

## Top Quality Hay open house sparks interest

By CRAIG FOX/cfox@fltimes.com  
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ROMULUS — Farmer Luc Normandin brought his four sons down from near Montreal Thursday to take a look at Top Quality Hay Processors' mammoth new drying system in a former Seneca Army Depot warehouse.

Normandin and his family were among 200 people who attended an open house aimed at showing off the 384-foot-long piece of machinery that dominates the renovated building.

The unit uses giant ovens, conveyors and other equipment to dry alfalfa hay, a process that takes four hours instead of the four, five or more days that traditional methods take. Because of the unpredictability of rain, farmers lose between 30 and 50 percent of their hay.

Normandin is so interested in Top Quality's hay processor that he's thinking about acquiring the first Canadian franchise.

"I'm really sure it works," he said after getting a tour with company owners. "I'd love to be the first out of the United States [to have a] franchise."

Partners Jeff Warren, John Davie, Chuck Long, Neal Simmon, Mike Kunes and Mark Wickham have invested \$3.9 million in the venture and would like to see a day when dry-hay processors dot the state's agricultural landscape. The Romulus processor takes hay from a 25-mile radius.

So far, 27 potential investors have expressed interest in becoming involved in franchises. The open house was held to attract potential workers, hay farmers and hay buyers, Warren said.

The company hopes to hire 18 to 21 employees to run three shifts during this year's spring hay season, with plans to start May 15. The facility will process about 40 tons a day of hay, Warren said.

"It's a win-win for everyone," Warren said, because it will employ local workers and help area farmers.

The company moved into the 50-year-old warehouse last year with the help of a \$500,000 state grant to install electrical, gas and water service.