

## **Winner of 2016 Montrose Community Service Award**

Linda Miller, a resident of Montrose Township and a trustee on the Montrose Township Board, believes in the power of the community, its resources and building on those assets to better her neighborhood. In 2012, she had a desire and vision to establish a local, outdoor farmers' market at the 33-acre, scenic Barber Memorial Park, located near the Flint River in the Township. She presented her plan and with the Board's support she began promoting the Farmers' Market concept to local residents, gardeners and farmers. Recruiting vendors seemed effortless as applications poured in and publicity of the upcoming Farmers' Market took on a life of its own. More than 60 vendors applied and occupy booth space, tables and stands to sell their fruits and vegetables, honey, maple syrup, spices, flowers, plants and handmade, hand-sewn, hand-crafted products such as yard ornaments, jewelry, purses, candles, wooden furnishings and many other unique items.

Miller features a "special vendor" of the week which includes demonstrations, samples and educational presentations to market shoppers. The Farmers' Market draws hundreds of shoppers and 40+ vendors each week who embrace the farmer-consumer and local "farm-to-table" philosophy. As time progressed, Miller added more marketing strategies such as advertising on the menus at local restaurants, utilizing the WJRT TV-12 "Morning Mugshot," newspapers and social media to reach more customers. Montrose Township's picturesque Farmers' Market offers spacious parking, clean restrooms, and picnic tables to eat purchased goodies and draws people from surrounding towns and neighboring counties.

Miller's one-woman vision which began with no formal budget or staff has grown into a successful, weekly operation which runs from June through October and encompasses a place to buy fresh, local food as well as make connections between buyers, sellers, business leaders and community organizations. The Township's Park and Recreation employees assist Miller with the set-up and tear-down of the weekly event. Shoppers can sense cooperation and community pride while visiting the Market because Miller has structured her dream into a family-like environment where vendors take care of other vendors and shoppers get 'red-carpet' treatment. Residents have come to know Thursday nights at Barber Memorial Park as a place to gather and celebrate local people and resources.