

Co-op touts two city projects

'Busy year' ahead; new Agro Centre will store big items

BY CASSANDRA KYLE, THE STARPHOENIX JANUARY 27, 2010

With plans to open two new retail centres within the next year, staff working for Saskatoon Co-op are expecting a busy 2010 -- especially general manager Gerard Muyres.

But the work going into a new Agro Centre just outside the city's western boundary and a new gas bar and cardlock on 51st Street will pay off when customers who have been asking for the new facilities get the Co-op services they want, Muyres said Tuesday.

"We've been working on these projects for a long time," he said. "We believe we have to put back into our communities."

Work is already underway on the member-owned company's Agro Centre located just north of Highway 16 to the west of Redhead Equipment.

Muyres said the 15-acre site will serve the region's farming community and will replace the agriculture component of the Co-op store on Avenue C and Circle Drive.

"Our original site we have on Avenue C and Circle was built in the early '80s. We've far outgrown this site and it's time for us to move and serve our farm market better," Muyres said.

Groundwork and road construction has already been completed at the site, which will house a 3,500-square-foot storefront and a number of storage areas for large inventory items such as grain bins, fenceposts and farming equipment.

"All those kinds of items today we store in many locations around the city and so what we really want is a big land base to store all the big, bulky items we have," he said.

The Agro Centre will also include state-of-the-art chemical storage sheds for the safe storage of farm chemicals, Muyres said, as well as storage areas for oils and greases used on the farm and, of course, animal feed.

"These will be state-of-the-art buildings, all the safety features built in, high energy-efficient buildings that really will serve us for a long time going into the future," Muyres said.

The lumber business and gas bar at the Avenue C location will remain as is, although upgrades to the site will take place in the coming years, he said.

Environmental considerations were built into the plans for the Agro Centre, which will use LED lighting and, with the exception of a parking area, will see the lot covered with a type of clover instead of pavement.

Saskatoon Co-op is also working to make its new gas bar and cardlock in the north end as easy on the environment as possible.

Muyres said the company purchased the five-acre Russell Metals site on 51st Street for its new gas station in 2009 and expects the buildings on the lot to be taken down shortly.

Construction will start at the site as soon "as the frost is out of the ground," he said, explaining the centre will feature gas pumps, a 4,000-square-foot convenience store, a touchless car wash, eight lanes for semi-truck drivers to fill up their diesel tanks and a card-operated shower space to serve long-haul drivers.

"This site will have a lot of space on it," he said. "That's what we learned at Stonebridge (where Co-op opened a gas bar over the summer), everybody likes all the space we have, the ability to get around easily. This site will duplicate that."

Muyres said the Agro Centre is scheduled to open this fall while the gas bar and cardlock on 51st Street will likely open in early 2011.

The company's GM maintains the retail expansions will better serve Saskatoon

Co-op's 64,000 members.

"We're going to have one busy year," he said.

ckyle@sp.canwest.com

© Copyright (c) The StarPhoenix