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Rienzi Market  
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Sweet smells of freshly organic baked bread, the aroma of raw local honey and the heavy scents of freshly picked vegetables are the attention grabbers when people first arrive. Vibrant colors of reds, greens and yellows navigates the eyes of people who are intrigued from table to table.

Several tables are filled with wooden baskets and displays of produce, vegetables, baked goods and anything else freshly made or grown. There is a friendly greeting face behind each table urging you to buy something and promising that their product is the best on the market.

The choices here are endless. There's squash, cucumbers, honey, frozen shrimp, corn, greens, frozen fish, blackberries and so much more.

Most people find these fresh local foods at Walmart or other grocery stores but others find them at Rienzi Market.

On the Rienzi Drive extension in Thibodaux, La., is where you'll find Rienzi Market. The market has been opened since April 2015 and has been in high demand ever since. Rienzi market is open to the community on Thursdays from 3:30 p.m. to dark.

For Rienzi Market coordinator, Kimber Ratcliff, fresh local food has always been a huge part of her life "My grandparents have a cattle ranch in East Texas and they grew a large garden. I spent all my summers and holidays there as a child and in college. Eating local wasn't a trend, it was just what we did, and it was delicious. I felt connected to the food and I wanted my children to grow up the same way."

Ratcliff grows fresh food in her own backyard in hopes to stay healthy and true to herself. “I have a few raised beds at my house where we grow whatever is in season. It’s important to me that my children know where food comes from and how to eat seasonally.”

Rienzi Market is part of the Saint Francis Vegetable Gardens. “The garden serves as a location and backdrop but does not sell any of the produce grown.”

Ratcliff helped found the organization Saint Francis Vegetable Gardens and has dedicated a lot of her time and efforts to the gardens and the market in order to be successful.

“I have gotten to know many of the local farmers through volunteering with the garden. When speaking with them, they expressed that their traditional customer base on Saturday morning was dwindling and that the business at their roadside stands was down.”

After speaking with volunteers at the garden, friends and family and people at speaking engagements, Ratcliff was constantly asked where they could buy local produce. “The solution seemed easy. Open a weeknight market that was convenient for people to stop by after work, those picking up kids from school and college students.”

She says this was an instant success and farmers found a new cliental and many customers had recommitted themselves to supporting local producers.

With this in mind, profit is not her end goal. Instead, Ratcliff wants to provide healthy options for her community and also give back at the same.

Though Rienzi Market appears like any other farmer’s market, the market offers something that sets it apart from others. “All produce in the garden is donated to Catholic Charities and is handed out at the Good Samaritan Food Banks in Lafourche and Terrebonne Parish.”

Ratcliff and the gardens mission to support local growers by educating the community on the importance of fresh local food for health is a statement they thrive on. Thursdays are the days where community members of Thibodaux can gather at the market and have the best options of fresh and local food. Not only does the community have the opportunity to buy fresh local food, they also have this opportunity to meet the people behind the tables and essentially develop friendships.

Each vendor at Rienzi Market not only offers something unique and fresh to the market, but they also share their personalities with the community.

All vendors at Rienzi Market promise fresh and local produce food. But how can you be sure that the produce is actually fresh like promised? “I personally know every vendor at the market and have been to their farm or home... Instead of me telling you about the vendors, you have to meet them for themselves because they are great.”

The importance of fresh local food and health for consumers means a lot to Ratcliff. “I trust my local farmers. I trust them because I am buying the same produce they feed their family with to feed mine.”

Some of the vendors at Rienzi Market include Dale Toups Honey, Bayou Produce, Aledia Shrimp, 12<sup>th</sup> Street Bakery and many more. Each participate vendor must follow general rules set by Ratcliff such as health regulations and must also fill out an application. Most vendors gravitate towards Rienzi’s Market because they offer something unique compared to other markets. “We are proud to be the first farmers market in the state to not charge vendors a fee for participating.”

The vendors offer fruit, vegetables, seafood, flowers, plants, honey, eggs, meat and artesian bread. “Our vendors are incredibly hard working, fun and smart people.”

The energy, community, vendors and, of course, the produce offers something quite significant as an experience. There's a reason why people continue to go every Thursday to check items off their grocery list. The community continues to go because they want to support local farmers but also because the whole experience is family-oriented.

It's more than just an experience.

Today, Ratcliff stayed true to her wishes and shares the love of fresh local food with her children. "My family all shares my affinity for our local farmers. On cold days at the market you can find my youngest cuddled up in blankets in the back of a farmer's truck to stay warm; and my oldest daughter learned how to count change when a farmer needed help when his line got long for fresh grown tomatoes."

It's more than just a farmer's market to some, it's a community and a lifestyle.