
State fortifies LMC's wine offering

'Foodie' governor on board with \$1 million grant

By **RALPH HEIBUTZKI**

HP Correspondent

BENTON HARBOR — Lake Michigan College's Great Lakes Wine Institute is a lot closer to reality thanks to a \$1 million state grant, officials say.

The grant provides "another shot in the arm" for the center that LMC is building at the corner of Yore and Empire avenues, President Emeritus/Acting CEO Bob Harrison said.

"It's great. It's wonderful. It's huge," Harrison said. "We believe this industry is important to the state, and I believe that this is a great investment in the future of the wine industry."

Mike Moyer, LMC's director of enology and viticulture, voiced similar excitement.

"It provides opportunity to build a state-of-the-art teaching winery and culinary facility that will contribute to the economic development of the region. The economic cluster associated with it, the restaurants and hotels, is already a significant part of Southwest Michigan's economy," he said.

State Rep. Al Pscholka's office announced the grant.

"With vineyards and wineries on the upswing as part of the agri-tourism industry, there's a

See **WINF** page A6

WINE

From page A1

need for qualified vintners and sommeliers throughout the state. The Great Lakes Wine Institute will be instrumental in training these future professionals," he said.

The funds came about from the Michigan Talent and Economic Agency, said Pscholka,



PSCHOLKA

who worked with LMC and the Michigan Liquor Control Commission to get proper licensing for the program.

Pscholka spent about a year working with Gov. Rick Snyder's office and the Michigan Economic Development Corp. "to identify where something like this might fit, get this included in the budget, and get it signed," he said.

Snyder himself took a strong interest in the project, once the discussions began, Pscholka said.

"What some folks might not know about Gov. Snyder – he's a bit of a foodie," Pscholka said. "He likes to cook. He was excited to hear about" the institute.

LMC has already received some private donations for the center, which will further house LMC's culinary programs, Harrison said.

The estimated cost is be-

tween \$5 and \$6 million, but that figure won't get nailed down until LMC seeks construction bids, Harrison said.

Harrison sees the center as a place where the wine and culinary industries will send people for training, and a site to offer education programs and seminars.

"If we could see our way clear, we would do something in 2017 or 2018," Harrison said. "The original estimate was right around \$5 million, but by adding the culinary (programs), we increased the cost – but we increased the versatility of the building."

Harrison credited the grant, in part, to his own 15-year relationship with Pscholka.

"My relationship goes back to when was doing the On Location program at Cornerstone Alliance," Harrison said. "Rep. Pscholka has been paying attention to the economy, and the creation of jobs – it's (the grant) a compliment to his looking around, and saying, 'Where can the legislature and the state help?' He's been paying attention to the trends."

The industry is expanding beyond simple wine tasting rooms, Moyer said.

"The wine industry in Michigan has been on the upswing, with 13,700 acres of vineyards, making it the fourth largest grape-growing state," Moyer said. "The state's 121 commercial

wineries bottle more than 2.3 million gallons annually, and they attract more than two million tourists each year. The college is really responding to industry needs and helping to grow the regional economy here in Southwest Michigan."

Moyer is starting the new school year with 14 students, two more than last year, he said.

Word about the wine and culinary industry's growth potential has definitely gotten around, if the types of students he's seeing this year are any indication, Moyer said.

"Last year's students tended to be more diverse in demographics, age and background. This year's cohort (group) is a lot younger, and there's a lot of energy. It's exciting to see them get excited about wine," he said.

Like Harrison and Moyer, Pscholka said he believes that the center will eventually grow into a major destination spot – not only for Southwest Michigan, but the Midwest, too.

"They (LMC) were able to recruit a guy (Moyer) who's a blue chipper, who can grow this type of industry," Pscholka said. "I think we're sitting on a gold mine. It's a long-term play – we might not see it (the result) in a year or two, but 15-20 years down the road, they'll say, 'Wow, this was a really good, strategic move for our area.'"