

'To another level'



Franklin Farmers Co-op's newly renovated, expanded Decherd store enthusiastically received during grand opening celebration

More than 2,000 farmers, Co-op personnel, and local residents helped Franklin Farmers Cooperative officially celebrate the grand opening of its rebuilt store at 2229 Decherd Blvd. in Decherd on March 3 and 4. The Co-op's former building, which had been in place since 1964, was torn down to create more parking for the new 14,500-square-foot showroom.

How eager were folks to attend the grand opening of the renovated Franklin Farmers Cooperative in Decherd on March 3? Let Co-op sales associate Jessica Burch set the scene:



"I pulled into the parking lot at 6:45 this morning, and it was full," she said with a laugh. "I couldn't believe it. The grand opening was supposed to start at 11 [a.m.], but so many people were already here that we de-

cid-ed to just go ahead and begin everything earlier."

The excitement was palpable as more than 2,000 people from Franklin County and the surrounding area attended the two-day celebration March 3 and 4 to get a firsthand look at the Co-op's \$3.7 million redesign and expansion of its showroom and warehouse — the first such construction by the 70-year-old Co-op since 1964. Customers at the event registered for door prizes, shopped an extensive selection of farm and home items, talked with the Co-op's helpful staff and representatives of Ten-

nessee Farmers Cooperative as well as other vendor companies, and enjoyed a complimentary barbecue lunch.

Orchestrated by Oliver Little Gipson Engineering, Inc., of Tullahoma, the building project more than tripled the size of the showroom from 4,500 square feet to 14,500 and added 20,000 square feet to the warehouse. All told, the Co-op's Decherd campus now encompasses 62,000 square feet.

"Our board had the vision to provide a facility that would service the community for another 70 years, and I knew that what

we were about to do was going to raise the business to another level," said Franklin Farmers General Manager Doug Swann. "We were running out of room to put new products and had to outsource parts of our warehousing. Something needed to be done. I'm very proud of the finished product and the employees of this store who helped pull off this transition. Without them, we couldn't have done it."

The accompanying photo essay from the grand opening showcases more details about the new store from the perspective of those who attended.



LEFT: The open, inviting design of the Franklin Farmers showroom includes attractive stone features at the checkout area and multiple registers for rapid customer service. With more than three times the space of the former Co-op building, the new showroom offers a more diverse mix of products for both farm and home. "People are buying out of every department," said Josh Cole, the Co-op's retail sales manager. "We've taken what was a 98-percent male demographic and split it right down the middle with this new store. We did this for our future — if we don't have a stronghold in more than one avenue, we'll be in trouble down the road." **MIDDLE:** Bonide Regional Manager Frank Smith, right, assists customer Marcia Jones with lawn care products. **RIGHT:** Co-op employee Kolter Swan, right, reaches for an item for a grand opening shopper.



LEFT: Bradley Faulkner holds daughter Charlee, 3, as they browse the extensive selection of plants located outside the store's entrance. The Estill Springs resident said he's been coming to the Co-op "my whole life." "I buy anything and everything here," Bradley added. "Now they have a little something for everybody. We'll be here a lot!"

BELOW: Doug Swann, at left, Franklin Farmers' general manager since 2000 and a 40-year employee of the Co-op, is flanked by the Co-op's board members, community leaders, and other attendees following the ribbon-cutting ceremony. Swann thanked everyone for their support and patience during the construction of the new store.



With 20,000 square feet of added warehouse space, there's now ample room to store products. "We're able to space items out much better, too," says Mark Syler, a 31-year Co-op employee.



Franklin Farmers warehouse employee Keith Hill loads a bag of Co-op Dairy Feed for customer Carl E. Taylor of Grundy County. Hill came to the Co-op in 2013 after working at the Decherd Nissan plant.



The spacious customer service area in the rear of the Franklin Farmers showroom is staffed by friendly folks like, from left, Leah Money, Jeff Lightfoot, and Adam Martin. Lightfoot has worked at the Co-op for 42 years and said it's "mind-blowing" to see the transformation with the new store. "This has opened up a whole new world for us," he said. "We were at a standstill with the old store. We couldn't add products because we had nowhere to put them."