Meet the Farmers: Melanie Cutillo
The Little Tea Cart
Mexico, N.Y.

Melanie Cutillo, founder of The Little Tea Cart, poses with teapots available for sale as well as a sample of her blended tea.

The summer of 2016 was a significant summer for Melanie Cutillo. Not only did this June kick off her first week ever as a vendor at the Downtown Farmers Market, it also marked her first month in business as the founder and owner of The Little Tea Cart.

"I started The Little Tea Cart in June, and this is my first season at the Market," Melanie says. Four months later, she's built up a loyal fanbase, and a catalog full of hundreds of flavors of tea.

Melanie's love for blending tea started when she ran a local coffee shop in Mexico. She dove deeper into her hobby, honing her craft when the shop closed. That's when she started working with a local tea master who encouraged her to play with different flavors to further stir her passion, propelling her to go into business for herself.

"I decided, you know what, I'm going to do it," Melanie recalls, smiling as she remembers all of the ways she was encouraged by her son, and her partner, Theresa Munoz (who prepares many of the baked goods sold at The Little Tea Cart's booth at the Farmers Market). "I made a tea room in my house and my son put a sign on the door that says, 'The Ultimate Mom Cave.'"

In her "Ultimate Mom Cave," Melanie has created more than 75 unique tea recipes. Her catalog boasts more than 200 different flavors.

She says the most popular flavor this summer has been "Creamsicle," a white tea blended with orange peel and vanilla."

Other big sellers include the "Blueberry Lemon Medley" and "Hawaiian Tea," a blend that includes bananas, pineapples, coconut and pecans with real butter. Melanie also makes special orders upon request. Earlier this summer, she created a "Blueberry Mojito" flavor.

All of Melanie's teas are sweetened naturally, and she uses local ingredients – from local farmers - whenever she can. "Everything has to come from Central New York as much as possible. I won't even buy a Pennsylvania peach," she says.

Melanie's love for local is evident in the names she gives to the teas she brings to the Downtown Farmers Market. For example, "Ontario Lemonade" - with its hint of maple – was named to showcase the nostalgic flavors of Oswego County.

Melanie herself swallows nostalgia each week at the Downtown Farmers Market, pouring stories of her own Market memories as she pours tea for customers.

"My mom came here for 20 years. She bought bushels and bushels of peppers from [longtime Downtown Farmers Market vendor] Linda Hahn, who she called 'The Pepper Lady,'" Melanie laughs. She fondly remembers helping her mother carry those bushels. Melanie always thought they'd be used for goulash and other treats, but many times, Melanie's mom would "cut them up, freeze them, and give them away to friends and family."

"She'd buy them every single week," Melanie shakes her head with a smile. "If she hadn't moved to North Carolina, she'd still be here today. She'd be sitting right here, eating one of my scones."

Loyal customers have come to rely on The Little Cart booth for an assortment of baked goods, including those scones, as well as lemon pound cake and butter cake made by Melanie's business partner, Theresa Munoz. The duo stays up late baking on Monday nights so that everything is fresh for the Downtown Farmers Market on Tuesday morning.

Though Melanie says it can be a challenge to get up early and leave her Mexico home to get to the Market by 7:00 am each Tuesday, it all becomes worth it as soon as she drives over the bridge in Brewerton.

"That's when I'll get excited," she smiles. "I've met so many great people, it's just been wonderful. This is really sweet and special to be here - it really is."

Downtown Farmers Market

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