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Farmers markets offer launch pads for startups



Liz Rehberg, owner of The Bakery on Military Avenue, makes a banana cream pie to sell at the Market on Military on June 2 in Green Bay. Before opening her bakery in a building across the street, Rehberg used the market to fine tune her offerings as she renovated the building. Photos by Sarah Kloepping/usa today network-wisconsin

Business owners learn their audiences, build customer base

Alexandria Bursiek Kloehn

Green Bay Press-Gazette | USA TODAY NETWORK – WISCONSIN

GREEN BAY - Liz Rehberg was still renovating her bakery when she began selling her products at the Market on Military farmers market.

The Bakery, 822 S. Military Ave., is across the street from the weekly market in Green Bay Plaza. By selling her products at the market, Rehberg was able to get feedback on her products and make some money before opening her doors.

Rehberg opened her store six weeks after she began selling at the market with a different selection of goods than originally intended, after realizing Green Bay residents were more interested in savory flavors like meat stuffed croissants.

"I had one idea for what I thought people would like," Rehberg said. "Then, when I did the market, it turned out that they like different stuff than I was thinking."

Rehberg is just one of many business owners who have flipped the script on farmers markets. Instead of using the Market on Military as a way to sustain a business, she and others have used the ${\it market as a launching point-a way to learn about}$ their audiences, build a customer base and make a profit before opening a store.

Leah Weycker, executive director for the Military Avenue Business District, which hosts the Market on Military, said farmers markets can be a great way for new businesses to get on their feet before opening a brick and mortar store.



Liz Rehberg, owner of The Bakery on Military Avenue, makes Danishes to sell at the Market on Military in Green Bay.

"I think we've become a business incubator," Weycker said about the market. "We give access, certainly to people who have a small business."

It's not only businesses with a building already in the works that can benefit from selling at local farmers markets. Cole Ductan, the owner of Bay Area Burger, started by solely selling his burgers and fries from a food truck and taking advantage of markets in Green Bay, De Pere and in Oconto Coun-

When he began his business in 2020, he knew he eventually wanted to open a (non-mobile) restaurant, but he decided to start with the food truck because of a lack of available properties.

Ductan now plans to open Bay Area Burger this

See STARTUPS, Page 2A

Effort seeks **'hidden** talent'

Underserved areas an answer to labor shortage

Jeff Bollier

Green Bay Press-Gazette USA TODAY NETWORK - WISCONSIN

GREEN BAY - There is a need for semi-truck drivers in northeast Wisconsin, but a language barrier often keeps Somali or Afghani refugees from

completing training to get their com-

mercial driver's license. There are good-paying, family-supporting jobs available in computer science and technology, but underemployed or older workers often need to learn typing skills or the basics of Microsoft Office to get started.

There are residents like these

See TALENT, Page 3A

Penalty for bomb threats is heavy

Alisa M. Schafer

Manitowoo Herald Times Reporter USA TODAY NETWORK - WISCONSIN

KIEL - A variety of felony and misdemeanor charges could be waiting for whoever is responsible for a string of bomb threats aimed at the city of Kiel and the Kiel Area School District the past couple of weeks.

Manitowoc County District Attorney Jacalyn LaBre said the types of charges and the severity in cases like the one in Kiel largely depend on factors such as how the threats were delivered — through a computer, over the phone or in person.

LaBre said she couldn't comment on any specific pending cases but could share general information about the likely felonies and misdemeanors

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Forecast, 10A





Cole Ductan, owner of Bay Area Burger Co., poses for a portrait with his "smash burger" during the Farmers' Market on Broadway in June 2021. After building a following through area farmers markets, Ductan plans to open a brick and mortar Bay Area Burger restaurant this summer at 126 S. Broadway in Green Bay. SAMANTHA MADAR/USA TODAY NETWORK-WISCONSIN

Startups

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summer at 126 S. Broadway — months later than he initially hoped. A combination of shipping delays and the worker shortage has delayed the business' opening since February.

Ductan said the markets have been a great way to supplement income in the meantime.

"This buildout can take however long it needs to, but I'll be able to supplement my income with farmers markets," Ductan said, "and not have to worry about, you know, how am I going to pay my bills."

Rehberg and Ductan aren't alone in using farmers markets to jumpstart their businesses — a number of other Green Bay-area businesses have done the same.

Voyageurs Sourdough Bakehouse, with locations in Green Bay and Appleton, started as a delivery service and by selling at the Broadway market.

Coffee Wizards, a café in Allouez started at the downtown Green Bay market selling nitrogen-infused coffee.

"We had so much excitement when we were at farmers markets. People really loved the coffees that we were serving there," said Coffee Wizardz coowner Sam Brown in a January interview. "It just felt right. You know, it's like people wanted us to have a shop."



Melissa "Aurora" Adlebush, owner of Aurora's Apothecary, built her business through farmers markets and other outlets, now has permanent stores in Appleton, Green Bay and Fish Creek. SARAH KLOEPPING/USA TODAY NETWORK-WISCONSIN

Melissa "Aurora" Adlebush, owner of Aurora's Apothecary, has three locations including one at 133 N. Broadway that she opened in 2020, 12 years after she started selling at the Broadway mar-

When she first began selling at farmers markets she had a shop open in Morrison, but she struggled because of how small and remote her shop was — selling at markets and other events allowed her to make connections and increase sales.

"Since my shop was small and no one was going to travel to me for herbs, I traveled to them," Adlebush said.

She sold her products mainly through events and markets for about eight years before shutting down the

Morrison store and opening an Appleton store in 2016. Shortly after that she opened a location in Fish Creek.

Rehberg said the best perk to starting a business at the market is the ability to connect with people and other busi-

"What I like a lot about the market is that, not only do the customers help you get an idea what's going on, but the other vendors do too," Rehberg said. "I've gotten a lot of ideas and even recipes off of some of the other vendors."

Alexandria Bursiek Kloehn is a business reporter for the Green Bay Press-Gazette. You can reach her at abursiekkloehn@gannett.com or view her Twitter profile at @bursiekkloehn.

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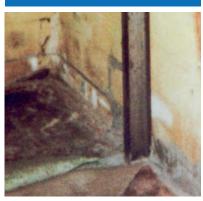
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