

GROWERTALKS

GT in Brief

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Retail-Ready

Chris Beytes



Countryside Greenhouses of Allendale, Michigan, has completed construction of a 7.3 acre, \$7 million retail garden center that's brand new from the concrete up. Grand opening will be April 1, but the owners, Dale Buist and his sons Chris and Justin (Patrick still works offsite in IT), held an open house January 15 for interested growers and retailers who were curious about the project.

Situated on more than 100 acres of West Michigan farmland, the garden center is sizeable: 6 acres of DeCloet triple-peak greenhouses, plus 1.3 acres of open roof over the nursery plant area. A central steel barn building serves as the main entrance.

Greenhouse bays are 42 ft. wide and 18 ft. tall to the gutter. Nine central bays run 420 ft. long, 10 more bays (five on each side of the central nine) are 384 ft. long. Both sets of five culminate in a dozen cash registers (for 27 total, including two in the central barn and one seasonal checkout in the nursery area).

Greenhouse equipment includes 32,000 hanging baskets worth of Cherry Creek ECHO, Wadsworth environmental controls, Damm water filtration and HAF fans, Anderson fertilizer injectors and Modine heaters.

If it looks like a production greenhouse, that's by design. They plan to use the 6-acre retail greenhouse to finish crops started at their old production/retail facility around the corner. And they plan to do so in high volume: 225,000 hanging baskets and 120,000 flats, for starters. (Basket prices range from \$3.99 to \$24.99.)

Dale likened the garden center to Walmart—not the typical comparison you'd hear from an independent garden center owner. But that comes from their low-price, high-volume strategy and philosophy.

"I've taken a little bit of a bad rap for lowering the market price," Dale says. "But I don't think we're wrong. I don't think we're ruining the market; I think we're foreseeing where the market is going. We're just headed there as quickly as we can get there so we can turn a profit at tomorrow's prices."

“We’re volume-oriented, price-oriented, but still keep the quality and the experience that customers will enjoy and continue to come back for.” **GT**