Chism's 30-year career at FVC, 12 as general manager, comes to end.

By Russ Pankonin
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Tuesday, Oct. 30, marked Jim Chism's final day as general manager of the Frenchman Valley Coop—a position he's held for 12 years.

It also marked the end of a 30-year career at FVC for Chism, who started as a feed salesman on March 1, 1982.

During the past 12 years, FVC has seen phenomenal growth, both in terms of an-nual sales and branch locations.

While all that may have happened with Chism at the helm, he was quick to credit that success, not to himself, but to the people around him.

"I've had a great team to work with," Chism said Monday. "They are fabulous folks. That's what makes us successful."

Chism said he's been fortun-ate to work with good people during his career at FVC.

He couldn't say enough about the mentoring he received from long-time FVC manager Martin Leibbrandt.

"I couldn't think of anyone I would have rather been learning from," Chism said.

Chism worked his way up through the company, becoming feed division manager and then assistant manager under Leibbrandt in March, 1998.

He became general manager of FVC on Jan. 1, 2000.

Technological Advances

Looking back on his 30 years at the coop, Chism has witnessed technological advances make an ever increasing impact on the agricultural industry.

Things we take for granted today, like the fax machine, cell phones and e-mail, didn't exist when he first started at the coop.

Today, farmers control their pivots with cell phones and use GPS to drive their machinery, he noted.

The technology in seed represents another major step in the advancement of farming practices.

As for the coop, they've adopted the technology as well, especially in the agronomy department. Today, they make use of grid sampling of soils and variable rate application technology to achieve the greatest efficiency for the farmer.

Chism also praised the ag producers in the region. They were early adopters of this technology and are very efficient operators, he noted.

Industry Leader

Summing up some of the top achievements for the coop during his tenure proved difficult for Chism.

After some thought, he said the coop's constant efforts to increase grain storage space and speed of handling has been key.

Automating their agronomy plants ranked high on the list, as well.

But perhaps the most important has been the growth mindset of the coop, its board and members.

That attitude will continue to help the coop achieve greater success for many years to come,

Chism said.

Wasn't Planning a Move

Chism, 55, said he and his wife Marcia weren't looking to move. "We didn't anticipate it at all," he said.

He was contacted by a search firm about a similar position with a coop headquartered in Ames, Iowa. He decided to at least talk to them about the position, which he ultimately took.

He will be the CEO of Farmers Cooperative in Ames, Iowa. The coop is the largest farmer-owned local agriculture cooperative in Iowa, serving its 5,500 members with 450 full-time employees from their 60 locations.

Chism said his role will be the same as at FVC, but with a bigger operation.

He said the move east will get them closer to both sides of their family.

He said it will be hard to leave Imperial after making their home here for so many years and raising their family here.

But change is not always bad, Chism noted, and he's looking forward to the challenge.

The coop has been working on a succession plan for the past five years.

As a result, Chism has no doubt the coop will bring on a new general manager that will bring continued success to the coop.

Doug Ohlson is serving as the interim general manager. He said the board is taking applications for the position through November with a goal of completing the process no later than Feb. 1, 2013.