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> Central Market Hosts Meet, Greet and Eat for Locals

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Sep 17, 2007 12:00 PM, By AMANDA BALTAZAR

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SHORELINE, Wash. – A recent event at Central Market here attracted over 2,000 people and helped draw customer attention to some of the products that differentiate the store.

Meet, Eat and Greet is a two-day event, now in its fourth year. On each day, some 40 local vendor booths filled an area outside the store and lined the aisles inside, where samples were given out and product demonstrations were held. Vendors also talked to interested consumers about their businesses.

“The idea is that we provide an opportunity for our customers to meet the owners and chefs behind our products,” said Mike Pederson, store merchandiser. “The vendors get to meet the customers, and the customers get to put a face to the products.

“It’s a way of acknowledging our local vendors and getting their name out there. It’s also a way for us to reinforce our image and our support of the community.”

The products run the gamut from bakery and local meats to organic dairy items and specialty gourmet products.

Sales increase at the store during the weekend, said Pederson, and are up afterwards. A cash register has been placed outside for the past two years, which has also helped sales, “because it’s made it more convenient for the customers,” said Erika Lamoureux, culinary resource manager.

This year there were 40 vendors on Saturday and 37 on Sunday. Some of the larger companies had booths both days. Every year, the event grows, said Lamoureux, who said last year there were closer to 30 vendors each day, and the event could see 50 of them next year. Part of the reason is that there are more people making local products now, she said.

Many of the vendors come year after year. “We invite them back, because they’re so much fun to have in the store,” said Lamoureux.

Among the local companies represented this year were Holy Jalapeno, maker of two relishes; organic mushroom supplier Fungus Among Us; and True North Roasting coffee.

“These are the kinds of products that need visibility, because they’re unique, and not daily products,” explained Pederson, adding that the big problem the local vendors face is distribution.

Attendees are mostly existing customers, said Pederson. Many come to talk to the vendors, but some also come for a “feeding frenzy,” he pointed out.

“The energy in that store is good, and the staff make it a fun event,” said Judie Schaefer, owner of Holy Jalapeno, Seattle. “The customers here are always very involved,” added Lynn Monroe, owner of Fungus Among Us in Snohomish, Wash.

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