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FEATURED

Dowells named Farmers Market Champions of the Year for 2011

Jul 8, 2011



Dr. Larry Dowell talks with 7-year-old vendor Chloe Gertner at the Fair Grove Farmers Market. He and his wife Josephine have offered advice and encouragement to Chloe and many other members of the market's Growing with Kids Club.

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The Missouri Department of Agriculture announced that Larry and Josephine Dowell of Strafford have been named 2011 Champions of the Year for their work to promote gardening, locally-grown foods and farmers markets.



The Dowells were recognized Wednesday, June 29, at the Fair Grove Farmers Market, where they are members.

The Champion of the Year award, sponsored by AgriMissouri and the Missouri Farmers Market Association, recognizes the contributions individuals make to Missouri's farmers markets, to their communities, to Missouri farmers, and the efforts of those individuals to share their passion with others.

"We are proud of the great contributions the Dowells have made toward teaching youth in their community the importance of growing fresh fruits and vegetables," said Director of Agriculture Dr. Jon Hagler. "The Dowells' commitment to sharing their love of gardening with others is inspiring and their recognition as 2011 Champions of the Year is well-deserved."

Larry and Josephine Dowell have been fixtures at the Fair Grove Farmers Market for the last seven years. Larry, a retired doctor in Strafford, and Josephine, a retired nurse, donate their time each week to the 345-member Fair Grove Farmers' Market Growing with Kids club. They also distribute plants, seeds and advice to novice gardeners.

They are both Master Gardeners through the University of Missouri Cooperative Extension Service's Master Gardener program and donate far more time to the markets' youth than the program's required 30 hours of community service.

One of the young people influenced by the Dowells was at the market Wednesday evening, both for the Dowells' recognition and to sell produce of her own. Chloe Gertner, a 7-year-old member of the Growing with Kids club, sells fresh basil she has grown with advice and encouragement from the Dowells at the market.

"Our market thrives on children," said Deb VanBenthusen, manager of the Fair Grove market. "The Dowells have gone above and beyond the call of duty to make a positive impact on the Fair Grove Farmers Market and the community. From the advice and encouragement from the Dowells, Chloe has learned how to grow her own garden, at the age of 7. Now she will be learning the business skills of selling her own produce."



Chloe has been a member of the Growing with Kids Club for four years.

State Rep. Shane Schoeller also visited the market Wednesday evening, where he presented the Dowells with a House Resolution recognizing their achievement.

The Fair Grove Farmers Market is open every Wednesday from 3:30 to 7 p.m.

