

CROW WING COUNTY FAIR

Slow down and enjoy the flowers

BY AMY FREDMAN

Staff intern

A faint buzz of activity is bringing life to the now empty Crow Wing County Fairgrounds as workers prepare for the 111th annual Crow Wing County Fair.

The fair begins Tuesday and runs through Saturday in Brainerd. Fair general manager Dale Domrase is ready.

"Every year we try and have something new and different going on at the fair," Domrase said. This year, Domrase is most excited about the updated horticulture building.

Louie Hoffmann, Crow Wing County master gardener, was the project's initiator. Louie built a pergola, a trellis structure that gives shade to plants, last year for the master gardeners. This year, he decided to build a greenhouse for the Brainerd Garden Club.

From there, the project escalated.

Louie remembers thinking, "While we're at it ...," to which wife Deb Hoffmann responded that renovating the horticulture building was "way too big of a project."

Despite his wife's initial objection, the project started on June 21 and ended a little over three weeks later on July 15. Louie worked on the building nights, weekends and on vacation time from his job as SuperAmerica manager, totaling more than 150 volunteer hours. As a Boy Scouts troop leader, Louie's Troop 45 of St. Andrew's Church also spent time on the project. Other volunteers also participated.

"We're proud of them," Deb said of the many volunteers. "The volunteers made all the difference."

All the labor was volunteer, but the fair board, master gardeners and Brainerd Garden Club funded the project.

Louie wanted to create a layout where people would meander through the building. "The goal was to slow people down to look at the flowers," Deb said. She added that many people are bringing in their best flowers, and she hoped that the meandering format would encourage fairgoers to appreciate those flowers.

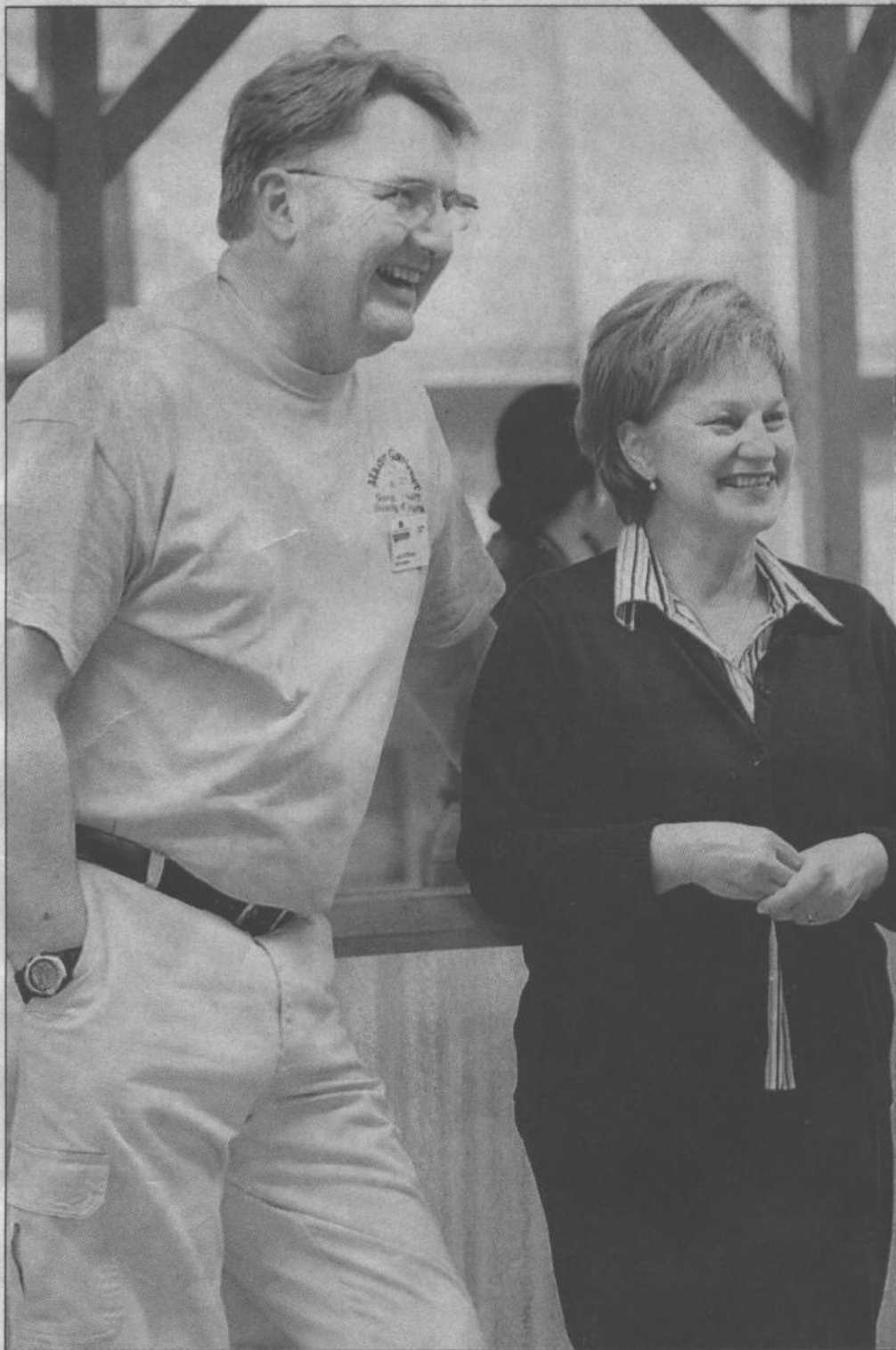
Deb said she was anxious to see how people reacted to the building. "It's fantastic," Domrase said. "It's one of the prettiest things. We're really excited about that."

All 160 vendor spots are filled. Pig races

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Brainerd Dispatch/Kelly Humphrey
Louie and Deb Hoffmann stood last week in the newly renovated horticulture building near the greenhouse Louie built for the Brainerd Garden Club at the Crow Wing County Fairgrounds. Building the greenhouse sparked Louie's idea to renovate the entire building to create a "meandering" effect for the fair.