

GROWERTALKS

GT in Brief

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Science on Display

Jennifer Zurko



The state-of-the-art addition to Ball Horticultural Company's headquarters is now officially up and running. Ball Helix, Ball's research & development division, now has a brand new home for its in-house scientists to conduct their plant research that includes everything from molecular and cell biology to production tissue culture, pathology and intellectual property.

Ball Helix was created in 1998 and has been conducting amazing, breakthrough research for years—most recently in aging labs and greenhouses. The company knew its focus on R&D wouldn't fully be realized unless it could provide the best tools and environment to do the work, so ground was broken in August 2019 to begin construction of the new building. All of the Ball Helix employees started moving in during this past March.

Matt Mouw, Chief Technology Officer for Ball Helix, said constructing the new building is all part of Ball's long-term "generational investment" in R&D. And the fact that groundbreaking technology is now available and more affordable for our industry helps, too.

"This is a present investment for future returns," Matt explained. "Biotechnology has experienced what I call a 'trickle-down effect.' Initially, it was in human health and pharma. Then it moved into big agriculture, where it created billions

of dollars of value. And then it moved into the vegetable seed industry. The cost has become appropriate for our industry. The first human genome sequence cost hundreds of millions of dollars; today, that same work can be done for tens of thousands of dollars.”



Matt said the natural progression of the Ball company's history has shown that there's always been a desire to embrace new products, markets and technology in order to differentiate themselves. The way Ball's executive management and board sees it, biotechnology is the latest path to continued success.

“We're investing in the technologies that enable us to create unique products and operate the most efficiently and effectively,” said Matt.

The continual goals for Ball Helix are divided into three categories: service, like disease testing; support, for

breeders and production farms; and “discovery,” which is the new research they couldn't do before without advanced technology, like gene cloning for a new color, fragrance or disease resistance.

Now that Ball Helix is part of the main building and the labs have been constructed to view what the scientists are doing inside, it's easier to communicate the benefits to what the division does to visitors and customers.

“This is the first time all of Ball Helix is in one place. Science happens between scientists, so this enables co-creation and collaboration, which are two really important aspects to this new building,” explained Matt. “I think about this building like the Gardens at Ball—it's an experience. It's all about science on display.” **GT**