A market with a cause at Gloucester’s old paint factory

By Stephanie Iancu



Despite gusty winds and predictions of stormy weather, the Cape Ann Makers Market brought together over 20 local artisans who showcased their crafts at the old paint factory in Gloucester, Massachusetts. The event was hosted by Ocean Alliance, a local nonprofit organization promoting marine conservation off Cape Ann's coast.

Visitors were able to shop from a wide variety of sellers, whose products ranged from homemade scented candles to locally harvested sea salt. Deanna Fay, the co-founder of the Makers Market, said that all vendors were selected based on their commitment to sustainable practices and materials.

“We put a lot of emphasis on original designs, creativity, materials and quality of work,” said Fay, who also owns Hold Fast Company, a small business that makes natural soaps and home goods.

Fay and co-founder Anna Baglaneas-Eves came up with the idea of a summer market when they realized that most craftspeople on Cape Ann could only sell their products locally during the holiday season.

"Ultimately our goal was to provide opportunities for vendors like ourselves," said Fay. "It was just one of those ‘someone should do this’ ideas. And we thought ‘I guess *we* should do this then.’"

They also sought inspiration from SoWa, Boston’s arts district, which hosts open markets every Sunday from May to October.

"We asked ourselves ‘How do we take this concept and adapt it to Cape Ann?’ So we did some brainstorming and went to talk to someone from the city about it and then we landed on the idea of the Makers Market,” said Fay.

Fay said that they originally thought of turning the market into a nonprofit event, as most other markets charge high table fees that certain small vendors cannot afford. They then thought about Ocean Alliance and decided that they could instead collaborate by charging a much smaller fee than other markets and donating the full proceeds to the nonprofit. “It’s a win-win for the community,” said Fay.

The money will be used to fund a drone project to study whales off the Cape Ann coast. The team is also working to restore the paint factory to use as a headquarters.

The founders and hosts also wanted to showcase crafts that fit in well with Ocean Alliance’s mission of protecting marine biodiversity.

“We want to support the blue economy of the region,” said Alicia Pensarosa, assistant director of Ocean Alliance. She also said that the event would help spread the word about Ocean Alliance’s work and the fact that they will be hosting various other events at the site throughout the year.

Many vendors said that their products are passion projects and that the amount of time required to make them matters very little. Jean Davis, a local reiki practitioner and teacher who creates images of reiki energized crystals, said that she trusts her creative instincts to lead her toward the finished products in due time.

“It’s a process that requires patience, but I’m just grateful,” she said. Baraka Robin Berger, an artist and printmaker who paints women of myth and history, said that her main intention was to turn her artwork into a healing force and that, although attending events and markets required a lot of energy, she found it fulfilling.

Artisans and residents alike flocked to the market for the sense of community it provided after two years of pandemic isolation.

“It’s nice to just interact with people here,” said Laura Richard, who owns the small nonprofit business Syrup for Syria, which sells maple syrup extracted from trees in her backyard and donates all profits to the International Rescue Committee. She said that she and her husband were glad for this opportunity to act locally while also supporting an important faraway cause.

Fay noticed many Cape Ann residents shopping locally during the pandemic.

"I feel like there is a lot of support [for markets] in the community in general and certainly after COVID people were feeling a bit more community-oriented. They also didn’t want to go too far from home, so the fact that we were doing a local event and trying to make it as safe as possible received a lot of support," said Fay.

"This is a covid business we started two years ago, when [our main business] Cape Ann Giclee got shut down for two months," said James Eves, co-founder of Cape Ann Sea Salt and husband of founder Baglaneas-Eves. The couple now sells their sea salt — which is collected from the beach of neighboring town Rockport and uses natural evaporation processes — at about two markets a week.

A second Makers Market is set to take place on August 18.