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Owners of Chiselled Grape Winery willing to wait for own vintage

THE CHISELLED GRAPE label is now on wines brought in from California, but vineyard owners Harald Tomesch (above) and Allan Haas are looking for a local harvest down the road. The business is based in a century-old schoolhouse in the Town of Grafton. *Photos by Mark Jaeger* f there is truth in the adage “good things come to those who wait,” the future could be very bright for the Chiselled Grape Winery in the Town of Grafton.

The business has put its label on six varieties of wine brought in from California.

More importantly, approximately 300 vines are being planted in the one-acre vineyard immediately north of the century-old schoolhouse that has become its headquarters.

It is located at the corner of Lakefield Road and Port Washington Road.

The winery is owned by longtime friends Harald Tomesch and Allan Haas, although the business is a bit of a diversion for both men.

Tomesch teaches classic literature and theology at Concordia University Wisconsin in Mequon, and Haas is president of H2D Inc., a Milwaukee marketing and corporate imaging firm.

“Our sons played hockey together. We later discovered we had a common love of jazz and wine,” Tomesch said.

From the improvisation and fusion of that musical form, the idea of creating their own wines took off.

Tomesch said his interest in viniculture started when he was teaching in Ontario, a region of Canada known for its cold-weather winemaking.

He made wines that frequently topped commercially available products in blind tastings.

“Starting a vineyard was something I always wanted to do,” Tomesch said.

Once he and Haas committed to getting into the wine business, the search was on for an ideal location.

The Grafton site, with its rural character and easy access to the metropolitan area, seemed a perfect fit.

“It will be a couple years before we can start harvesting our grapes, so we brought in wine from Santa Barbara. We had a panel of 25 people judge which wines we wanted to offer — one day was devoted sampling whites and one day reds,” Tomesch said.

The winners — a 2010 Viognier, 2010 Chenin Blanc, 2009 Gewurztraminer, 2005 Barbera, 2009 Sangiovese and 2009 Malbec — were ordered in bulk and bottled on site, using the Chiselled Grape label created by Haas.

“The idea was to bring Santa Barbara to Grafton. Next year, we might feature a selection from Oregon, the East Coast or Argentina, whatever strikes us. The wine lover will get a chance to sample the wines of a different region without having to travel,” Tomesch said.

Even more attention has been paid to the variety of grapes that will be grown.

Heritage root vines were acquired from the Frank winery in the Finger Lakes region of New York.

Tomesch said a healthy root system is critical to growing grapes, as is well-drained soil.

“The saying is grapes don’t like to get their feet wet,” he said.

Different varieties of vines that should thrive in the local lake-chilled climate will be grafted onto the base vines.

They include Rkatsiteli, native to the Republic of Georgia, Arctic, a newly defined variety identified by growers at Cornell University, and Gewurztraminer, a spicy grape that originated in the Alsace region.

The vineyard is planted so that the vines are 7-1/2-feet apart.

“That has been determined to be the optimum distance. The vines aren’t crowding each other then, but land isn’t wasted,” Tomesch said.

If production goes as expected, he said, the vineyard is expected to be able to get six bottles from each vine when mature grapes are harvested in two or three years.

Tomesch said the winery will be about more than wine. The converted schoolhouse will be available for corporate retreats and a gallery featuring works by local artists is planned. Musical events are also scheduled.

A grand opening is set for July 1 to 4. The theme “Reds, Whites and Blues,” will blend interest in wines and music with a patriotic nod.