



## Truly a grand opening

The Hermes Nursery Company of Lenexa offered free horse-drawn surrey tours, bluegrass music and an impressive spread of munchies during grand opening festivities at its new wholesale nursery operation in Shawnee last Saturday. The Shawnee location, called

the River Farm, includes 100 acres, where about 100,000 trees and shrubs are currently under cultivation, as well as a magnificent barn (at left), where sales, shipping, potting and other operations take place. Photos by Rob Roberts.

# Nursery firm opens 'River Farm' in Shawnee

Hermes Nursery of Lenexa sponsored grand opening festivities last Saturday at its new 100-acre wholesale nursery facility on the banks of the Kaw River in Shawnee. The site is at 20000 W. 47th St., approximately two miles west of I-435.

The festivities included free music, food and horse-drawn surrey tours of the site where over 100,000 trees and shrubs have been planted since spring of 1986.

To be called the River Farm, the location on the Kaw River flood plain is ideal for nursery production because of abundant ground water and fertile soil.

The farm will allow Hermes Nursery to supply commercial and wholesale clients with over 50 varieties of trees and shrubbery

that are sometimes difficult to find in this part of the country.

The new nursery is the largest business expansion ever for the Hermes Nursery. Founded in Lenexa by John T. Hermes in 1965, the company evolved from landscape maintenance into commercial and residential landscaping, design and installation of irrigation systems and wholesale nursery service during the 1970s.

"Adding this 100-acre facility is a commitment by our company to expand service and selection to professional landscapers and retailers throughout the metropolitan area," said Hermes. "We've built our reputation over 25 years with excellent service and premium stock at a fair price. Development of the

River Farm will position our company to meet the area's growing landscape demands for many years to come."

Officials and staff of the City of Shawnee have welcomed the expansion by the neighboring Lenexa-based company. "Shawnee is delighted the Hermes Nursery chose a site in our community close to the Kaw River with easy access to the interstate," said former Mayor Tony Soetaert. "We look forward to the positive economic impact, and we applaud the Hermes Nursery for recognizing some of the distinctive advantages Shawnee offers expanding businesses."

A special feature of the River Farm is cultivation of patented

trees, such as Red Sunset Maples, Shademaker Locusts, Autumn Purple Ash, and Greenspire Linden, all of which are otherwise difficult to obtain in Kansas City. Popular trees such as Birch, Redbuds and Flowering Crabs, many varieties of Yews, and several species of deciduous shrubs, including Burning Bush, Manhattan Euonymus, and Forsythia are also under cultivation.

In addition to plant production, the River Farm facility will be used for the receiving and shipping of materials, potting, labeling of plants and equipment repair. The nursery will wholesale its locally-grown plants and rewholesale nursery stock received from the Gulf and West Coasts.

The Hermes Nursery will continue to operate at two other sites. A wholesale nursery operates adjacent to the company headquarters at 12421 Santa Fe in Lenexa and an Olathe nursery site at 175th and 169 Highway is used for growing plants requiring a more acidic soil than is present at the River Farm. Future expansion of production is also being planned for the Olathe location.

The General Manager for the River Farm is Bob Lareau, who has been with Hermes Company for seven years.

Because it is a wholesale operation, the River Farm specializes in selling to professional landscapers and retailers and not to the general public.



Owner John Hermes, foreground, has overseen Hermes Co. Inc.'s largest expansion, a 100-acre wholesale nursery. Workers in the background are loading a purple leaf plum tree for delivery. (staff photo by Jean Shifrin)

## Nursery nurtures growing firm

### Landscaper completes wholesale expansion

By Jennifer Greer  
staff writer

As a landscaper, John Hermes is used to slow, steady growth—from both his plants and his business.

But in the last few years, the wholesale portion of his company has shot up like a weed.

Hermes Co. Inc., which operates Hermes Landscaping and Hermes Nursery, has just completed the largest expansion in the company's 25-year history by opening a new 100-acre wholesale nursery in Shawnee. Hermes Co. is headquartered at 12421 Santa Fe Trail Drive in Lenexa.

River Farm, along the south bank of the Kaw River, is home to about 120,000 trees and shrubs that will be used by Hermes Landscaping and other local landscapers, said Bob Lareau, the farm's general manager.

Hermes, company president, said River Farm represents the Hermes Co.'s first major step into the wholesale nursery business.

Hermes put down roots in Johnson County in 1965 when he started Country Fair Lawns, a landscape maintenance operation with about five employees. The company soon moved into commercial and residential landscaping and irrigation design and installation.

In the 1970s, Hermes branched out into distributing wholesale stock to other landscapers. He decided to start growing his own plants as well, and in 1979, planted 40 acres in southern Overland Park.

Country Fair Lawns was changed to Hermes Co. Inc. in 1982.

By 1985, Hermes had begun selling its own plants and had bought the large plot that is now River Farm and an additional 80 acres in southern Johnson County. Planting at River Farm began in 1986, and the first major shipment of plants went out last fall.

At the farm's official opening last week, nearly all of the 100 acres in Shawnee had been planted.

The company plans to expand planting at the Johnson County nursery at 171st Street and Kansas 7 later this year. Only a small portion of the 80 acres there are planted now, Hermes said.

Since 1984, sales from the wholesale portion of the business have doubled annually, he said. Last year, wholesale sales made up about 10 percent of the company's total sales, and Hermes expects wholesale sales to double again this year.

Hermes Co. now employs between 50 and 120 people in its landscaping and nursery operations, depending on the season.

Hermes said opening River Farm should have several benefits for the company.

"I think it will provide a good deal of support to our existing operation," he said.

In addition, plants grown at the nurseries can be used for Hermes Landscaping's own jobs.

"Sometimes you can buy it cheaper than you can grow it, but then you're at the mercy of the grower," Lareau said. "You have better quality control when you grow it yourself."

The move also has set the company apart from the nearly 200 other landscaping businesses in the Kansas City area, Hermes said. Only about three area nurseries are growing as much as Hermes Landscaping.

Hermes said he wants the wholesale business to continue to grow, but the landscaping design portion should remain the company's focus.

Some of Hermes' recent large landscaping jobs include Commerce Plaza at College Boulevard and Metcalf Avenue, and the General Motors Fairfax assembly plant in Kansas City, Kan. Both of those jobs recently received awards.