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TOP STORY

## Food Park, farmers mart big in East Mesa

By Srianthi Perera, GetOut Contributor

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Ryan Alarie, who created the Red Mountain Farmers Market three seasons ago, also sells a brand of seasonings called RA Seasonings.

Special to GetOut

Northeast Mesa has a new open-air dining destination that also doubles as a community gathering spot.

The Power Food Park on Power Road between Brown and McKellips roads had two successful opening weekends in December and is now ready to serve its own brand of fare and fun.

Four to eight food trucks will be available 5-9 p.m. Monday to Saturday on a rotating basis.

Maui Wowi, Detroit Coney Cruiser, 4 Ate O, Classics Crepes Eatery and Bonzai Boyz are among those that have participated. Some trucks sell new concepts, while others are established.

The Red Mountain Farmers Market is held at the site on Saturdays from 8 a.m. to noon.

The site has plenty of seating placed apart and features campfire pits that are available by reservation. Grassy areas are available for recreational backyard games such as cornhole.

David Darling of Mesa, who co-owns the business with Ray Johnson, is the owner of the one-and-a-quarter acre site and the adjoining acre that's used for parking.

"I'm originally from the Pacific Northwest and there's a big food truck community in the Pacific Northwest. We've always had an affinity toward them and that community," he said.

Darling owned the property for many years and attempted to do many projects on it.

"We felt like the best use for the property would be creating a community space and supporting a small business. Within that community space, I've created an outdoor gathering space especially during COVID," he said.

"We decided we'll create a food park where we can come together as a community in a safe way during COVID and support small businesses."

Darling figured correctly about the area needing a community space: During the two days in December that the park was open, there were more than 2,000 people each night.

“One of the more encouraging aspects of what we’ve done is how supportive the community has been and how enthusiastic they’ve been about supporting the space,” he said.

Among his supporters is Amy Gregory, who decries the lack of dining spaces in the area. She took her extended family there recently; it is about four miles from her home.

“It was so great to have a fun dining option close to home, in the heart of Mesa: a great ambiance, awesome food and really just a fun environment for families,” she said. “Mesa never has anything fun and finally they have this.”

Usually, Gregory takes her family to a dining spot in Gilbert, Chandler, Tempe or Scottsdale.

“I love Mesa and I want to build Mesa. I don’t want to build Scottsdale, I want to build Mesa,” said Gregory, who’s a real estate agent.

Ryan Alarie, who grew up in east Mesa, created the Red Mountain Farmers Market three seasons ago.

He started at Mesa Community College-Red Mountain Campus and had to move because of the pandemic. He moved the market to the parking lot at Zaharis Elementary School, but Mesa Public Schools asked him to move – again because of the pandemic.

Alarie thinks he’s found the perfect location in the Power Food Park.

“It’s great; there’s plenty of seating, rides, games, it’s a real nice set up for a farmer’s market,” he said.

Open on Saturdays from October to April, the market features 60-70 vendors from across the Valley mainly selling meats, fruit, vegetables, artisan fare, pantry goods, spices, hot sauce and jewelry. It attracts about 1,000 people each day.

Alarie himself sells all-natural seasoning blends, called RA Seasonings.

Darling said his idea caught on easily because it has been a really difficult year for small businesses because of COVID.

Husband and wife team Justin and Lindsey Olsen of east Mesa debuted their new mobile eatery, 4 Ate O, at the park; they created the business due to loss of employment.

Justin, a chef of nearly 17 years, has worked in many prestigious restaurants and was last employed by Scottsdale Beer Company, which laid him off because of the pandemic.

Lindsey is also a restaurant professional, who has worked at Lons at the Hermosa Inn and Sheraton Hotel Downtown Phoenix, among others.

“We started this business out of need and desire to do our own thing,” Justin said. “My wife and I decided to take a leap of faith and pour everything we have into our own business where we can make decisions that are best for us and our family. We ordered a custom-built trailer and within about four to five months we are up and running with perfect timing.

“Our first official night open was with them on their grand opening as well,” he added. “It was a crazy busy night for us and we were so pumped for them to give us the opportunity to be there. It’s a great venue, nothing else like it in town or possibly the state.”

“That’s what we’re trying to foster,” Darling said. “It’s supporting these small businesses and the food trucks during a difficult time.”

Keep in touch with Power Food Park at [facebook.com/powerfoodpark](https://www.facebook.com/powerfoodpark).