

Center is big, it's high-tech, it's big, it serves more than 60 stores, and did we say it's big?

By [Larry Clark](#) | Hickory Daily Record

The new Target regional distribution center is so big Superman might not be able to leap it in a single bound.

It's only 1.6 million square feet, said Rick Scholtes, general manager.

"Only" because Target has other centers with more square footage.

But some storage racks in the Newton facility approach 40 feet tall. The sheer height gives it more storage capacity.

"In cubic feet, it's the biggest," Scholtes said.

The facility is a prototype because of its high-tech automation. New equipment for storing and retrieving merchandise was needed, he said.

The inventory is recorded and tracked by computer. The main conveyor is eight miles long.

In some cases, employees go aloft on mechanized platforms to work with merchandise.

But one section of "carton-level storage" is operated from the floor using robotic machinery.

That section contains 325,000 slots. Employees need sophisticated equipment to make it work.

Truck bays abound. The distribution center serves 60 to 80 Target stores. There's a bay for each of them, plus extras.

Looking across the interior, that barely discernable little square off in the distance is a 7-foot-tall double door.

Scholtes said Target emphasizes safety. Yellow lines mark walkways. Every motorized piece of merchandise-handling equipment beeps, buzzes or honks appropriately.

The forklifts are battery operated. If the batteries were boxes, an adult could hide in each one.

Charging and exchanging are automatic. Employees don't have to touch or lift the batteries.

Workers don't lift any of the heavy objects in the facility. There are material handlers that workers pull or walk behind, but they're for smaller items.

At Tuesday's grand opening ceremony, the only thing with an internal combustion engine was one of Juan Pablo Montoya's Target-sponsored race cars on display.

It was the only thing in the building that smoked.

The place isn't air conditioned, but high-volume fans are everywhere. There is also an air-handling system that pulls hot air out of the building or takes in cool air.

If the outside air is too warm or humid, the intakes automatically close.

Scholtes said the distribution center is still experimenting with some of its operations.

"We're testing different methods of moving material," he said. "Some items stack well, and we have to be ready to ship items where they're needed."

A cavernous area near a line of loading bays will be filled with trees at Christmas, he said. That's temporary, but a company objective is to efficiently use every inch of space.

The facility is a maze of metal beams, shelves and cables. Pallets are stacked high. Employees move material or repack items for shipping to individual stores.

It's a never-ending process on the acres of concrete floors.

Target has 1,719 stores in 49 states. They must be serviced quickly. There are 26 regional distribution centers, and T-3811, as the Newton facility is called, is the newest, most advanced and biggest of the lot.

Scholtes can rattle off statistics and information about the company and the center he manages, but there's one question that stumped him.

Every Target employee who was at the grand opening Tuesday wore a red shirt with the Target logo. That was a lot of red shirts.

Most of the workers were not at the ceremony, but were having meetings of their own. All of them got a red shirt.

Scholtes admitted "I have no idea" how much red fabric was needed to make all those shirts.

He clearly remembers the 14,000 applicants at the three-day job fair in March.

"I was impressed," he said.

Scholtes said all of the current employee positions have been filled. Including the Target officials who came to Newton, the facility employs more than 500 people.

"We have technology that no other center has," he said. "But the team members are the most important part of our operation."