

After years of dreaming, a couple of years of planning, another two years of construction and then a hurry-up move-in, Tri-County Feeds, Etc. threw open the doors to its new 24,000-square-foot, post-and-beam home a couple of miles east of Marshall, Va. last September 22. Tri-County owners, Bill and Jeri Noel Jackson, also threw a classic—and classy—grand opening event.

“Everybody who sold me anything was here,” Bill said with obvious pride. About 25 companies were represented, each taking up designated areas in appropriate departments around the store. “We had all the feed representatives in the warehouse, and then we had all of the tack, apparel, footwear people, all of the reps from the pet-food companies—they were all here.”

In addition to the factory reps, the



Jacksons brought in celebrity guests, including the Hogettes, the unshaven, cross-dressing, pig-snout and white-hat-wearing fans of the Washington Redskins football team who make appearances in and around Washington, D.C. to raise funds for children’s charities. Olympic medalist Karen O’Connor was on hand to sign books and draw the winner in a Kawasaki Mule all-terrain vehicle raffle. The raffle raised \$12,000 for local and regional nonprofit groups for the benefit of horses and pets, including the Louden Therapeutic Riding Foundation, the Middleburg (Va.) Humane Foundation and The Equine Rescue League. Door prizes were also given away every hour of the one-day event.

Bill estimated that the grand opening drew about 2,500 people. He and Jeri were very happy with the results, but they were also relieved when it was over.

With all the logistics involved in scouting, ordering, taking delivery and stocking hundreds of new lines and products, hiring additional employees, advertising, promoting and tending to all the minutiae of prepping a new building, the Jacksons had their hands full.

“We hired an event-planning company to do this for us,” Bill said. “We had way too much going on getting the store ready to open. Just getting the inventory in has been huge,” he continued. “It was all new product and it had to be tagged, labeled and have SKUs assigned and put into the new software. Our staff really put a lot of time and effort in. I basically had a warehouse with feed in it, then I got five or six tractor trailer loads of product that had to be put in, and everything had to be done in

The exterior of Tri-County Feeds, Etc., resembles a stately horse barn in the Virginia countryside.

time for the grand opening.”

According to Ronnie Zito, when she joined the company as retail manager in 2006, Tri-County worked with about 40 vendors, mostly in feed and stable supplies and equipment. She said they had around 220 vendors by the time the new store opened, and were up to 260 vendors by March of this year. New inventory includes tack, pet supplies, English and Western apparel, footwear, jewelry and home furnishings. To reflect the expanded nature of their business, they changed the name from Tri-County Feeds Inc. to Tri-County Feeds, Etc. According to Jeri, longtime customers come in the store and are amazed at the variety and quality of the inventory.



To help handle the business expansion, the Jacksons augmented their sales and delivery staff. Zito is one of a half-dozen new employees added in the run-up

to the grand opening. The store now has two dozen full- and part-time employees.

“We could not have done this without our staff,” Jeri enthused. “Fortunately for us, all of them have horse knowledge—they all ride. A lot of them own dogs. They know all of the customers who walk in the door and they can answer technical questions. They show up, they are consistent, they are friendly and they’re willing to do everything. I don’t know how we lucked out. If we’re talking about our business, I have to brag: we have a great staff.”

Tri-County has come a long way from its beginnings nearly three decades ago, when Bill Jackson moved to the storied horse country of northern Virginia from upstate New York to work with horses after finishing high school. He began selling and delivering shredded paper stall

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