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Feed and
Seed's
Mary Hipp,
Patricia Tripp
vow to support
local farmers,
curb local
hunger

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Farm to MARKET

Patricia Tripp (left)
and Mary Hipp (right)
*photo by JACK ROBERT
PHOTOGRAPHY*

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Judson Mill's Feed and Seed is ON A MISSION

■ story by EVAN PETER SMITH

MARY HIPPI was leaving it up to the imagination.

It was a hot afternoon in early September, and Hipp was standing inside a giant warehouse, a cathedral of exposed pipes and unpainted walls that echoed with the vibrations of oscillating industrial fans.

"Things have been happening very quickly in here," she said. "We literally didn't even have walls about six weeks ago."

Wearing a hard hat, a casual button-up shirt and blue jeans, Hipp could've been mistaken for a construction site supervisor, not a veteran of the restaurant industry and current board chair of the Upstate nonprofit Feed and Seed.

But Hipp has been wearing many hats — literal and metaphorical — over the last few years and the result of all that work will soon bloom within this very warehouse.

A LOCAL AND REGIONAL FOOD HUB

Located inside the new Judson Mill development at 701 Easley Bridge Rd., right beside BlocHaven climbing gym, the upcoming Feed and Seed food hub will serve as a local and regional food aggregation and distribution center for food relief organizations, schools, institutions and local residents.

"The short version of our mission here is to make fresh food affordable to all South Carolinians," Hipp said. "We already have the farmers here. We have the buyers. But the system that connects the two is broken or just does not exist anymore. Feed and Seed is rebuilding that system, a direct connection from the farmers to the institutions — the kids in schools, the underprivileged, the everyday residents."

Beginning at the entrance of the warehouse, Hipp gave a quick tour of what the space will look like when it opens to the public in late fall.

Up front will be a marketplace, where anyone can walk in and buy fresh produce, quick healthy meals and other items.

Behind the market will be a commercial kitchen, where food will be prepared for the market.

Keep walking and you'll find yourself in another commercial kitchen, this one focused on research and development, utilizing scientific practices to preserve food for long-term storage.

But that's just the front half of the warehouse. Beyond the kitchen space will be large areas where food that arrives in pallets at the loading dock out back ("Forklift-worthy shipments of food," according to Hipp) will be processed. That processing includes freeze-drying, dehydrating and flash-freezing, all of which allow for storage of crops without sacrificing chemical structure, flavor and nutrition. Crops can then be turned into healthy meals at the marketplace, served in food box programs to schools and other nonprofits, served in area restaurants and businesses, and countless other areas.

The back of the warehouse will be an open space bordered by rooms, like walk-in closets, in which food can be stored.

"This is what started everything," Hipp said, walking up to the storage rooms. Consisting of one cold room, three coolers and one freezer, the 5,200 square feet of food storage will allow the Feed and Seed hub to scale up its operations and gain a much wider reach in its efforts at providing healthy food, cheaply.

"In all of our research of other food hubs, the one things they regretted is they would've added twice as

“It's a big project.
But we're ready for it.

-Mary Hipp, board chair, Feed and Seed

much cooler space as they had,” Hipp said. “So we did that.”

The room will double as a community room, where the hub can provide technical support for farmers, as well as nutritional classes, cooking classes, food safety courses and more. Just as the profits from the market at the front of the food hub will fund some of the philanthropic aspects of the hub’s mission, the profits from certain classes will fund some of the more community-oriented classes.

“We’re ‘Robin Hood’-ing it,” Hipp said.

A main goal of the classes is to empower local farmers, nearly all of whom are facing tough odds.

“You have to understand, most of these are beginning farmers, small to midsize farmers that utilize organic practices,” said Feed and Seed executive director Patricia Tripp, who had just walked in from the back (while also wearing a hard hat).

‘TRIPP AND HIPPI’

“Tripp and Hipp.” It could be the name of a buddy cop TV show from the 1970s — just replace dialogue about crime with lines about good agricultural practices.



“We want these farmers to stay on their land,” Hipp said, “and be able to make a living, because most farmers have a second job. The average age of a farmer now is, what, 67?”

“Right,” Tripp said, nodding, “which is why we’re trying to get some of these younger folks trained and selling into these outlets.”

But to repeat, the odds are tough. Small farmers can’t compete with the mega-farms in terms of both volume and price level, so Feed and Seed is aiming to purchase at a price slightly above wholesale, essentially creating an entirely new outlet for smaller farmers to sell their crops without the burden of beating the big guys — or without having to pin all their hopes to a booth at a farmer’s market.

“We were looking at filling those gaps that were needed within the local food system,” Tripp said.

The physical space itself might as well be a metaphor for the nonprofit’s entire operating model, she added.

“It does look like we have a lot going on under one roof, but especially since the pandemic, a lot of people learned how important it is to be diversified,” Tripp said. “We’re going to have different areas of revenue within Feed and Seed, and that diversification will provide some stability for Feed and Seed as well as the community members and the farmers.”

It’s a mission that has been thriving in the minds of both Tripp and Hipp for years, but now that they are standing in the actual space where it will happen, the reality of the scope of their mission is solidifying.

“It’s a big project,” Hipp admitted. “But we’re ready for it.”

Adam Sturm left his decades-long career as a chef to open Adam’s Mobile Market, a mobile market dedicated to connecting farms to local families. Over the past year and a half, he’s been a culinary consultant with Feed and Seed and will soon be setting up shop inside the new food hub, where he’ll be experimenting with new and unique ways to process and preserve food.

“My goal is to make food processing cool”



Sturm’s creations include “curry in a hurry,” a ready-made bag of dehydrated vegetables and seasoning that instantly becomes a delicious and healthy curry just by adding hot water



Feed and Seed board member Mary Hipp (page left) stands at the site of the food hub. The hub will occupy a large warehouse in the newly redeveloped Judson Mill (top of page) including a food storage area, commercial kitchens, a large loading area and more.

photos by JACK ROBERT PHOTOGRAPHY | rendering by MCMILLAN PAZDAN SMITH

Sturm & Mobile Market photos by EVAN PETER SMITH