

Sunday market coming this summer

Okotoks: United Church awarded contract to open market July 3

By Krista Conrad

Staff Reporter

Farm fresh vegetables and handmade products will be on the market in downtown Okotoks this summer.

In the coming weeks, the Old Creamery site will be transformed into a weekly community market, which will be open on Sundays. The location, next to the Okotoks United Church, was home to a 100-year-old barn that burned down in a case of arson a year ago.

Town council awarded the church a contract to manage the market on May 26, and the ball is already rolling for it to open on July 3.

Bev Carlson, of the Okotoks United Church, said the church began brainstorming ideas for the site after the Town announced the century-old creamery barn would have to come down as a result of the fire.

"When we looked at that site, our question was, 'Who's going to be our neighbour? What's going to happen next door? How can we benefit the community?'" said Carlson.

Church members considered a community mar-



BRENT CALVER/OWW

Bev Carlson, at the former Okotoks Creamery site, will head up the Okotoks United Church's development of a weekly market on the site for a one-year test run, starting July 3.

ket for the site and were preparing to approach the Town when they heard the council had the same idea and was seeking proposals in April.

"We thought, 'Okay, they want to do this,'" said Carlson. "So, we put in a proposal and were awarded it, which is so exciting."

The new Foothills Creamery Market by

Okotoks United Church will follow the Alberta model for farmer's markets – "Make it, bake it, grow it," she said.

The Town is doing remediation of the site to make it suitable for the public market and the church is planning the market and recruiting the 30 or more vendors to fill the space.

"We want homegrown,

homemade, true farmer's market feel," said Carlson.

The 18-week outdoor market will run on Sundays from 10:30 a.m. to 2 p.m., from July 3 to the end of October.

"It's a one-year test pilot on the site," said Carlson. "We're excited, but with council wanting the first day on July 3 we're really hitting the ground run-

ning. It's going to come together really quickly."

There will also be food and busker entertainment on-site, she said.

The idea is to offer something for the entire community in the downtown, she said.

The church is connected to downtown Okotoks, having moved from the current RPAC building to its new location on Riverside Dr. just a few years ago.

"It was a conscious decision to stay downtown because that's where the lifeblood of this community is," said Carlson. "So our thoughts on that site was what could be on that site that builds community."

Having been in town for almost 100 years, the Okotoks United Church has always been involved in the community, helping with Inn from the Cold and other initiatives, she said.

Proceeds from the Foothills Creamery Market will go back into the community through the church's benevolent work, she said.

She said the church is also excited to provide some fellowship through the market.

"Community to us is not just selling things, but it's people gathering in a place and having that sense of community," said Carlson. "The market draws great crowds not just locally but from other places in surrounding areas as well, and brings people together."

Shane Olson, Okotoks economic development manager, said the community market will help draw people downtown and encourage more shop owners to keep their doors open.

"It's all about animating downtown, exposing people to businesses in the downtown area," said Olson. "Having it on Sundays is setting a leadership example to encourage downtown businesses to set Sunday hours."

He said something the Town has heard several times from the Roger Brooks International branding team is if the downtown is successful, other business districts will succeed as well.

"We need opportunities to bring tourists and locals to visit, engage and interact with downtown," said Olson. "What better way to do that than with a community market?"