

UPTOWN NEWS



Some of the sights (above and in photos at right) enjoyed by shoppers at La Marqueta, a longtime East Harlem food market. Photos by Amy Kraft

City makes fresh food a priority in hopes of reviving food market

BY AMY KRAFT
NYCITY NEWS SERVICE

'H'omemade apple-sauce!"
"Sofrito, 10 dollars!"
The shouts of vendors at La Marqueta competed with the screeching trains overhead as shoppers and merchants recently celebrated a renovation of the longtime market, tucked beneath the elevated Metro-North tracks between 111th and 116th Sts. on Park Ave.

"This brings an opportunity to share amazing vendors and their food and talent," said East Harlem resident Debbie Quinones. "It's a wonderful place to be, and I used to come when I was a girl, so it's like I'm coming back home."

La Marqueta, long an important economic and social part of East Harlem, has been struggling since the 1980s. The city made several attempts to revive it but couldn't find a sustainable business model. In 2003, the city Economic Development Corp. proposed overhauling the market by focusing on a much-needed resource for the communi-

ty: fresh food.

La Marqueta is one of four public markets in Manhattan and is considered crucial in a community that has far more bodegas than supermarkets. East Harlem's adult obesity rate is 55% higher than the rest of Manhattan, and the neighborhood is beset by high rates of diabetes, city data show.

The city and La Marqueta tenants have collectively pumped more than \$1 million into the market, updating front-end stalls and designing Hot Bread Kitchen, a new, 3,000-square-foot kitchen space that provides training and job placement for culinary entrepreneurs. Hot Bread Kitchen in La Marqueta also was funded in part by the Harlem Community Development Corp., which will continue working on its more ambitious plans for La Marqueta: an extension stretching to 133rd St.

"The turnout was tremendous," said Spaha cafe owner Tika Fotoglidi as dozens of shoppers sampled items in the 11 stalls during the open house. "Now we want to reach out to more organic suppliers to fill the stalls with fresh options."



PHOTOS BY AMY KRAFT