

Merchants split over Taos Farmers Market

Popular Saturday event closes off parking to the historic downtown Taos Plaza

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As Taos locals and visitors welcomed the beginning of the weekly Taos Farmers Market on a recent Saturday, shop owners on the town's historic downtown Plaza have taken sides for and against the market's placement.

The Taos Farmers Market is held every Saturday once the weather warms up enough in May and brings in visitors and residents alike to grab the first of the summer crop. Beginning at 8 a.m. and ending before 1 p.m. on Saturdays, vendors set up their tents and booths along the edges of the Plaza and await the crowd of shoppers with their produce bags and strollers full of children.

The market gives farmers and merchants the chance to sell their product and brings extra traffic to some of the shops for the day.

"In my mind, 'plaza' means social gathering place and I think that more things going on in the Plaza is good for Taos," said Taos Mountain Outfitters owner Bill Gaydosh.

"I'll open my store between 8 and 10 Saturday morning.

When everyone else starts opening, I'll have had 100 people through my store."

Gaydosh and other Plaza merchants welcome the market every year and even extend their morning business hours in efforts to catch some of the market traffic earlier than their neighbors. Many businesses on the Plaza don't open before 10 a.m. on weekends. The market has been held at the Plaza since 2014, which is when the town decided to move it from the previous venue of the Taos County Complex parking lot.

Out of 39 businesses in and around the Plaza surveyed by *The Taos News*, 24 expressed their support for Taos Farmers Market. Of the shops surveyed, 11 were firmly against the market in the Plaza and four shops declined to comment. Some shops that voted a thumbs-down on the market said they would be more supportive if a different parking situation were assessed. There are more than 60 parking spaces directly inside the Plaza and a majority of them were occupied by vendor booths at the market Saturday (May 20), forcing Plaza visitors to park away from the event and shops.

"Our argument is that Plaza merchants need tourist dollars and [the market] impedes getting tourists in and shopping," said Rane Malanga. "We're competing for parking spaces.

When the tourists come to town, we want them to identify the Plaza, park on the Plaza and shop the Plaza."

Malanga owns Artwares Jewelry on the Plaza and said she would not be against the market if the town were to figure out a different situation for parking. In addition, Malanga feels that the market caters to a different demographic than the clientele that normally shops the Plaza. Some jewelers on the Plaza,

such as Malanga, market high-end Southwestern jewelry and feel the market shoppers who flood the Plaza on Saturdays are not necessarily interested in their product.

While merchants debated the Taos Farmers Market benefits and drawbacks, the Plaza was vandalized prior to the market's opening day on May 13 when someone covered an exterior electrical outlet in super glue, rendering it useless. The outlet in the northwest corner of the gazebo had glue drips covering the bottom. Town staff fixed the outlets and the market was able to operate as normal.

Town of Taos officials say the vandalism is being investigated.

"I don't understand why they are so adamantly opposed to it," Gaydosh said before the incident. "To me, the Plaza should be a place where people come together." The vendors and selection at the market will increase as the season continues and more crops ripen.



Taos Farmers Market kicked off its season in May as merchants and vendors flooded Taos Plaza to sell their goods. Several shops in the area have expressed support for the market and welcome the extra foot traffic the market brings. Other Plaza merchants oppose the market's location.

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