



Volunteering at the Williamsburg Farmer's Market

by Greg Lilly, Lifestyle Editor



Tents line Market Square on Duke of Gloucester Street, white canvas flapping in the breeze. Early morning sunlight filters through low clouds with a promise of brighter skies. A man, full of energy, directs the vendors in the set up of the Farmers Market. Michael Segala, Jr. seems to have the vigor and spirit of a person truly enjoying the process, the companionship, the interaction, and the service he provides to the market's vendors and customers.

“This market is part of Williamsburg’s cul-
ture,” Michael says. People browse the tents and single out produce, flowers, plants and baked goods for purchase. A Boston terrier on his leash pulls his owners toward a yellow

Labrador and his owners. The people stop to talk, the dogs to sniff. A few tents down, greetings fill the air as old friends see each other from across the street, one re-introducing her



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visiting granddaughter. Information booths staffed by members of local organizations offer pamphlets and answer questions. Camaraderie, shopping, education, entertainment are all components of the Saturday morning ritual.

“The market itself has a strong following,” Michael says. “Every week, I recognize the faces. It’s a real social environment.” He says that many

“This is a community market with local products, entertainment, and a place to reconnect with your neighbors.”

- Michael Segala

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area residents show up week-after-week. “That core of people,” he explains, “not only are they buying from the vendors, but they know them. People come every weekend to buy flowers and produce or pick up orders for meat, pork or chicken. The vendors have established a following.”

Michael has volunteered at the Williamsburg Farmers Market for four years. He’s one of the early morning crew, getting to the market by 6:00 a.m. “We’re responsible for a number of things each Saturday morning,” he describes. “First the vendors; we help them off load their trucks, set up their tents, and get their goods out.” The volunteers also set up the green information tent and the chef’s tent. They string up special event banners and arrange the stage area for the music.

“We usually have a chef’s tent,” he explains of the additional entertainment at the market. “The chefs come from various restaurants and demonstrate.” Often musicians play during the market hours. “We set them up in front of the Trellis. The music varies. We’ve had soloists to a full family, that family act was like the Von Trapp family in *The Sound of Music*. They were amazing. We get a large variety of musicians.”

Michael was born and raised in Massachusetts. He left to play baseball at the University of Denver then returned to the east coast where he worked and went to school in Rhode Island. “I got married twenty-five years ago this coming June 22 to a young lady that I’ve known since we were both in second grade,” he says.

He earned his MBA, and his company moved him and his family several times. “The final move was Williamsburg,” he says. “We moved here in July of 2001.”

Always volunteer oriented, Michael and his wife have served on many church boards and assisted with various community events. “Down here,” Michael says, “I was looking for something to get involved with. We’d go to the market on Saturdays, looking for things to buy. One Saturday, I went to the information tent, and they pointed me toward Libbey Oliver, the market manager. I asked if she needed volunteers. She said they always needed people to help.”

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Finding time to volunteer had been difficult for Michael, especially with his job and family. "I have this agreement with my family, particularly my wife," he explains. "It came about one year when we had taken a vacation down in Orlando. At the time, I was a sales manager with a large territory. The family was waiting in line to get the Disney character signatures. We were at Epcot. Goofy, Pluto, they were all there, and the lines had to be ten to fifteen kids long. I saw I had plenty of time, so I took off to the bathroom, but a bank of phones called my name and I started checking messages and returning calls. Before I knew it, my wife and kids were standing there, staring at me. She said they had been looking for me for an hour. No way. They had all those lines to wait in. She said, 'This has got to stop.' We decided there needed to be a give and take with my time. The deal I have with them is that I can do anything I want before they get up in the morning and I can do anything I want after they go to bed."

When he talked to Libbey at the Farmers Market, he asked her what time volunteers started in the morning. "She said they could really use some help at 6:00 a.m. when the vendors start coming in. 'Fine,' I said. 'I'm all over it.' That's my time slot, I volunteer from 6 to 8am, then I'm home just as the kids are getting up. That's how it got started."

Last fall, Michael was asked to join the board of the Farmers Market. "I'm really proud that I was asked. It's an honor," he says.

This year, the market opened in April - a month earlier than usual. "The customers asked for the market to be open more," Michael says. "We tried to open earlier in the season, while making sure our vendors had products that early. There was a great response to the April opening." Along with the early season opening, the Tuesday market comes back June 1 through August 31.

Besides the social and shopping experiences of the market, local entertainment packs the street. "The chefs always bring in a crowd," Michael says. "The apprentice chefs will be here one weekend. The guy who runs the school will go shopping in the market, just filling paper bags with different things." The teams of apprentice chefs will not know what they will have to work with. "They have a competition," he continues. "They have a certain amount of time to produce a meal from what they get in the bag from the market. It is amazing to see the creativity and to see the response from the audience. The people are really curious about what the chef teams will make."

A musical stage adds melody and harmony to the scene, and the market becomes a nice venue for exposure for local musicians. Jazz to rock to folk, the music at the Farmers Market has something for everyone.

"We have a strong relationship with the Virginia Cooperative Extension service, too" Michael says. "They man a booth and answer questions about trees, lawns, gardens, just about anything that grows."

The Farmers Market continues to thrive with the help of volunteers like Michael Segala, Jr. "We can always use more volunteers," Michael adds. "This is a community market with local products, entertainment, and a place to reconnect with your neighbors." He invites everyone to come to Market Square on Saturday mornings to discover the shopping, meeting and entertainment hotspot of the community. NDN

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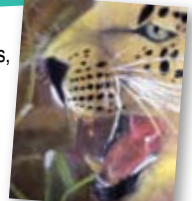
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