

Fresh Produce

VFW Post in Texas creates farmer's market to help foster community awareness

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For several years, VFW Post 1836 members had debated running a farmer's market at their Post in Lufkin, Texas, but it never seemed to line up properly until last April.

The opportunity finally presented itself when a local couple with experience managing a farmer's market elsewhere moved to Lufkin looking for a new place to host their operation last year, opening a window for Post 1836 membership to do it.

"Our team at Post 1836 has a goal to return to a place of prominence in the community," Post 1836 Commander Ashley Kettelkamp said. "We want to be seen as a community center where there is activity, opportunity, fun and help, and we felt like a farmer's market, along with many other things, fit that goal."

The Freedom Farmer's & Artisan's Market has operated for more than 50 days since its inaugural opening last April, according to Kettelkamp, who added the Post membership now runs and oversees the day-to-day operations.

The market currently runs on Saturday from 9 a.m. to 2 p.m., hosting several local vendors who provide an assortment of products, including breads, salsa, microgreens, teas, honey, freeze-dried products, handmade soaps, goat's milk, local beef, wreaths, home décor and jewelry.

These vendors also share the luxury of no set-fee, a perk Kettelkamp believes shows the Post is interested in fostering relationships with the local business community, as well as all customers who visit the Post.

"We have only asked that if they have a good day, to consider a donation to the VFW," Kettelkamp said. "Given that donations are unpredictable, it has varied a lot from week to week, but there's been a couple thousand dollars generated over the course of the roughly year and a half that we've been operating."

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The popularity of the Freedom Farmer's & Artisan's Market in the community also has led to other avenues, generating donations for the Post's food and clothing pantry, as well as the recruitment of several new VFW members who now volunteer weekly.

"We have seen the market generate interest, participation and awareness in the community that we would not have had otherwise," Kettelkamp said. "This has encouraged us to continue. We actually intend to keep running right through the fall and winter, and into next year."

This article is featured in the 2024 September issue of Checkpoint. If you're a VFW member and don't currently receive the VFW Checkpoint, please contact VFW magazine at magazine@vfw.org.