they really appreciate the effort that we're making, that it's something really special that we're doing here and that



Top left: The baked goods are fresh and French from Oh La Vache at the Rancho Santa Fe Farmers Market in Del Rayo Shopping Center. Photo by Karen Billing

**Top right: Michael Varbaek and Diana Haworth. Courtesy photo
Left: Thyme of Essence serves up wraps at the farmers market. Photo by Karen Billing**



we've taken it to a different level," Haworth said.

Families trickle in and grab a bite to eat, enjoying the shade of a market umbrella and live music. People come fresh from morning workouts to pick up produce for the week, and kids take over the designated children's craft areas.

There is a waiting list for vendors wanting to join the market, so the owners get to pick the cream of the crop.

"We have very good relationships with the vendors; for us it's a labor of love," said Haworth.

In the aisles, there are buckets of colorful bouquets from Hidalgo Flowers and green grapes and ripe nectarines from Smit Orchards. People can sip on guava lemonade from Luscious Lemonades or enjoy an iced tea from Pangea Tea, with coconut gel on the bottom to sweeten it.

Shoppers can pick from Robbie's Fresh Fish or Rollswisserie Gourmet Rotisserie chicken, taste authentic Spanish paella and gazpacho from Emilio's or order up a fresh-made crepe from Oh La Vache, where baskets overflow

with French pastries and breads.

Thyme of Essence serves up falafels and their popular *manoushe* sandwiches — toasted flatbread filled with Persian cucumbers, tomatoes and their self-harvested olive oil.

There's a tent for 5150 Nut Butters, with butters in flavors such as cookies and cream and chocolate biscuit, which could pair well with something sweet from the San Diego Honey Company and their flavors, such as raspberry amaretto or vanilla bean nectarine.

Del Rayo Village businesses The Floral Palette and Caffe Positano have a presence in the market as well, offering blooms and coffee beans, respectively.

"It's been a tremendously positive change to

have these guys in the market," said Positano's Tim Cusac of the new owners.

For Varbaek and Haworth, a farmers market goes right along with their life philosophy of longevity; they previously owned markets at Viejas and in Alpine.

As athletes, researchers and motivational speakers, they have spent much of their lives in the pursuit of outstanding health and wellness and sharing that knowledge with others.

Haworth, whose athletic roots include figure skating, competes in adventure racing and cycling. Varbaek is a world-class cyclist who once competed for the Danish National Team.

Both are certified culinary arts chefs and chef instructors specializing in raw food preparation, and together they have embarked on a four-year journey to learn everything they could on the topic of longevity, filming a documentary along the way.

The pair has traveled to "longevity villages" around the world where they studied and documented the lifestyle and habits of long-living people. They focused on visiting villages with the highest concentration of centenarians in more than 50 countries such as Japan, Italy, China and Greece.

"We have 200 new sets of grandparents, extended families throughout the world," said Haworth.

In their travels, they studied what all these different cultures had in common when it came to living a longer life.

"One strong theme we found was the sense of community and being part of something greater than themselves in the villages and town squares," Haworth said. "We're all spread out here (in America); our whole way of living is different."

In those communities, people go out and experience a market or town square — it's a thing to go do and be a part of, rather than just crossing off items on a shopping list.

That's what the two really wanted to create in Rancho Santa Fe.

Varbaek hopes people will come, talk to the vendors, sit down and listen to live music, not think about work and just enjoy the moment.

Haworth admits that it sounds corny, but they have already seen a sense of family and community forming,

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