



WHERE HIPSTER
MEETS GRANDMA:

The 5th Street

Vintage



Scratch the surface of the overly polished Tuscaloosa/Northport that seems during the past few years to have emerged fully formed from the forehead of a monster best dubbed “Homogenization,” and you will find the community’s heart still ticking and its soul persevering. Look between the sharp edges and behind the endless apartment buildings, hotels, and chain stores, virtually indistinguishable from one another, and you will find a thriving, richly diverse culture being nurtured lovingly and carefully by artists, crafters, collectors, and the people who appreciate what they make and curate. On the first Sunday of each month, September through June, they all come together at the 5th Street Vintage Market in Northport’s Tuscaloosa Farmer’s Market space.

The brainchild of Jamie Cicatiello, Sylvia Parker, and Lori Watts, 5th Street Vintage Market evolved from a series of sidewalk sales at Cicatiello’s lifestyle store, Grace Aberdeen Habitat Alchemy. After those small successes, the three quickly realized that they could blend their expertise and networks to form what they call a three-person “dream team” dedicated to creating and sustaining community.



Market

by Bebe Barefoot Lloyd

A busy day the 5th Street Vintage Market



Watts owns This Ol' Thing Vintage, organizes and runs estate sales professionally and is a long-time vintage clothing seller and expert, so she knew all of the area vintage and antiques dealers. Parker expanded their reach; as an avid record collector as well as through her alter ego, DJ TomKat Kitten, she knew all of the people who dealt in vintage vinyl. In addition, she has collected antique jewelry for more than three decades. A couple of years ago, she decided to sell some pieces through Cicatiello's store, loved the energy those exchanges created, and now has a thriving Etsy business, Tallulah Moonlight. Through Grace Aberdean, Cicatiello's contacts included a long list of artisans and crafters, as well as a like-minded customer base. The three joined forces and held the first vintage market in December of 2012. Their stated goals: to have a good time, and to give people a way to find stuff they like and collect.

"We just knew so many people who like to do this," recalls Cicatiello. "And it gives people something to do on Sunday afternoons."

Watts agrees, and adds that the Market provides some vendors with an outlet other than internet sales.

"It was time for them leave their Ebay, Etsy, and other online businesses for an afternoon. They needed to get out from in front of their computer screens and have fun," she says.

Parker says leadership is key, and that everyone takes their cues from Watts's great attitude.

Cicatiello agrees, adding

that "Lori handles everything, and both she and Sylvia know so many people here."

The team feels that the things they believe in are the things that build societies. For example, buying and wearing vintage clothing is a fashion statement, yes, but it is also much more than that. It is recycling. Collecting vintage jewelry or records or antique furniture is a form of historic preservation. The Market is not about being trendy. Rather, it



is about building culture, which in turn creates community, which then creates more culture.

"Upcycling and recycling are not trends," says Watts. "They are a way of life."

Parker takes this a step further, emphasizing that it represents a specific culture.

"To me, it's Southern culture. People didn't have a lot, and they made what they had work."

Parker also believes that it fills a need that corporate consumer culture simply cannot.

"People need authenticity," she says. "Everything has become so 'slick.' Even cartoons. People want something that's more genuine. The culture is so saturated. Our Market means simplicity. Taking ownership. I spend a good bit of time on Etsy. It amazes me how many people are into handmade. Even things that are so common...someone's buying them!"

Cicatiello adds that people are also really interested in putting their personal stamp on things and raising the ordinary to extraordinary. She uses a craft-show staple, the ubiquitous woven bracelet, to illustrate: "There are lots of woven bracelets for sale out there, but how did this person do it? Or that person?"

The initial overwhelmingly positive response has not wavered, and all agree that after the first year, the 5th Street Vintage Market seems to have been accepted as "legit." The vendors and customers represent a cross-section of the area. You are as likely to see a middle-aged interior decorator searching for that perfect, unique decorative item as you are to see a college student trying on 1970s hippie dresses over her clothing. You are as likely to see a focused, seasoned, and well-informed vinyl aficionado adding to his already sophisticated collection as you are to see an edgy high-school fashionista searching for the perfect one-of-a-kind prom dress.



From bamboo salsa by Black Belt Bamboost to hand-made jewelry, the 5th Street Market has something for everyone.

As Watts happily points out, “We attract the hipsters and the grandmas!”

Even in inclement weather, the market is full and great energy pulsates in the covered space, which is large enough to accommodate substantial crowds but still small enough to maintain the intimacy necessary to foster relationships that are at the heart of culture and community.

Friends of Historic Northport (FHP), a non-profit dedicated to preserving historic integrity, owns the space, generously allows them to use it and wholeheartedly supported the Market from the start. Cicatiello sits on their board, so she and the “dream team” are also dedicated to helping FHP. They have not considered other spaces, because they feel they have the perfect set-up.

“This one is nice and big and open,” says Watts, “and we also want to keep the Market in Northport.”

Future plans include having DJs and music, and they are looking into having the parking lot paved.

5th Street Vintage Market tries to help as many charitable causes as possible. The first year, they extended invitations to non-profits to offer concessions and did not allow for-profit food or

Upcycling and recycling are not trends. They are a way of life.

→ Lori Watts



drink vendors. The charitable organizations had difficulty getting volunteers to work their tables on Sunday afternoons, however, so now you can usually find Mary's Cakes serving up delightful soups, sandwiches, confections, coffee, and lemonade.

The Market continues to try to support causes like Black Belt Bamboost, The Humane Society of West Alabama, and Friends of Historic Northport. They offer free booth space to legitimate charities that are appropriate for the Market. Examples of "appropriate" would be organizations such as Books for Prisons and the Alabama Blues

Project. This Fall, the Boy Scouts will be selling popcorn.

The 5th Street Vintage Market is the kind of place where vendors might sit out one month, but still show up as customers, and customers became so inspired that they become vendors. And always, vendors are simultaneously customers, supporting each other and appreciating what each brings to the 5th Street feast.

George Hadjidakis, who for decades owned and operated Tuscaloosa's iconic Vinyl Solution record shop on the Strip, is still an avid vintage vinyl collector and dealer. You will usually find him at

the Market, often as a vendor but sometimes as a visitor and customer. Everything about it impresses him, and he especially loves the possibility of unearthing an unusual find.

"There are truly unique items that you don't see every day," he says. "I mean, tell me where else I can find a Rat Fink charm?"

He points out that many of the vendors are also collectors, so they bring special items to sell.

"Since I sell records, I would like to see more record people coming out," Hadjidakis continues. "There have been some really nice records for sale, but we need more



The Market offers a huge variety of vintage clothing.

people who would appreciate that an original Velvet Underground & Nico LP with an Andy Warhol cover is in their grasp. No big money for me yet, but it's fun to do it."

Like Hadjidakis, most vendors consider the community-building and networking opportunities to be just as important as making a profit.

Ione Williams, who specializes in mid-century vintage items and furniture, is a joyous fixture at the Market, and she is

thrilled with its success.

"It has actually given the public a place to come and enjoy conversation and experience a visual happening," she says. "It raises awareness of vintage and handmade because people can have conversations with vendors about the history of items."

Serena Blount Fortenberry, a very successful Etsy shop owner, sells a variety of vintage goods at the Market as both "Vintage Squalor," which is also the name of her Etsy

shop, and "Junkyard Genes." She echoes Hadjidakis's and Williams's emphasis on the Market's people.

"The vintage market has character," says Fortenberry. "I love it. Tuscaloosa often seems too 'new' for me. The folks who sell and shop at the Market, whether they know it or not, are preservation-minded. They eschew the bland, mass-produced consumer culture for something more interesting. I love that." It also introduces her to new friends. She enjoys meeting other vendors, and finds it refreshing to meet like-minded people. The Market has also helped her online business, and vice versa.

Noelle Butler, another vendor/customer, thinks the Market fills several community gaps. "So many 'antique' venues seem to be a mix of old and new these days," she says. "It's refreshing to find a place to shop that for the most part is true vintage and handmade. Sort of like the glory days of Ebay before it became mainstream. It's also the perfect escape for a Sunday afternoon, and Tuscaloosa has needed an option like this for so long."

Butler, who has a demanding full-time job as a buyer for the University's campus bookstore, participates as a vendor mostly because she wants to support the Market, but she is also impressed with the dream team's emphasis on raising awareness for worthy causes.

"I remember after Hurricane Sandy there was a silent auction to benefit Norton Records," she says. "I thought that was pretty cool."

The 5th Street Vintage Market is a "destination" venue. It might feel like an "event" because it happens only once a month, but it is

much more than that. It draws people in, but it is also more than a Sunday afternoon shopping experience.

Cicatiello, Parker, and Watts built it and people come. They know their audience, and feel strongly that they offer something special. The Market is painstakingly curated. There are plenty of flea and crafts markets and other antique and vintage venues, but there is not another event or venue around that is so carefully and lovingly assembled. This “dream team” trio of curators puts as much thought and care into what is sold at the Market as their vendors put into the items they collect and create. They all emphasize that is what makes the 5th Street Vintage Market different. That, and one other important thing, summarized in a simple question posed by Cicatiello. “Is your heart in it? People can see that. They’ll be back.” ★

All photographs are courtesy 5th Street Market: Jamie Cicatiello, Rusty LuQuire and Allison Olson.

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Directions to the Market:

Take 5th Street from downtown Northport toward Kentucky Park. Pass the park (which will be on your left) and keep following 5th street until you see the Tuscaloosa Farmers Market sign, which will be on your right.



For More Information

Visit the 5th Street Vintage Market website at:

5thstreetvintagemarket.com

and their Facebook page:

facebook.com/5thStreetVintageMarket