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## **Startups thrive at market** *Jennifer Youssef*

**By Jennifer Youssef**

The Detroit News

Detroit  **Entrepreneurs** who want to test the **market** and their business savvy without investing much money are finding Detroit's **Eastern Market** a good place to start.

Experts say the **market** is an ideal location for new proprietors to get their feet wet because they can meet consumers, get instant feedback on their products, and refine their business skills. The only cost is \$65 to rent space on Saturday during open **market**.

Randy TenBrink and Suzanne Vier say they couldn't have chosen a better place to set up their company, Randy's Granola. With little capital, and unsure how the **market** would react to their product, the business partners opened a stall at the outdoor **market** in July.

Today, the granola is sold in at least 30 stores in Michigan and other states and sales are up about 20 percent each month, Vier said. They credit the 118-year-old **market** complex with jump-starting their company, saying the exposure, experience and customer feedback they've gotten at their stall have been key factors to their success.

"As an **entrepreneur**, it's a good opportunity to come face-to-face with your demographic," said 45-year-old TenBrink, of Marne, on the west side of the state. He went into business for himself after he was laid off from an auto supplier.

That personal interaction is why many **entrepreneurs** are drawn to **Eastern Market**, said Ed Deeb, co-founder of the **Eastern Market** Corp., former chairman of the **Eastern Market** Merchants Association and president of the Michigan Business & Professional Association, a trade group that represents 20,000 small- and medium-sized businesses.

"It gives you a chance to mingle with people to know what they're looking for," Deeb said. "It gives you ideas. That's the spirit of **Eastern Market**."

Merchants can rent a 7 foot-by-20 foot stall on Saturdays in the **market**, bound by Gratiot Avenue, Wilkins, Riopelle and Russell streets. More than 20,000 customers visit on an average Saturday, according to the **Eastern Market** Corp.

Officials are trying to attract more small businesses to the area by sponsoring parades, having sales and offering other enticements, Deeb said.

It's a good place for **entrepreneurs** to test the **market**, get experience and have access to thousands of customers, without having to make a hefty financial commitment, said Mike Rogers, a spokesman

for the Small Business Association of Michigan.

"What's great about **Eastern Market** is that it lets them leverage their sweat equity," Rogers said. "It serves as a tremendous catalyst for success."

Randy's Granola was discovered by three distributors at the **market**, and one picked up the company's product.

"**Eastern Market** has given us more exposure than any other venue," said Vier, 37, who was working in New York City and plans to move back to her native Michigan to run the business. "We've grown very quickly."

Roz Cordova is another example. After taking a buyout from Chrysler Group LLC in November, the 40-year-old Rochester Hills woman launched Crushed Smoothies LLC.

She's been selling the fruity beverages at local sporting events, fairs and other community gatherings, and recently set up a stand at **Eastern Market**.

"When you say 'Hey, I'm at **Eastern Market**,' everyone knows what you're talking about," Cordova said. "I'm getting great response from **Eastern Market** customers."

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