

# UP CLOSE AND PERSONAL in LILBURN

*Includes Neighborhoods  
in Stone Mountain & Lawrenceville  
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# The Lilburn FARMERS MARKET Story

By Mandy McManus, *in her own words:*

“How does a University of Georgia art major transplanted from Illinois who has never been to a farmers’ market become the manager of the Lilburn Farmers’ Market? I ask myself that question often. I moved to the Lilburn area from Decatur 13 years ago with my husband, Joe, and my two daughters, Jessamy (now 19 attending Georgia Southern University) and Jolee (now 15 attending Brookwood High School). We were looking to move into a larger home in the great Gwinnett County school system. Soon after the move, I began looking for opportunities to give back to the community. Joining the GFWC/ GaFWC Lilburn Woman’s Club was a springboard into other volunteer experiences. I never pictured myself when I moved into Lilburn as the market manager of a successful farmers’ market! The last three years have definitely been an amazing experience that I would not trade for anything.

The journey started in early 2010 at a Lilburn Park committee meeting during a brain storming session to come up with ideas to promote downtown Lilburn and local businesses. City Council member and now mayor, Johnny Crist came up with the idea of starting a farmers’ market. Everyone was given assignments to research the feasibility of this idea. I was asked to do a web search to investigate other farmers’ markets. When I came to the next meeting I was surprised to learn that I had been nominated and approved as the Lilburn Farmers Market manager. Keep in mind that I still had not ever been to a farmers’ market. The date to open this new venture was in 6 weeks! Imagine my shock and surprise!

I knew I needed help and I contacted my friend, Andrea Brannen. We became friends after I moved to Lilburn. Everywhere I volunteered Andrea was already there. Soon I realized that we lived around the corner from each other and had similar interests and a bond was formed. Since Andrea teaches computer skills to students



*Andrea and Mandy – “The Get It Done Right Team”.*



*Dave Runton, the Clicker Man*

at R.D. Head Elementary, I knew she was the perfect choice to help with the computer end of the market. Little did she know that this would become her passion as well as mine. Excel spreadsheets, websites, book keeping and a host of other tasks became part of her job description. We are a perfect match. I am a 'get it done' person and she is a 'get it right' person. Together we are a 'get it done right' team.

Talk about kicking into high gear. Hastily we prepared applications and policy handbooks and even homemade business cards. Free time was spent attending every



*The Lilburn Farmers' Market is truly a family affair. Joe, Mandy & Jessamy McManus at Sophie's Choice Dog Treat booth.*

farmers' market nearby and chatting with vendors hoping they would take a chance on the Lilburn Farmers' Market. Time was slipping away fast and we learned that there is lots to do behind the scenes to start a market. Booth layouts, how to mark spaces (side walk chalk is not a good choice on rainy nights), promotions, signage – we were so naïve! We had no idea what we had gotten ourselves into. Our friends thought we were crazy! Ignorance was

truly bliss for these two novices.

Butterflies filled our stomachs prior to the first market. How many vendors would come? What would the weather



*Our first season on Railroad Avenue.*

do? Would the Lilburn community come and support the market? The first market had 17 vendors in attendance! It was so exciting! The community embraced the market coming in droves. Many of the vendors sold out in the first hour! But then the rain came. It was the storm of the century. Water poured over our shoes soaking everything and everyone. This was not the way we wanted the market to end that night. When the rain stopped, a rainbow appeared over city hall! The rainbow was truly a sign! Amazingly the crowds returned and continued to shop. What a wonderful opening night!

That rainy night was a foreboding of things to come. We got accustomed to soggy shoes (we now wear flip flops each week!), steam coming up from the pavement and packing up wet tents. The rain hit 9 out of 12 markets that first season. But word got out to vendors and customers about what a wonderful Friday event has happening in Lilburn. The market now had a small band of volunteers that were committed to come early each Friday afternoon to help set up Railroad Avenue for the market. It was like watching a circus arriving in town bringing everything to start the show. We would arrive at 2 pm to an empty street with barricades on each end and by 4 pm colorful tents lined the area filled with all kinds of goodies waiting to



*Rainbow over city hall the first night of our market!*

be purchased. Then by 9 pm, the street was empty again – tents had been folded and packed into trucks and vans and goodbyes were said until next Friday. This was not a 3 ring circus but a 50 tent performance. By the end of the season, these folks were more than vendors or customers – they became our ‘Friday family’. It was so hard to see them drive away the last Friday in August at the end of our first season.

Time to relax, right? No! We learned that running a market is a 12 month commitment. Monday nights became our work night. Reviewing our first season, we saw that the Lilburn Farmers’ Market had become a family Friday night event. Parents brought children to choose food for the next week while learning about how it was grown or made. Neighbors reconnected and conversations lasted well into the evening. We decided that we wanted to foster these community feelings. Brainstorming began on how to engage more of the Lilburn community and support local organizations at the same time. During the first season, several wonderful causes had contacted us about having a booth. It was decided to create a new category in the market and to offer one a free spot weekly to a local non profit organization to fund raise and spread the word about their cause. A few of the groups that have come to the market are Providence Christian Academy,



*Jolee and Sophie McManus enjoy ‘Dog Days of Summer’, one our favorite events.*



*Our new location on the Greenway Trail parking lot.*



*Lilburn Woman’s Club supports the Lilburn Farmers Market.*



*Nature’s bounty can be found at the Lilburn Farmers Market.*

St John Neumann Regional Catholic School, Parkview Christian School, local elementary schools, Boy and Girl Scout troops, high school booster clubs, and neighborhood groups. Working with these groups bring such excitement to the market and has increased our customer base at the same time.

Another group that we wanted to give the opportunity to participate in the market was GFWC/GaFWC Lilburn Woman’s Club. Both Andrea and I are members and we

knew that LWC always does a great job of providing information about their projects and partnerships while having a great time doing it! Each of the 6 programs of work of the Lilburn Woman’s Club stepped up and took a week. Their involvement has added to the scope and enjoyment for everyone attending the market. Thank you, LWC for your support!

The beginning of our second season brought some

changes. The market moved to a larger and flat location on the Greenway Trail parking lot. The City of Lilburn graciously installed electricity for the vendors to use. The City of Lilburn has been so supportive and generous to the Lilburn Farmers' Market. We are so fortunate to partner with them. Facebook became our friend – make sure you 'like' us to receive the latest updates. LilburnFarmersMarket.org went live! A porta-potty now became a fixture at the market. A new market layout was designed and now was semi-permanently marked on the pavement. Yeah! No more sidewalk chalk each week. None of these changes would have been possible without the support of our families. Our sweet husbands have sweated with us and shown up each week to help with anything we need. Even our children have manned the information booth and been roped into taking pictures of market events. Thank you for supporting our market passion.

We are now into our third season – and they said it won't last! Vendors have come and gone but we have a group of volunteers who have stood by us – rain or shine! Dave Runton, a member of the original Lilburn Park committee, has been our rock and voice of reason. He is now known as 'Clickerman' because he counts the market attendance each week. Pat Swan does double duty on many Friday nights. She mans the information booth, is resident first aider, and helps organize Lilburn Idol too. She is our hero! Stan Fisher, the sign man, and Johnny Crist, our mayor, get up early each Friday morning covering Lilburn with market signs and then reverse the process each Friday evening. Janet Boe, my mom, has become irreplaceable every Friday. If there is something to be done, she does it!



*The market could not be run without our wonderful volunteers.*

Andrea and I can never express our thanks appropriately to these dedicated volunteers who are part of our Friday family.

Working a farmers' market requires many skills but nothing that either one of us had been trained to do. My commitment to local growing and supporting small businesses motivated me to push forward with the market.

Having a small business myself of selling plants from my greenhouse showed me the importance of having a local outlet for other locals to sell their products. This led to the market's mission statement: The Lilburn Farmers Market is a co-sponsored event with the City of Lilburn that provides a venue for local farmers and producers to sell their products directly to the consumer and promotes a greater sense of community by bringing people together in downtown Lilburn.

The Lilburn Farmers' Market has had many changes since that first night. Locations have changed, vendors have grown from 17 to over 50, but customers continue to come and shop for wonderful locally produced products every Friday rain or shine! Andrea and I invite you to come to the Lilburn Farmers' Market on Friday night during June, July and August from 4 to 8pm on the Greenway Trail parking lot and discover it is 'a tasty way to start your weekend.'"



*Girl Scouts using the market to raise funds for their projects.*