

Hen House Market

15000 West 87th Street,
Lenexa, KS 66215



PHOTOS BY RICHARD TURCSIK

A top-to-bottom remodel at Hen House Markets' flagship store is something to crow about.

BY RICHARD TURCSIK

The golden egg



WITH ITS STARBUCKS CAFÉ, RICE GARDEN CHINESE food, Hissho Sushi, fresh-fried chicken, local produce, jet-fresh seafood, service meats and those famous, mouth-watering Tippin's pies, it's easy to see why shoppers flock to Hen House Markets' flagship store in Lenexa, Kan. It's also easy to see why the store closes at 11 p.m.—if it didn't the customers would be roosting there all night.

Traffic's been on an upswing since a literal floor-to-ceiling remake of the store, originally opened in 1990 and last remodeled in 1997, was completed in October. "This remodel had no expansions to it, but we replaced a lot of our equipment

and put in what we are calling our New Generation Décor Package for the Hen House Markets," says Dave Grysowka, vice president of operations for Kansas City, Kan.-based Balls Food Stores, which operates 12 upscale Hen House and 17



Seed money

If you want the freshest local produce in Kansas City, you could take a drive out into the country and pick it yourself, walk through a sweltering farmers market, or simply visit the produce department of your nearest Hen House Market, where the mantra is: “Buy Fresh. Buy Local.”

Established in 2000 as a way to help small, local family-run farms survive, the “Buy Fresh. Buy Local” program has grown into an unparalleled success, allowing them to thrive in the age of imported produce and factory farms. “We work with Amish and other co-op groups and we’ll put a trailer at their location and when they fill it they call us,” says Bill Esch, executive director, marketing and advertising, Balls Food Stores. The chain has reached out to state agricultural extension agents in both Kansas and Missouri to make small farmers aware of the program, Esch says.

“We work with them and in August we’ll tell them ‘this is how much we will buy from you next year’, so they can go to the bank, get their money, buy the seed and all of the other investment requirements—and we guarantee it,” Esch says.

That has been a big hit with the farming community, Esch says. “They don’t have to worry about if they can sell it or what they are going to lose,” he says, citing one farmer growing 700 acres of corn. “He upped that because we told him we would buy everything he can grow and so he then developed more markets,” Esch says.



Hen House also participates in a Consumer Supported Agriculture program, which consumers join and agree to buy products over the course of the growing season. “They come to our stores, pay a flat fee and pick up the products,” Esch says, adding that the chain has expanded that program to include corporate clients.

“We’ll take a truck out to their location and they pick up the produce in the parking lot, or the company will take it inside and their employees will pick it up. We’re saving on transportation miles and people really want that fresh, locally grown product,” Esch says.

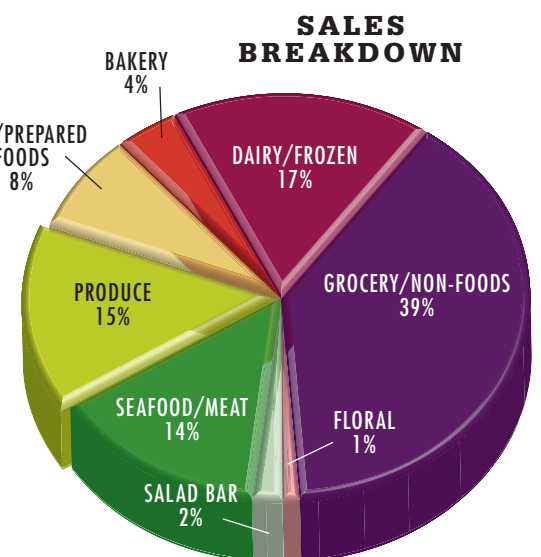
“This is one of the things that Hen House should really be proud of,” says Jill Wendholt Silva, the food editor at the *Kansas City Star*. “It is a huge commitment and they are taking something that is done on a very small scale, and ramping it up, but still keeping it true to the spirit. It’s been a huge success.”

conventional Balls Price Chopper stores in the Kansas City area.

That includes a stylized chicken and egg logo and a shift from a teal to chartreuse color scheme. “It’s quite a deal to change the font because when you change the font it changes everything—name tags, packaging, bags, labels and scales. There were tons and tons of things we had to go through,” Gryszowka says.

Done while the store remained open, the remodel proved to be a Herculean task, taking two years to complete. On the plus side, “Because we really are a neighborhood market, our customers liked coming in and seeing what we had done the night before,” says Pam Mitchell, Lenexa store director.

To lighten up the store, the open ceiling was painted chartreuse over its original teal. “They sprayed the ceiling at night and it had to be done in sections,” Mitchell says. Likewise, floor tiles were replaced with 16” x 16” luxury vinyl tiles, which are more striking than the traditional 12-inch squares. “When we build stores from the ground up, we use polished concrete floors, but when you redo a store you don’t get the same effect,” Gryszowka says. “There are lots of imperfections and when you are doing a lot of grinding you get down to the aggregate, which didn’t bother us, but there were trenches from when departments were changed in the first remodel.”





Shoppers entering Hen House are greeted by the Hen House Flower Shop, an FTD florist. “Just look at the plants. You know you have a good department when everything looks like a million bucks,” Gyszowka says. “These plants almost look fake, they’re so nice. But you go into some stores and you think they’re running a plant hospital.”

POP OF COLOR

Helping those flowers pop is the Baero lighting fixtures above the department. “One of the big changes in this remodel is with some of the lighting,” Gyszowka says. “We teamed with Baero out of St. Louis and have just really been pleased with them and their color rendition.”

To the right of floral is the Rice Garden Chinese take-out, followed by a Starbucks concession.

“We are a Starbucks licensee,” Gyszowka says. “It’s definitely a draw, especially in the morning.”

Starbucks leads into Hen House’s prepared foods area featuring made-to-order sandwich-



es, in-house smoked meats, rotisserie chickens and its famous fried chicken.

“We’ve done many cuttings on our fried chicken, against the Colonel, Hy-Vee, anybody in town, and we just kick their butts every time,” Gyszowka says. “Our fried chicken is made with fresh chicken—never frozen—that is marinated in buttermilk. We got our own secret breading and we’ll match it against anybody.”

He can make the same claim for the architecturally striking salad bar across the aisle. Business is so brisk—it accounts for 2% of total



store sales—that it even has a dedicated register during the peak lunch period. Because the store doesn’t have a large café seating area, portable tables and chairs are set up near the department during lunch hour. “It’s not unusual to turn those tables three times during



lunch,” Mitchell says.

Utensils help identify the origins of the items on the salad bar—green tongs for locally grown items, white for organic and black for conventional products. “We call the salad bar our battleship,” Grysowka says. “When we opened this store it was the first big salad bar we had in our company and it was doing as much business as many of our competitors’ entire produce departments.”

WHAT’S FOR DINNER?

Another program for Hen House management to crow about is “What’s For Dinner Tonight?” Shoppers can literally pick up a bag with a complete dinner for four for a set price. On Sunday, for example, they can get beef tips, vegetables, garden salad and gourmet rolls for \$14.95; Monday is chicken tenders, macaroni and cheese, country gravy, garden salad and biscuits for \$11.99.

“You just come in and grab it, take it up and pay for it. It goes over very well at this store,” Mitchell says, adding the menu might be tweaked three times a year.

“The confidence of our customers is built around this,” Grysowka adds. “I mean the customers don’t even look in the bag. They just grab it and go.”

The refrigerated “What’s For Dinner Tonight?” case also includes soups, entrées and pot pies prepared in Hen House’s central commissary, one of two the chain operates. The other makes Toppin’s pies.

Hen House changed sushi suppliers as part of its remodel. Today the department is run by Hissho Sushi. “We like to think we have the best sushi chef in Kansas City,” Grysowka says.

Judging from the vibrant colors filling the salad bowls in the deli case, Hen House has the best salad chefs in town too. About 90% of the salads are made in-house.

“Our deli is kind of spread out,” Grysowka notes. “We start up in that front corner, then have the hot, the grab-and-go and then we get into the service deli case. That’s all flanked by the fruits and vegetables in the center.”

Produce occupies some 5,000 square feet and specializes in local product. As part of the remodel, the produce prep station and its large ice tables were replaced with multi-tiered



Flat Jasper

It’s Saturday morning in Kansas City and tens of thousands of people are tuned to KCMO Talk Radio 710 listening to “Live! from Jasper’s Kitchen,” hosted by local chef and restaurateur Jasper Mirabile, Jr. and sponsored by Hen House Markets.

“I am sort of their ambassador,” Mirabile says. “David Ball and his father Fred have what I think are the four best words in the market: ‘Buy Fresh. Buy Local.’ It’s all about supporting local farmers

and local food artisans. That is what we do in Jasper’s restaurant too, so it is the perfect marriage of two companies.”

Mirabile has developed exclusive recipes for Hen House stores, including the popular Jasper’s Lentil Soup, in the prepared foods case; his fresh Italian sausage is also sold exclusively in Hen House. “I’m working on a couple of other Italian dishes right now for them,” he says. He also conducts the store’s monthly Learn, Shop & Cook cooking classes.

His recipes, for dishes like Italian Wedding Soup, Pollo Alla Frederico and Hot Kentucky Brown sandwiches, are displayed on Flat Jasper—a life size cardboard cutout of Mirabile that’s displayed in every Hen House store.

“They know me as the Hen House Chef when I walk the store, but they also know me as Jasper’s Restaurant,” he says. “That helps the restaurant, too.”

Mirabile’s show is part interviews with local farmers and national and local food artisans, as well as listener call-in questions about how to make the perfect pot roast. Once a month it is broadcast live from a different Hen House store. “There’s just this excitement when you’re in the store doing a show,” he says.

The radio program generates store traffic too. “Two years ago on a cold January day we were selling soups for \$2 a pint, but you had to tell the cashier you listened to the show,” Mirabile says. “We sold the most soup that day in the store’s history.”



shelving, part of the industry shift to factory prepared pre-cuts. “We designed the department with that dog-leg case in the back so it is not all open because we want to lead you to this corner so you walk into seafood,” Grysowka says.

Hen House’s seafood department is a sight for the eyes—and the ears too. A fishing boat mural serves as the backdrop for a department straight off of Fisherman’s Wharf, complete with wooden crate workstations, sea shanty architecture and the sound of cawing seagulls in the back-



ground. Fish is merchandised on non-refrigerated stainless steel tables surrounded by a high-wall snow bank of ice which associates make daily by packing molds.

“I wanted to create a department like the Swiss Family Robinson Tree House in Disney World where you think you are in an actual tree,” Gryszowka says.

Hen House’s meat department is a Magic Kingdom unto itself. About 90% service, it features some 24 feet of namesake poultry, artfully arranged in symmetrical rows. “There’s craftsmanship here,” Gryszowka says. “We’re not just throwing everything into a case.”

In red meat, Hen House exclusively stocks Hereford beef. Further down, is the Balls Smokehouse, a self-serve coffin case filled with hams, smoked brisket, ribs, sausage, hot dogs and corned beef all prepared to Balls’ proprietary recipes.

One item that no Hen House customer


ever forgets is the signature Tippin’s pie. Tippin’s was a family restaurant chain that operated in the Midwest and Texas and Hen House carried its pies exclusively for years. When the restaurant chain went under, Balls Food Stores bought its commissary, which included the pie bakery.

“We hired several of their key people and have been able to make that thing work,” Gryszowka says. He drops a \$10.99 peach pie into a visitor’s hands. “Feel the weight of this. We sell these pies to retailers around the country. Dierbergs in St. Louis buys them, AJ’s in Phoenix.” he says.

Hen House’s remodel opened up a space in the middle of the center store area for seasonal merchandise. “This is a big benefit because otherwise you wouldn’t even be able to walk up to the front end because it would be so crowded with those types of things,” Gryszowka says. □



▷ **STORE STATS**

Grand re-opening	October 7, 2009	
Total area	54,000 square feet	
Selling area	38,000 square feet	
Number of SKUs	50,000	
Number of Checkouts	15 (including self-checkouts)	
Number of Aisles	16	
Weekly sales estimate	\$400,000	
Number of associates	133	
Store hours	6 a.m. to 11 p.m., daily	
Wholesaler	Associated Wholesale Grocers, Kansas City, Mo.	
Architect	Jeff Maple Design, Kansas City, Mo.	

▷ **PRICE CHECK**

Item	Hen House	Hy-Vee	Price Chopper
Salad Bar (lb.)	\$4.99	\$5.00	\$4.99
Bananas (lb.)	69-cents	38-cents	69-cents
Granny Smith apples (lb.)	\$1.99	\$1.69	\$1.79
White grapes (lb.)	\$1.99	\$2.99	\$1.19
Cauliflower	\$2.99	\$1.99	\$2.99
Cucumber	69-cents†	\$1.28	79-cents
Chicken drumsticks (lb.)	\$1.69	\$1.48	\$1.99
Kansas City strip steak (lb.)	\$12.99	\$7.49	\$11.99
Boyle’s corned beef (lb.)	\$2.99†	\$3.19	\$2.99
Hellmann’s mayonnaise (30-oz.)	\$2.99	\$2.88	\$4.89
KC Masterpiece BBQ sauce (28-oz.)	\$2.19†	\$2.49	\$2.59
Ensure (6-pack)	\$8.99	\$8.99	\$8.99
Ocean Spray cranberry sauce (14-oz.)	\$1.56	\$1.49	\$1.49
Welch’s grape juice (64-oz.)	\$4.52	\$3.88	\$4.59
Fig Newtons (14-oz.)	\$3.99	\$2.99	\$3.99
Chef BoyArdee spag & mballs (14.5-oz.)	\$1.25	\$1.17	\$1.39
Ragu spaghetti sauce (26-oz.)	\$1.99	\$1.78^	\$1.99
Jell-O (3-oz.)	67-cents	68-cents	69-cents
Maxwell House coffee (11.5-oz.)	\$3.99	\$4.48	\$2.99
Clorox bleach (96-oz.)	\$1.98	\$1.98	\$1.58
Minute Maid orange juice (64-oz.)	\$2.66†	\$1.99^	\$2.69
Daisy sour cream (16-oz.)	\$2.39	\$2.57	\$2.19
Large eggs (dozen)	\$1.39	\$1.38	\$1.19
Pillsbury Toaster Strudel	\$2.29†	\$2.58	\$2.59
Sara Lee pound cake (10.75-oz.)	\$3.25	\$3.89	\$3.29
TOTAL	\$77.11	\$70.71	\$76.54

† Bonus Buy ^ Hot Deals
Price check conducted April 16, 2010 in Lenexa, Kan. at Hen House, 15000 West 87th Street; Hy-Vee, 13400 West 87th Street; McKeever’s Price Chopper, 19601 West 101st Street.

▷ **THE COMPETITORS**

Number of competitors within a 5-mile radius of Hen House, Lenexa

CHAIN	# OF LOCATIONS	CHAIN	# OF LOCATIONS
Hy-Vee	2	Super Target	1
Wal-Mart Supercenter	1	Aldi	2
Price Chopper	2	Costco	1
McKeever’s	1	Sam’s Club	2
Whole Foods	2		