

Longtime favorite restaurateurs to open fresh produce market

By Katie Garwood
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When the Stewart's Market building on Anastasia Boulevard went up for lease last month, Jeff and Genie McNally knew they needed to move quickly.

Living in the Davis Shores neighbor, the McNallys — who also own The Floridian restaurant in downtown St. Augustine — saw a need for a local market: Any time they needed a few items at the store, it would mean driving to a grocery store at least 15 minutes away.

So when Stewart's Market — which carried fresh produce, meats and cheeses — closed down after 30 years, the McNallys felt called to act.

"We saw the space go up for lease and we said 'somebody needs to do it,'" Jeff said. "As is often the case with us, we tend to be those somebodies. We think we can do it, we can do it right, we're going to partner up with some good people, we're going to do it right for the neighborhood so that somebody doesn't get it and do something silly because the space is designed to be a grocery store, it should be a market."

Within 24 hours of looking at the space and speaking with the building's previous owner, the property was theirs.

Now, they plan to open The Market at Stewart's in July, offering much of what Stewart's Market used to, but with an updated approach. The market will sell fresh produce, cheese and meats as well as specialty and gourmet items, prepared meals and sandwiches for takeout, dips and spreads and a local beer and wine selection.

The layout will be pretty similar to that of Stewart's Market, but the store in the process of being renovated.

The McNallys hope to keep price points for their products low so fresh food can be accessible to more people, especially those in the neighborhood who may not have a car but still need groceries. In addition to basic produce, they also plan on offering organic produce for those who want more Whole Foods-type options.

“We want folks to be able to find good, locally-sourced goods who may not be able to reach those price points,” Genie said.

For tourists who happen to pass through the store, some souvenir items such as cocktail kits or coffee beans will be available as well.

But one main goal for the store is to serve the surrounding community, especially those who live on the eastern side of the Bridge of Lions. A similar store, Rype and Readi came to downtown St. Augustine earlier this year, but has a produce-heavy focus. Also, when it comes to getting fresh produce, crossing the bridge into downtown isn’t worth the hassle for many beachside residents.

“If there was a Rype and Readi-type store in this neighborhood, we would have washed our hands of the whole thing,” Jeff said. “We set out to fill what we see as a void on this side of the bridge. A lot of people just aren’t going to go downtown, especially to buy groceries. They’re going to think about getting behind a horse and carriage, getting stuck in traffic. I believe plenty of people in St. Augustine will come check us out, but from the Bridge of Lions to [the S.R. 312 bridge], they don’t have anything convenient so I want to be there for them.”

The Market at Stewart’s, much like The Floridian, will focus largely on offering locally-sourced goods. But it’s nearly impossible to buy everything locally since some things, like avocados, simply aren’t grown locally. And sometimes, the highest quality food is grown out-of-state.

The market will use some of the same sources as The Floridian, but will feature new sources too.

“There’s a lot of people who want to work with us because they know we’re starting the venture,” Genie said. “We’ve had a lot of folks reach out and say ‘Hey, we want you to sell our products.’”

The McNallys will have two longtime friends and coworkers running the daily operations at the Market at Stewart’s. Gaston Euschiazzo is a chef and will manage the food aspects of the operation, and his wife Amy Tarmey, who has worked in restaurants for years, will handle marketing and accounting for the market.

The Market at Stewart’s wasn’t something the McNallys had planned on. They saw an opportunity and jumped on it, which for them, makes sense. Even when they started The Floridian seven years ago, Jeff said they “never knew” how it would turn out. With this venture, Jeff said the feeling is similar.

“Some people things we’re crazy maybe with the different ventures we take on,” Jeff said. “Some people have their hobbies, their art. Our art is creating these spaces. Genie’s a chef, so her art is food as well, but for me, I’m not a chef. It’s kind of taking ideas and visions and having them come to life which is really exciting to me.”