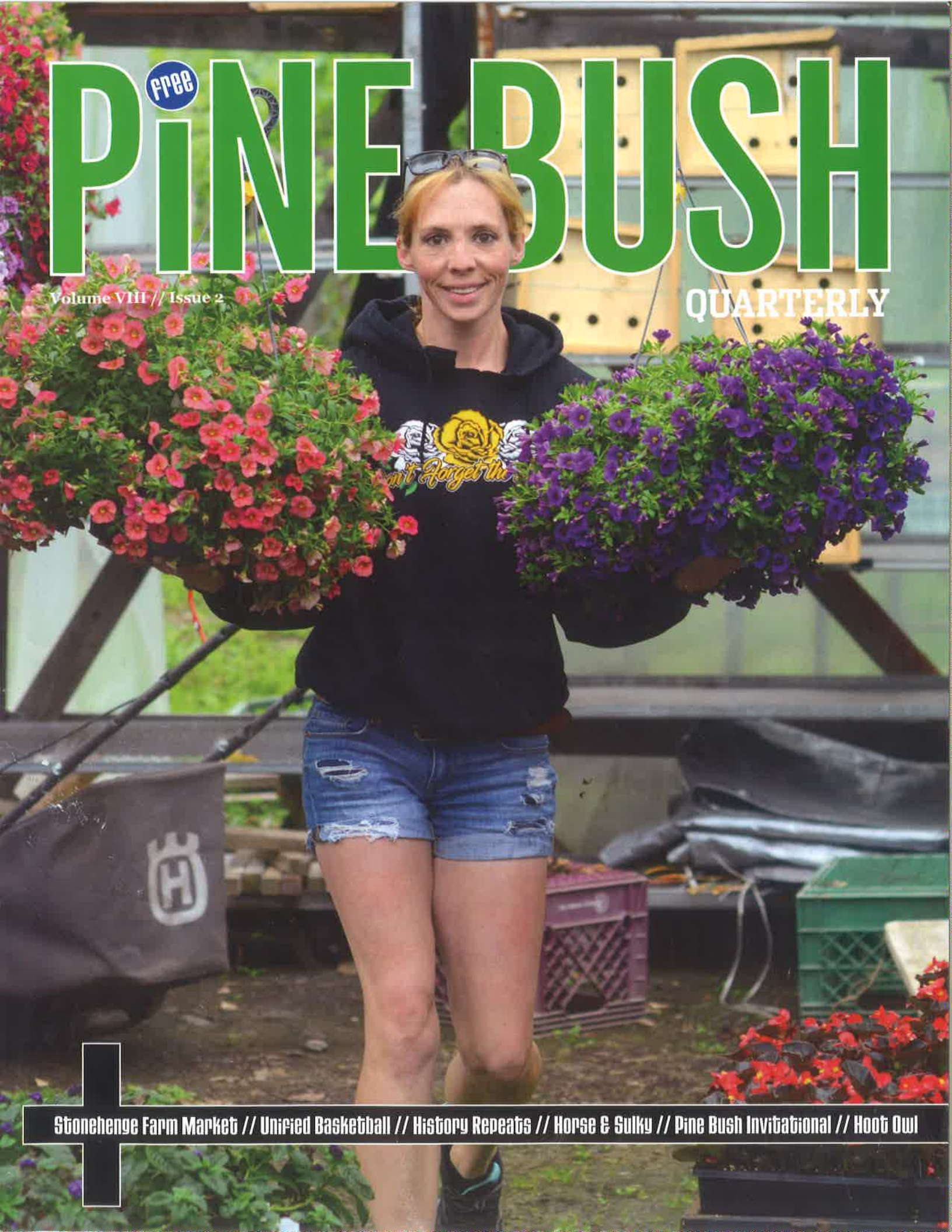


FREE PINE BUSH

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QUARTERLY



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The Magic of Stonehenge Farm Market

By RACHEL COLEMAN // Photos by JOHN KIDD

"I like that it's always changing. Every year, something is different," said Kate Loechner, manager of Stonehenge Farm Market.

Stonehenge Farm Market has been serving the community since 1972, perched at the crossroads of State Route 302 and State Route 17K in Bullville. It includes a wide array of plants, local produce, and local products like honey and eggs.

"We do both. It's not just a farm market. It's not just a garden center," said Loechner. "From pansies in March to Christmas trees in December, everything is always changing and that's really why I love it."

Local produce will be flooding into Stonehenge in the next few weeks and by mid-July, about 80 percent of the produce will come from local farms in Gardiner, Maybrook, and Goshen, much of it from the Black Dirt farms.

"We buy local so you can too," said Loechner.

Depending on the season, customers will find local strawberries, corn, pumpkins, and other fruits and vegetables. Meanwhile, customers can also buy seeds and plants in the garden center to create their own verdant landscape, whether that is with a flower garden, vegetable garden, or shrubs.

"Nine out of ten times, we have what you're looking for," said Loechner.

Loechner noted that customers can expect the best quality, as she hand-selects about 70 percent of what they offer from local greenhouses.

"I hand pick it myself. We take our time to find quality products," said Loechner.

Loechner has been in the business for 20 years, starting at Thompson Ridge at age 14, and then spending the last nine years pouring herself into the Stonehenge Farm Market.

"You're just go-go-go, all the time. You have to love it. You have to have a passion for it," said Loechner. "It keeps you on your toes in good ways and bad ways. We're always busy. There's never a time where there's nothing to do."

"I've never had my own garden, but I can tell you the type of soil and fertilizer that you need," said Loechner, explaining that she lives vicariously through photos of her customers' gardens as she doesn't have time to cultivate her own garden. "I've always wanted to do this. I work seven days a week...and I love every second of it!"

"It's absolutely wonderful,"

— Kate Loechner





And her passion hasn't gone unnoticed, judging by customer response.

She estimated that about 80 percent of her customers are repeat customers, with the same customer sometimes coming in three to four times per week.

"We have a very loyal customer base," said Loechner. "We're part of the community. It's what really sets us apart. Everyone knows Stonehenge on the corner."

What people may not know is that tucked away behind the market is a plant "hospital." Rather than simply getting rid of plants that are struggling, Loechner moves the plants to the hospital and they are nursed back to health by a woman who tries to save as many as she can.

Sometimes they're sent home gratis with a customer, with the hope that they can help it thrive.

"We try to give everything a fighting chance. We don't throw things away," said Loechner.

That goes for their produce as well. Rather than let food go to waste, Stonehenge sends a regular weekly donation of produce to the Montgomery Food Pantry. The produce that is no longer edible for humans is donated to a local pig farm and animal sanctuary.

"We absolutely love it. It's going somewhere and it's not going in the dumpster," said Loechner. "It's going to a family and that makes us feel good."

Stonehenge also helps their customers keep from wasting food. Customers who find themselves blessed with an overabundance of produce from their gardens—whether it is cucumbers or blueberries—can bring it to Stonehenge in exchange for store credit. This means if you need some local eggs or tomatoes and have pounds of blueberries you'll never eat, head over to Stonehenge where the spirit of the barter system is still alive and well.

While things are going well for Stonehenge Farm Market, it's not all blue skies—literally.

"The most difficult part is the weather," said Loechner. "If we have bad weather around us, it hurts the plants. It affects us even from across the country. The farmers are hurting right now."



Loechner explained that each year crops are affected by bad weather, insects, and disease. She recalled that three years ago there were no peaches in New York State because of a frost right after Mother's Day.

"It's what the weather does," said Loechner. "Weather can be really brutal on stuff. You just have to roll with it. It's the nature of the business."

This year, the mild winter has many local crops from strawberries to corn running about two weeks later than usual.

"But regardless of the weather, it's really been our best year so far," said Loechner. "I have the best people I could possibly have working with me right now. I couldn't do this without them."

Loechner said her crew has a passion for the business and a thirst for knowledge about plants and produce.

"It's absolutely wonderful," said Loechner.

In fact, she's found that the chief complaint from her customers is that Stonehenge closes for two to three months after Christmas. Loechner plans to speak with the owner about keeping Stonehenge open all year round. In the meantime, they're hoping to hold their second annual customer appreciation weekend in August.



"It's going to a family and that makes us feel good."



Discover the magic of Stonehenge Farm Market for yourself and visit them at: 1401 State Route 302, Bullville, NY 10915.