

Family adds third Agway store

BYLINE: BRENDA CHARPENTIER

Union Leader Correspondent

DATE: October 25, 2011

PUBLICATION: New Hampshire Union Leader (Manchester, NH)

EDITION: State

SECTION: Business

PAGE: 4

Overlooking Lake Winnisquam: Osbornes break ground on **Belmont** project.

BELMONT _ The family that owns and runs the Concord and Hooksett Agway stores broke ground on a new Agway on Route 3 between Tilton and Laconia last week and plans to open in time for the spring planting season.

Brothers Tom, Paul and Andy Osborne bought the nearly 5-acre property overlooking Lake Winnisquam in a foreclosure sale and are building a 60-by-160-foot structure with 5,000 square feet of showroom space, 3,500 square feet of warehouse space, and two attached greenhouses. An existing building, which formerly housed a gourmet food business, will remain and become part of the project, according to Tom Osborne. The site is next to Piche's Ski and Sports Outlet and across the road from Winnisquam Storage.

Like the Concord and Hooksett stores, the **Belmont** store will sell pet and livestock feed and supplies, lawn and garden supplies, and New Hampshire made crafts and foods. The existing building will be transformed into a country store, selling local crafts, gifts and fresh local fruits and vegetables. One of the greenhouses will be heated for a year-round stock of houseplants. In between the two buildings, a courtyard will display trees, shrubs, vegetable plants and flowers at planting time, pumpkins and other produce in the fall, and Christmas trees come winter.

Agway is a supplier of some 460 stores in the Northeast that are independently owned. Owners sell Agway's line of products in addition to whatever else they think will sell in their regional market.

The Osborne brothers' parents, Dave and Louise Osborne, started the Hooksett store in 1987. The family opened the Concord store in 2002. The family hadn't intended to build another one this year, but opportunity knocked after the owners of the Hillside Meadow Agway in Tilton closed their doors last spring, Osborne said.

Agway approached us. They wanted to continue to have a presence in the Lakes Region, he said. Osborne said his brother Paul, who now manages the Concord store, lives in nearby Gilmanton and liked the idea of managing a store closer to home. The right property was available, and everything else fell into place. The timing seemed to be right, so we thought we'd jump in and give it a go, Osborne said.

The store will provide about 12 to 15 jobs, some of which will be part-time, he said. The Osbornes will face competition from two nearby local nurseries, among others. Osborne said his family's farming heritage and hands-on approach will set its store apart. The Osborne brothers grew up on the family farm in Pittsfield, which was started in 1775, making them the eighth generation to call the farm home. The hay they'll sell will come from their farm, along with other products. We're part of local farming, and that's a claim the big box stores can't make, he said. We know about growing and feeding things, and that gives us a value in the marketplace.

Customers will get knowledgeable answers to planting and feeding questions, he said. Customers like the fact that they can come in and see the owners working alongside everyone else. We're very hands-on. Frost Building Construction of Andover will build the two structures. Plans call for construction to be done by March for an April opening.