The Chiselled Grape marks first year with awards, expansion plans

At just one year of age, the Chiselled Grape Winery in the Town of Grafton can't match some of the iconic winemakers of Europe or even California when it comes to vinification history.

Still, the local winemaker is starting to draw attention.

The winery is owned by longtime friends Harald Tomesch, a professor of classic literature and theology at Concordia University Wisconsin in Mequon, and Allan Haas, president of Brand XLerator, a Milwaukee creative-services firm.

Last summer, the men opened the winery and gallery in a century-old schoolhouse at the northwest corner of Lakefield and Port Washington roads.

The Cream City brick building was used as a one-room school house from 1907 to 1951, then converted to an antiques store and later a single-family home.

Today it houses a brightly lit art gallery, wine-tasting room and gathering space.

Immediately north of the schoolhouse, an acre of grapevines was planted in what has been called a research vineyard.

It will be another year before those vines are able to produce grapes suitable for winemaking.

With an eye toward growing grapes that thrive in chillier climates, the vines include Rkatsiteli, a variety of grape from the Republic of Georgia, Arctic, a cold-loving variety developed by researchers at Cornell University, and Gewurztamine, which produce a spicy grape found in the Alsace region. The vines were grafted onto hearty transplanted winter root stock developed for the Finger Lakes region of upstate New York.

This year, 80 pinot noir vines were also added to the vineyard.

"Our vines have gotten one year older and so far, everything seems to be going great," Tomesch said.

He said some plants suffered when there was a late frost this spring, but they haven't been harmed yet by the protracted heat of summer.

"We have been out every morning watering from 6 to 8 a.m.," Tomesch said.

The marketability of the locally made wine will be enhanced greatly by the inclusion of the Grafton winery in the American Viticultural Area known as the Wisconsin Ledge.

“The region stretches from the tip of Door County to Highway C in Ozaukee County, so we are at the southern edge of the district,” Tomesch said, adding that he hopes in time the region might develop the same kind of cachet for desirable wines as Napa or Sonoma.

While awaiting their first home-grown harvest, the winemakers have been perfecting their craft with grapes brought in from other vineyards.

The resulting wine is made largely from California grapes, filtered and bottled at the winery, and marketed under the Chiselled Grape label.

Last fall, the winery won two awards during a blind tasting conducted by the American Wine Society in Rochester, N.Y.

Its 2005 Barbera won a silver medal and its 2009 Sagiovese won a bronze.

Two of the other wines won acclaim in the 2012 U.S. National Wine Competition — the 2009 Malbec earned a silver award and a full-bodied 2009 blended red called Little Red Dress took a bronze award.

Last year, the winery’s 2010 Chenin Blanc receive a score of 91 points from Anthony Dias Blue, editor-in-chief of The Tasting Panel Magazine.

The winery is currently fermenting a fruity white Frontenac Gris from grapes received from a private vineyard in River Hills, as well as a dry red Marechal Foch from grape from the Kovnesky Vineyard.

With a busy calendar of special events, the winery has quickly become a favorite destination for those seeking a little local sophistication.

“The people of this community have really stepped up and embraced us, making the winery a popular location for private receptions and clubs to meet,” Tomesch said.

“It is fun to see how quickly the winery has become the kind of place people like to show off to out-of-town guests.”

After a profitable first year, Tomesch said, the winery is looking for available farmland in the area to be converted into even more vineyards.

Image Information: THE CHISELLED GRAPE co-owner Allan Haas marked last week's first anniversary celebration with wine lovers Lisa Glass, Allison Dozark and Anita Clark. The winery is located on Lakefield Road just west of Port Washington Road in the Town of Grafton. Below, the business features a retail outlet for its own wines, gallery space promoting a variety of artists, and a reception room which can be booked for private gatherings. Photo by Sam Arendt