

Business

Green Scene has organic, natural, and locally-raised foods

by Gail DeBoer
Staff writer

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The recent relocation and expansion of the Green Scene fresh organic market in Walker reflects not just customers' growing appetites for organic foods but the growth of the organic marketplace in general.

On June 1, the Green Scene, owned by Erin Andrus, opened its first "bricks and mortar" retail store at 617 Michigan Ave. W., Walker.

Andrus describes her business as a "specialty food store."

The Green Scene offers organic, natural and locally-raised produce and groceries; locally-raised grass-fed beef, hormone-free chicken and bacon; gluten-free products; frozen entrees; fruits and vegetables; locally-made breads; soy and dairy products; locally-made goat cheese; natural cleaning supplies; bath and beauty products; and more.

Weekly produce boxes were the cornerstone of the Green Scene, when it started in 2007, and they continue to be popular items.

Still just \$25, a produce box has enough fresh organic produce to feed a family of two to four for a week. In season, the produce box contain locally-raised fruits and veggies, while the rest of the year, organic produce comes through traditional distribution channels.

With every box, Andrus includes recipes to help customers utilize unfamiliar items. Customers can pick and choose the weeks they want to participate. Box pickup is every Thursday between 2 and 6 p.m. at the Green Scene.

Back in 2007, Andrus and her friend Theresa Bilben of Village Square were trying to find sources for organic produce. They finally decided to order in bulk and split the excess with other friends.

As things went on, Andrus discovered locally-raised organic produce at seasonal farmers' markets in Hackensack and Bemidji and added that to the boxes.

By January 2008, Andrus was working out of her garage, busily dividing and packing produce into weekly boxes and delivering them to homes in Walker, Hackensack, Nevis, Brainerd and beyond.

This part of Andrus' business is based on the Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) model, she says, except that Andrus buys from multiple sources, not just one producer, and offers produce boxes year-round.

"In season we find whoever locally grows the best carrots, the best kale; but in winter, we use the traditional distribution channels," she explains.

Finally last winter, with her kids in school, Andrus decided to take the next step. She assumed sole ownership of the Green Scene and started looking for a storefront. She found a building, wrote a business plan, arranged financing and closed on the building in early February. Four months later, the Green Scene opened at the corner of Michigan Avenue and Seventh Street, across from SuperOne Foods.

The convenient location with ample parking allows Green Scene to host a summer Farmer's Market in the



Green Scene employee Hannah Andersen stocks a cooler with organic vegetables. Photo submitted

parking lot Thursdays through Sept. 22. Hours are 2 to 6 p.m., except on three Crazy Days Thursdays, when the Farmer's Market runs from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m.

"We don't have a ton of agriculture in our area," Andrus remarked, "but we have King Gardens of Longville as our anchor — they grow produce in hoop houses. As the summer goes on and gardens begin to produce, we'll have more vendors."

The next Walker Crazy Days July 21 is also The Green Scene's official Grand Opening Celebration. As well as the Farmer's Market, there will be live music, cooking demonstrations and activities for the entire family.

Green Scene's fresh deli officially opened July 1, featuring "grab and go" lunch or snack items. Andrus says everything is made and packaged daily and includes a vegetarian item, a gluten-free item, hearty sandwiches, salads, spreads and dips. "Good for shoppers, visitors and employees at downtown businesses," she suggests.

Catering is another major part of what Green Scene offers — everything from box lunches for meetings to party platters to full-service event catering with entrees, salads, soups, spreads, desserts and much more.

This winter, Andrus and other instructors will offer evening cooking classes at the store; details will be forthcoming.

She sees her business as supplementing the standard supermarket or grocery, not competing with it. The difference is not just the wider range of organic and natural products she can offer, but personal service.

"At the Green Scene, every employee has a background in foods and can guide, educate and assist customers on how to use unfamiliar foods," she says. "We have the time to demonstrate products and produce."

The Green Scene, located at 617 Michigan Ave., Walker, is open Monday through Saturday, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Their website is www.walkergreenscene.com. Stop by or call (218) 547-2880.

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