NEWS

"There are as many worlds as there are kinds of days, and as an opal changes its colors and its fire to match the nature of a day, so do I."

JOHN STEINBECK AUTHOR

As spring arrives, farmers market returns outside in Wooster Square

BY SUDARSHAN KRISHNAN
CONTRIBUTING REPORTER

The Wooster Square Farmers Market is welcoming visitors back to an outdoor showcase of fresh, locally-sourced food.

Though the market runs year-round every Saturday from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., it began its outdoor season over the weekend. Two rows of stalls ran along the curbside parking lane of the Conte West Hills Magnet School. From beneath the shade of the canopy, vendors displayed offerings of seasonal produce, baked goods and a variety of other treats. Throughout the morning and early afternoon, visitors drifted down the lane, sampling the various products and getting a taste of the local farming scene.

"I think the theme would be good food and good community," Allison Ping-Benguiat, the farmers market manager for CitySeed, an organization that organizes multiple farmers markets, said. "What makes us different from other farmers markets is we are very much food focused, and we focus on sourcing locally."

According to Ping-Benguiat, all produce at the farmers markets is grown in Connecticut, and every business represented creates their products from Connecticut-grown ingredients.

While all the vendors maintain this principle, the exact lineup varies year to year, she added.

"A lot of them are longer established relationships. Some of them are newer and part of our Incubates program," Ping-Benguiat explained, referring to a CitySeed initiative that aims to provide advising, resources and exposure to emerging food entrepreneurs in New Haven.

One longtime participant in the Wooster Square Farmers Market is Star Light Gardens, a farm based in Durham and Middlefield that grows vegetables and flowers.

"We're second generation of this farm," owner Jenny Hill said. "The first owner was actually the first vendor to start at this farmers market, so our farm has been at CitySeed from the beginning."

According to Hill, Star Light is a market garden, meaning that it grows its produce primarily for events like farmers markets.

"We want our tables to have a lot of colors, and a lot of selection, a lot of diversity and options for customers," Hill said. Crates of organic root vegetables and potted herbs filled the stall.

Several other businesses are rooted in the farmers market scene. Quincy Horan, who started Waldingfield Farm Inc. with his two brothers, delivers a selection of organic vegetables at seven different markets throughout the state, he said. At Wooster Square on Saturday, he offered the last of the winter storage crops, as well as spring salad greens from the greenhouse and other seasonal pickings.

Downright Breads, which sold out of the majority of its baked goods on Saturday, is similarly invested. Employee Jacob Miller explained that for Downright, which started as a microbakery operating out of a home kitchen in West Haven, the main way to sell its products is through farmers markets. The bakery has since outgrown its cottage license and expanded its business into a commercial space.

Chef Deja Smith, the owner of the Khemi's Vegan Cuisine food truck in Bridgeport, Connecticut, gave visitors a cooking demonstration featuring various ingredients sold at the farmers market.

Her table presented a bright array of vegetables, herbs and condiments, which she worked into a couple of dishes, including a turmeric carrot soup. Smith is of Jamaican descent and appreciates the country's plant-based cuisine, she said.

"I love sharing my knowledge on plant-based eating, and also my culture," Smith said.

Sean Khong GRD '26, a Yale graduate student, came to the market at the invitation of a friend and wanted to try something new, he said.

"I love that it is small and you can really interact with all the different store owners, who are super friendly and welcoming," Khong said.

Chris Gottschalk, a Branford resident and neurologist who runs the headache medical program at Yale, has been coming to the market for over a decade, he said.

"I'm always in New Haven on Saturday morning 'cause I practice aikido in the dojo right over there. So I go to training, and I come here and try to buy as much fresh food as I can for the week," he said.

Gottschalk enjoyed some Thai food and a smoothie and looked forward to picking up some mushrooms, he said in an interview.

"I love the fact that it brings together a wide community of people from across the state, who are growing fresh healthy food," he said.

The warm weather came as a welcome surprise to many returning vendors and visitors.

"I'd say it's quite pleasant," Ping-Benguiat said. "We had good luck. In the past, we always started our outdoor season with rain."

The Conte West Hills Magnet School is located at 511 Chapel St.

Beyond the selection of food products, which ranged from Seacoast's gourmet mushrooms to Sanctuary Kitchen's readymade Thai food, CitySeed hosted some special guests. Ping-Benguiat highlighted appearances by Deja Smith, the Historic Wooster Square Association and the Parkway Ramblers bluegrass band, which performed lively renditions of classic tunes and audience requests.

As the farmers market takes place in the historic Wooster Square neighborhood, the organizers decided to invite the Historic Wooster Square Association (HWSA), an all-volunteer, non-profit neighborhood association. The organization intends to promote the neighborhood and activate its spaces, hosting tours, cleanups and meetups, among other activities, explained board member Barbara Lamb. The association is set to host its annual Cherry Blossom Festival on April 19th.

Narasimhan Ganapathi, a former chemistry professor at Yale who was encouraged by his daughter to volunteer for the market, felt that the day went very well. Ganapathi himself sampled the baked goods, and has made a point of stocking up on vegetables.

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SUDARSHAN KRISHNAN / CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHER
The Wooster Square Farmers Market, which runs every Saturday from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m., began its outdoor season over the weekend. Vendors selling a variety of produce and locally-sourced products lined up outside of the Conte West Hills Magnet School.

New Haven economic officials discuss development at Yale club event

BY LARS WINKLER
CONTRIBUTING REPORTER

At a Thursday night event on the "Economics of New Haven," Yale students asked city officials how the Elm City can grow without worsening displacement and housing pressures.

Hosted by the Yale Undergraduate Economics Association, the event featured New Haven Economic Development Administrator Michael Piscitelli alongside fellow economic officials Dean Mack and Cathy Graves. The discussion touched on housing, transit, small businesses and redevelopment and repeatedly turned to the trade-offs created by growth in a city with limited space.

For the student organizers, that practical focus was intentional.

"We wanted not only people who could look at the economy from the top down — professors and different specialists — but we also wanted people on the ground actually making stuff move," Matthew Sprintson '28, a co-president of the economics association, said in an interview.

The three officials said that much of New Haven's recent housing growth has come from reclaimed land and former parking lots, creating difficult questions about where future development should go.

Students used the question-and-answer period to ask whether stronger public transit could reduce dependence on parking, how the city plans to balance new housing with affordability and what responsibility officials have to support homeless residents using public spaces.

The officials said transit decisions are constrained in part by state and regional structures, though they pointed to coordination efforts involving Yale shuttle infrastructure. They also discussed city outreach programs for homeless residents and a proposed redevelopment of a deteriorating former power plant site.

Suren Clark '28, the other co-president of the club, said the event was meant to connect Yale students more directly to the city around them.

"It was really important to us that we discussed the economics behind it," Clark said.

After the event, Piscitelli said he appreciated the chance to exchange ideas with students.

"The Yale student body really cares about the community where they go to school," he said.

Clark and Sprintson, who revived the Yale Undergraduate Economics Association this school year, hosted the club's first event this January.

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New Haven Museum exhibit showcases local apizza artifacts

BY JINGCHU SOPHIA ZHANG
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The New Haven Museum hosted the owner for Modern Apizza on Thursday night in the latest installment of "The Monthly Slice," which hones in on the city's pizza landscape.

The museum hosts the monthly events in conjunction with its ongoing pizza-themed exhibit, called "Pronounced Ah-Beetz," which opened last October. The exhibit was co-curated by Jason Bischoff-Wurstle, who is the museum's director of photo archives, and Gorman Bechard, Dean Falcone and Colin Caplan, who were the producing team behind the local pizza documentary, "Pizza A Love Story."

On Thursday, Bill Pustari — who has run Modern Apizza along with his wife, Mary, since 1988 — took Bechard behind the scenes of his pizza-making and -managing career. Pustari began working with pizza when he was 13, he said.

One of Pustari's favorite Modern anecdotes was the time he delivered the restaurant's pizzas to the Red Sox. At the time, Pustari was friends with the team's announcer, Joe Castiglione.

"I'm taking full credit on them breaking that curse, from all the pizzas I brought them," Pustari said with a laugh during the event. "The entire season, Joe would call me if they were in a losing slump, saying, 'Any way you can bring some pizza up here?'"

When comparing New Haven's most well-known pizzerias — Frank Pepe Pizzeria Napoletana, Sally's Apizza and Modern Apizza — Pustari brought up each restaurant's different recipes and highlighted Modern's mother yeast, which resides in a tub and is fed with flour and water each day.

During the event, audience members, some of whom were decked out in Modern merch, shared stories and asked questions. Even after the hourlong event concluded, audience members stayed behind to take pictures and tell the Pustaris about their memories with Modern.

According to Bischoff-Wurstle, he and Bechard had the idea for the "Pronounced Ah-Beetz" exhibit back in February 2020. But the real inspiration for the exhibit ran further back in time, the men added.

Bechard, Falcone and Caplan had been working on "Pizza A Love Story" since 2009, with the premiere in 2019. For Bechard, who grew up in Waterbury before moving to New Haven, the documentary felt like a natural extension of something he had loved since he was young.

The exhibit itself came together between 2024 and 2025. It focuses on the history of Pepe's, Sally's and Modern but also incorporates items from other pizzerias across New Haven.

Artifacts shown include what is believed to be the oldest pizza box in the world, which originated from Pepe's in 1936, as well as a 1950s flour sifter from Zuppardi's Apizza, a cartoon poster for Sally's 50th anniversary and a 1960s proofing bin from Modern. Pizza boxes signed by Hillary Clinton LAW '73 and Conan O'Brien are among the more contemporary items on display.

Part of the yearslong process of preparing the exhibit was nurturing relationships with all of New Haven's pizza institutions and the families that run them — being "welcomed into the fold," as Bischoff-Wurstle put it.

"Next thing you know," he said, "you're being offered the oldest pizza box in the world."

"The Monthly Slice" program began in January of this year. Bischoff-Wurstle kicked off the program with a guided tour of the exhibit, and since, there's been a screening of "Pizza A Love Story" and a conversation with Doug Coffin, the founder and owner of Connecticut's Big Green Truck Pizza.

"This series helps to follow through on those things that didn't make into the show," Bischoff-Wurstle said, "or maybe there's a phrase, or maybe there's an item, or something that just opens up a whole new platform."

Partly thanks to its lighthearted nature, "The Monthly Slice" also helps the New Haven Museum bring in new visitors.

"I remember we asked, 'how many people have never been in the museum before?'" Bechard said, recalling the program's second installment. "I think virtually everyone raised their hand. It brings people here because it's a different sort, a fun exhibit."

For instance, Laura Anastasio, who lives in North Branford, learned about the New Haven Museum through February's screening of "Pizza A Love Story." She has since become a member of the museum, she said.

"I really am just trying to get in and see different things every time I come, to really just spend some time here, because I never have before," Anastasio said. "These events have been drawing me in. This is a start for me."

To Bischoff-Wurstle and Bechar, the exhibit's ultimate goal is to engage more community members like Anastasio.

"These are all currently businesses, these are all currently people, living, working," Bischoff-Wurstle said. "They're still telling their stories. They're still creating their history."

The "Pronounced Ah-Beetz" exhibit will be in the New Haven Museum until October 2027.

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JINGCHU SOPHIA ZHANG / CONTRIBUTING PHOTOGRAPHER
Bill Pustari, who has owned Modern Apizza for nearly four decades, brought history to life in a Thursday evening conversation that was part of the programming associated with the museum's pizza-themed exhibit.