

PRESERVING THE HERITAGE

OBSERVATION:

The purpose of this study is to rediscover the Roanoke City Market and to propose improvements that will preserve its heritage.

DISCUSSION:

During the charrette, the design team started every meeting with the obvious concept of putting the farmers and their market activities first in all considerations.

The farmers have been the heart and soul of the City Market since its inception. Making the City Market a vibrant, successful venue is the primary reason for this study. The longstanding presence of the farmers is the reason this important public place is what it is today. Across the United States, farmer's markets are one of the few authentic places left where the related activities have been in constant and continuous operation as a market from day one. The idea was for the design team to do everything possible to make this fantastic kind of regional marketplace grow into the whole being bigger than the sum of the parts.

People across the country have rediscovered regionalism. The era of the "three-thousand mile Caesar salad" that is shipped in from California is ending. Now the trend is toward growing and marketing your apples locally and reaping the wonderful benefits that go with regionalism.

Fortunately Roanoke has had the benefit of this regional agricultural base in the form of the

City Market forever. So the return to regionalism is part of the local strategy. One of the first things explored was to determine an effective way to highlight the farmers and their family history. The design team made mock-ups of a typical farmer's history display board. The first attempt was based on a hypothetical farm, but it used local images to communicate the farmer's message to the shopping public. When people from other places come to the Roanoke City Market, one could imagine that they would want to know all about the farmers, the produce and where it was grown.

Compare this experience with traveling in the Carolinas, for instance, and stopping at a roadside market on the way to the coast. You buy what you believe are local peaches in June, but you see semi trucks parked in the shadows. As you drive away, you notice there are no peach trees, and you realize that the peaches were grown in some other part of the country. Because the peaches were not ripe when they were picked for shipping, they have no taste!

What Roanoke's City Market offers is produce usually picked the same day. Most of the farmers in the City Market today have been selling produce there for four generations. That historical connection is a phenomenal draw for customers. That makes it important to feature the regional aspect of the City Market and make it the corner stone of this plan.

Roanoke's City Market area has been recognized as one of the most authentic places in

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America. Roanoke is a city with a sense of itself. Its citizens know that the success of Roanoke depends on the success of the City Market. Roanoke is a city with the farmer's market at the center of its soul.

As the charrette activities moved forward, a farmer's display board prototype became an exercise using Woods' Farms as the actual location. The story line became the Woods' history and the Woods' family seemed to embrace the fact that their story was worth telling and was interesting to other people. As can be seen in the images of this study, the display board is attached to the farmer's stall canopy post above the produce table of Woods' Farm. Through this simple graphic image, the customers can see where the apples were grown just by looking at the display board.

This is how the entire study came to be thought about by the design team. The City Market area should be thought about as a puzzle with many important pieces. This study is the assembling of all the pieces into a homogenous work of art or perhaps a canvas. The City Market study approaches the new design as a whole plan or complete entity. The design team has spent time to reach an extremely fine-grained level of sensitivity; they looked at the essence of what the City Market is all about. Hopefully, everything that is presented herein

reinforces this ideology.

The study is not intended to be the end result; it is the beginning. It is a springboard to implementation and exploration. One hopes that the process of rediscovery continues to occur, to reinforce what the City Market is all about. The most easily recognized problem might be that the City Market is just not being maintained properly, as opposed to being in need of a major overall. That idea is being left for further discussion. But since it was a hallmark of Design '79 and is still a hallmark today, the Roanoke Farmer's Market must be redesigned to look new at least every three or four years regardless of whether the canopy stalls are replaced or upgraded as is.

FINDINGS:

The authentic regional connection of the farmers and market vendors to the public should be promoted and celebrated as much as possible. That result can be easily accomplished by displaying a plaque for each farmer and market vendor at each stall or vending site. Each plaque would tell each individual farmer's story including the regional connection. This project is proposed to be included in the farmer's stall and market building improvement projects budget.



Each farmer and market vendor will have a plaque displayed at their stall or vending site that tells their story, including their connection to this region.