

Donna Carle mama to Pittsboro Farmers Market

By Judy Hogan

She calls us Mama if we're older than she is, women farmers and customers alike, and mamas get hugs. When I arrived at Donna Carle and Jeffrey Hassler's

**WOMEN OF
CHATHAM**

farm, Green Dreams, a large dog came galloping to check me out, followed by three others. Harry was especially welcoming and enthusiastic, and only when he put his paw on my shoulder did I notice that he was missing his left front leg. "Treat Grandma nice, Harry," Donna scolded.

Grandma to the dogs, that was; Mama to her. I was given a tour of the farm, the greenhouses, the logs where they grow mushrooms. I didn't see the pond where the herons have a sushi bar and the deer take bubble baths.

Donna, the Pittsboro Farmers Market Manager, lives with Jeffrey, the Market President, and five dogs and five cats, of many ages and conditions, all much loved. Donna gestures to her forehead: "I have 'sucker' written up here."

At Green Dreams, where they've lived since 1997 in the house they built, they grow melons, long, European-style cucumbers, bell peppers, and assorted greens and roots crops. On their leased farm they harvest pears, apples, and blueberries.

Donna was born in Boynton Beach, Florida. Because her father worked in construction, when she entered high school, she'd attended 14 different schools. From an early age Donna loved to grow flowers and food. In 1978, when the Florida company she

was working for was about to fold, she took vacation time to visit some Raleigh friends. Six weeks later she moved to Raleigh. She worked at various jobs, in restaurants (Irregardless for seven years), at florists, started a house-cleaning business, and was a massage therapist.

She moved to Chatham with Jeffrey in 1993, and in 1996 they bought land and began building a house. He'd been helping his father build houses since he was seven. Their friends helped, too.

Fran slowed them down. They'd just put in their footings when the rains hit. They bailed. She'd brought her grandfather from Michigan to live with them. He said it was paradise to be there, but sadly he died before they finished the house.

In 2000 she learned from Screech (Ralph Sweger of Screech Owl Farm) of an old greenhouse for sale for \$500. When Jeffrey came home, she said, "Honey, I bought a greenhouse today." Another time, when she had 19 baby chicks in an empty child's pool in the bathroom, she greeted him, "Surprise! We need to build a chicken house." They did. A friend said it was too elegant for poultry, but the chickens like it.

Donna is enthusiastic about the Sustainable Agriculture classes she attended at CCCC.

In 2001 she took her first produce to the farmers' markets in Pittsboro,



Donna Carle manages the Pittsboro Farmers Market
PHOTO BY JOHN SHILITO

Ferrington, and Sanford. Later they added Saxapahaw. In their second year at the Pittsboro Market, the market manager quit, and Donna stepped in because no one else wanted to do it. She carried home the box of miscellaneous papers, sorted and filed them. The market has simple rules and bylaws, and each new vendor is inspected to be sure they are bringing produce they've grown or baked. Donna's vision of this market is that it be open to new vendors and welcoming to customers. "We're a family," she says. The vendors tend to be very independent-minded. Managing them takes talent as well as compassion for the troubles weather, pests, plant diseases can give. She tells us, "There's enough chaos in the world. Let's be peaceful here, be on the same page for three hours a week, even if we read different books the rest of the time." In this market the farmers do help and support each other, including newcomers. If issues arise, Donna listens to

everyone and lets the dust settle awhile, if at all possible, before the board takes action. She works hard to promote it and encourages the three Chatham markets to work together on a unified approach to promotion and advertising.

Her interests, in addition to farming and rescuing animals, range widely:

reading, sewing, embroidering, cooking, studying Buddhism (she is a Mahayana Buddhist and attends a Raleigh group). She likes to walk, write in her journal, do yoga, support older musicians, and she

volunteers at the Shakori Hills Grassroots Music Festival. Her favorite group is Donna the Buffalo, the host band.

The county issues that concern her are managing our growth wisely, preserving green space, enhancing our options for working and buying locally, with more amenities like General Store Café and Chatham Marketplace.

Her advice? "Be more considerate and compassionate. Help one another. How hard is that? How about some community unity? After all, we're all in this together."

Pittsboro Farmers Market is open Thursdays, 3:30-6:30 p.m. through Nov. 20, at the Fairgrounds. Donna Carle can be reached at 919.542.6465 or carlehassler@earthlink.net.

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I'm asking you to believe in yours."**

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We are the change that we seek."**

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