



## Mayor Richards, Friends of the Public Market Celebrate Success of Market Token Program

(Thursday, April 19, 2012) — Mayor Thomas S. Richards and members of the volunteer Friends of the Public Market announced today that the Rochester Public Market's *Market Token Program* has earned the rank of the most successful such program in New York State and one of the leading programs of its kind in the country.

The *Market Token Program* allows beneficiaries of the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP), often referred to as food stamps, to use those benefits to purchase healthy food at the Rochester Public Market. Program beneficiaries purchase \$1 or \$5 wooden tokens with their SNAP benefits.

"The Friends of the Market have successfully tackled one of the most challenging issues in our community issues, connecting low-income individuals and families with healthy food," said Mayor Richards. "The Public Market has provided some of the finest quality foods in the Rochester area for more than 100 years, and this program is extending this Rochester treasure to our entire community."

"The success of this program is astounding and surpasses our expectations," said Commissioner of the Department of Recreation Youth Services Luis Burgos, whose department manages the Market. "But we have plenty of room to grow. So I hope more people will learn about this program and take advantage of the healthy offerings found at the Rochester Public Market."

"This program has a substantially positive economic impact on our community," said Friends of the Market volunteer and Market Token Program Manager Margaret O'Neill. "More and more consumers are supporting our local growers and entrepreneurs; eating more fruits and vegetables is one of the most effective strategies to achieving a healthy lifestyle."

The *Market Token Program* has grown significantly since it was launched in 2008, from \$50,000 in transactions to \$440,000 in 2011. That represented 30 percent of such tokens sold at all farmers markets across the state. This total also exceeds that of several states' entire collection of farmers markets.

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Despite the growth and success of the program, current Market Token sales represent only 4 percent of all SNAP benefit dollars in Monroe County. As the 2012 special event season of the Public Market kicks off Sunday with the first Garage Sale and Super Flea at the Market of the year, program administrators hope to continue growing the program in the coming months.

Funds from the Greater Rochester Health Foundation have helped with further marketing of the program.

Using SNAP benefits at the Market is easy. Electronic Benefit Transfer Cards, or EBT Cards, are swiped and redeemed for tokens, which can be used to purchase food items from Market vendors. Friends of the Market volunteers dispense tokens at the central Market Office.

Seventy percent of tokens are used to purchase fruits and vegetables. Other eligible foods at the Market include meat, fish and poultry; cheese and dairy products; baked goods, honey; spices and herbs; pasta; and also plants that produce food. *A recent Market Token Program* customer survey showed that 75 percent of *Market Token Program* participants are eating more fruits and vegetables than ever before.

Community groups and service agencies are invited to learn more about the *Market Token Program* by contacting O'Neill at (585) 325-5058. More information is also available online at [www.cityofrochester.gov/markettokenprogram](http://www.cityofrochester.gov/markettokenprogram). More information on Friends of the Market can be found at [www.marketfriends.org](http://www.marketfriends.org).

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News Media: For more information, contact Market Director Jim Farr at 428-6866.