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\$3 SUNDAY, FEBRUARY 23, 2020 THE PLAIN DEALER CLEVELAND.COM MN

SUNDAY PLAIN DEALER

WATCHDOG

Weighing the future of the West Side Market



Customers and vendors have long expressed concern over the market's hours and a desire to make changes to better align with present-day shopping habits. Both groups have suggested opening later and staying open later. The city has said a change in market hours will "be dealt with soon." Marvin Fong, The Plain Dealer

Looking ahead: Customer survey suggests changes, city plans to hire consultant

Laura DeMarco ldemarco@plaind.com

It's a dreary Friday morning on West 25th Street outside the West Side Market. Everything is gray: the streets, the sky, the mood.

But inside Cleveland's iconic market, a burst of color and fragrance greets patrons. Moms with strollers, businesspeople on their lunch break and seniors with bursting bags stroll the aisles looking over a selection of sausages, hummus and freshly baked breads.

The market isn't particularly busy this wintry weekday, but it is full of life.

But for how long?

Tough questions about the future of the 107-year-old, city-operated market, which has seen an exodus of vendors and hasn't turned a profit since 2013.

Most significantly, is city leadership willing and able to adapt to changing times?

It's a question that begins with the customers. In an era when most women work outside the home and a majority of customers do not live in walking distance, the market needs to give people reasons to visit. A shopping trip is an investment of time and effort, especially with far more competition than 100 years ago.

To that end, the City of Cleveland recently undertook a customer survey asking market shoppers about their shopping habits and what they want from the market. City of Cleveland Chief Operating Officer Darnell Brown said the city is prepared to act on what it has learned.

West Side Market Tenants Association president and owner of D.W. Whitaker Meats Don Whitaker said, "that sounds great ... but the same old system is not going to work."

Both the city and the Tenants' Association agree it is a pivotal time for the market.

CHALLENGES AHEAD

Inside the market, 11 of 98 stands are vacant, and in the outside produce area, 39 of 81 are vacant.

The last few years have seen the loss of several popular vendors, including Turczyk's Meats and Maha's Falafil at the end of 2019. Michael Turczyk cited unaddressed plumbing and electrical issues as major concerns, as well as fewer shoppers. Two of the most buzzed-about stands in recent years, Bon Bon pastries and Ora Bell's Southern Kitchen, quietly closed January 1.

Upon his 2017 closure of Vince's Meats, Vince Bertolaschi also cited fewer customers as a major factor. He and others have said the market never rebounded from the nine-month parking lot construction in 2016.

"We average 1.2 million (visitors) a year. Historically we've been as high as 1.8 million. As with any business, we have our ebbs and flows throughout the year. Our peaks are during the summer months and around holidays," said a city spokesman.

Whitaker said, "no growth is what bothers me."

The market's 2019 budget shows a projected loss of \$339,000, following a \$260,000 deficit in 2018. "The market is expected to pay for itself," said COO Brown at a recent 90.3 Sound of Ideas community tour forum on the West Side Market. "It does not."

Several stakeholders have come up with ideas for the market, including Ward 3 Councilman Kerry McCormack and restaurateur Rocco Whalen.

SEE WEST SIDE MARKET, A12



Advance Local

West Side Market

Managed by: The City of Cleveland owns the market. Felicia Y. Hall is Manager of Markets.

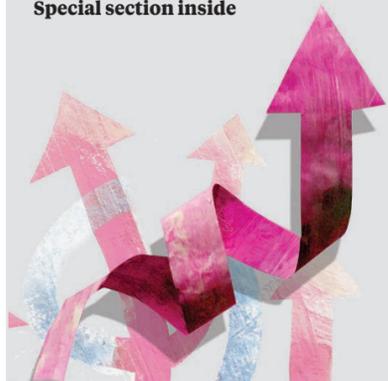
Number of stands: 98 inside (11 currently vacant) and 81 outside (39 vacant)

Hours: 7 a.m. – 4 p.m. Monday and Wednesday; 7 a.m. – 6 p.m. Friday and Saturday; 10 a.m. – 4 p.m. Sunday.

Full-time employees: Six

A sense of direction

Mentoring Monday: Business women in leadership roles can help a new generation catapult their careers. **Special section inside**



EDUCATION

Voucher schools escape test score scrutiny

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An F grade for Cleveland Heights High School's graduation rate let more students use vouchers this year, officially to escape a "failing" school for a better one.

But Ohio doesn't ensure that schools that accept vouchers are any better than "failing" ones.

Though public schools can be labeled as underperforming by their state report card grades, Ohio law doesn't calculate graduation rates or issue report cards for any of the private schools receiving about \$400 million in tax-funded tuition aid.

While more Heights students started using vouchers at schools like Yeshiva Derech Hatorah, the Beaumont School and the high schools of the Hebrew Academy of Cleveland, they did so without data to reliably determine if the schools offered a better-quality education.

SEE VOUCHERS, A9

CORONAVIRUS

Cleveland hospitals prepare for potential cases

Ginger Christ and Julie E. Washington gchrist@plaind.com and jwashington@plaind.com

As the novel coronavirus, called COVID-19, continues to spread across the globe, Cleveland's major hospitals are preparing for potential cases.

From screening patients for the virus to protecting medical providers, local health care systems are taking precautions to ensure that if they do get a case of COVID-19, it doesn't spread, as it has in China.

"Part of preparedness is thinking ahead," said Dr. Amy Ray, medical director of infection prevention at the MetroHealth System.

As of Thursday, more than 75,000 cases have been reported worldwide with more than 2,100 deaths, most of which are concentrated in China, the epicenter of the outbreak, according to the World Health Organization.

SEE CORONAVIRUS, A14

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