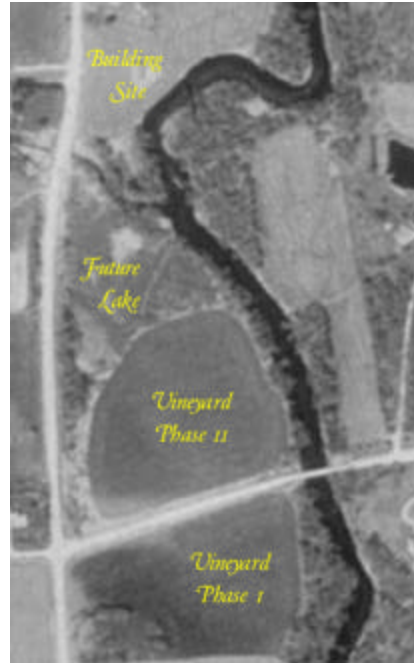


**To our Kalmar Township Neighbors
From the Patton Family**

Vineyard Update. Many of you have been following the progress of the vineyard, so we thought we'd write up a little update for everyone. As most of you know, we purchased the property on the East side of the intersection of country roads 103 and 105 from David Larsen earlier this year. Our long-term goal is to develop a vineyard and winery that blends in with the natural beauty of the area. We have been working with the Department of Natural Resources (DNR), National Resource Conservation Services (NRCS), the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency (PCA), and various architects and engineers to come up with a plan that both meets the needs of this agricultural operation and yet conforms to the guidelines of the various planning and zoning authorities.

The first phase of the project was the planting of a block of vines on the south side of county 103. We have about an acre each of three varieties of hybrid grapes suitable for making wine. There are two varieties of white grapes, on either side of an acre of red grapes. The whites are LaCrescent, which is a variety developed and released in 2003 by the University of Minnesota and Prairie Star, which is a new variety recently released by a private breeder in Northern Wisconsin. The rows of red grapes, which are marked with pink flags in the vineyard, are called Frontenac and are also a new variety from the University of Minnesota. For the wine drinkers out there, the LaCrescent grape makes a wine similar to Riesling, Prairie Star similar to Chardonnay and Frontenac similar to Cabernet.



The second phase of the plan is to plant a similar sized block of vines on the North side of 103 over the next few years and to seed the surrounding space in turf grass. Our ultimate plan is to create a two-acre lake and privately owned public park area on the North end of the property near the creek to add to the already beautiful scenic quality of the area.

Along with the additional planting, we will be installing the trellising system in the south side in the spring. The trellis, which will support the grape vines as they grow, is constructed from round treated poles and hi-tensile wire in a mini-telephone pole fashion.



The Flood. Obviously the big topic of this summer has been the two floods and their impact on the vineyard. Fortunately, other than nearly drowning our tractor, they really had a minimal effect on the vines. As the water wasn't moving too fast through the vineyard it didn't do much damage and we learned a lot about flooding and the natural dynamics of riverfront property. Vines typically do not like prolonged exposure to water but it seemed to come and go quick enough to make a mess without doing any serious damage.

Winery Update. An important piece of this agricultural venture is processing the grapes into wine and selling the final product to consumers. Our ultimate goal is to build a small commercial winery on the piece of land at the very North end of the property. According to a flood study we had conducted by an engineering firm from the cities, there are portions of this piece of land that are above the 100-year flood plain. We also noticed that they remained above the river through this year's flooding. We've been working with a winery architect to design a building that will blend into the scenic landscape yet provide for the various processes necessary to crush and ferment grapes. Here is an artist's conception of our planned winery:



Probably the easiest way to talk about the winery would be to answer some of the most common questions we've received so far:

Q: What is a Minnesota Farm Winery?

A: It is a state and federally licensed (bonded) building where wine can be produced. Minnesota farm wineries cannot sell anything alcoholic other than the wine created from Minnesota grapes, fruits, and berries. Although we are hoping to sell much of our wine through restaurants, wineries are what create the demand. Part of the romance of the "winery experience" is tasting the products, touring the vineyard and winery, and buying the wine directly from the winemakers.

Q: Who controls/governs wineries?

A: Producing and selling wine is controlled by the Federal Tax and Trade Bureau (previously called the Alcohol, Tax, & Firearms) and the Minnesota Alcohol and Gaming Enforcement Division of the Department of Public Safety. There is a lengthy and rigorous licensing process that every winery must complete whether they are selling a few hundred bottles per year or a few hundred thousand cases. Additionally wineries are governed by local city, township, and county ordinances and restrictions.

Q: What are the typical hours of operation?

A: Wineries, like many seasonal agricultural businesses, are typically open when there is sufficient product to sell and demand to buy. Most of the Minnesota wineries are only open on weekends during the summer during normal business hours. If you are curious, there are Minnesota wineries listed at <http://www.mngrapes.com>. Please contact them directly if you would like to find out more about their business and their impact on their surrounding neighbors.

Q: How would a winery affect us?

A: There are nine commercial wineries in the state currently with new ones opening each year. On a typical weekend afternoon there are 2-3 cars in the parking lot and possibly 1 or 2 people working in the vineyard. In general, wineries are quiet, they don't produce any sort of pollution or toxic by-products, and they do not require any special modification to roads or utilities.

Q: When will it be built?

A: We are currently working with the Kalmar Township Board, the Township Cooperative Planning Association, and Olmsted Planning and Zoning to determine if and when the winery can be built. Eventually there will be a public hearing in which residents will be given an opportunity to voice their opinions. Honestly however, if you have concerns or strong objections to our plans, we'd like to hear from you now. We do not want to go forward with this if our future neighbors are opposed to it.

Q: If the winery is built, what will it be called?

A: Interestingly enough, the intersection of 103 and 105 is still listed as "Post Town, MN" on many maps. One of the maps that still shows this town is Mapquest, an online mapping service which would allow customers to easily find our property. For this reason, we decided on the name "Post Town Winery". Steve spent a few days at the Olmsted Historical Society reading old newspapers to uncover the origin of the name and the history associated with the community that existed there in the late 1800s. The town was named after.... hmmm... you'll have to ask us or visit the winery sometime to find out the rest of the story (if you don't already know it).

History of Grape Growing in Minnesota. We often get asked, "Do grapes really grow in Minnesota?" Well, check out any ditch, fencerow, or riverbank, and you'll likely see wild grapes growing. In fact, we're located at roughly the same latitude as grape growing regions such as Bordeaux and Rhone Valley in France and many of the famous vineyards of Northern California and Washington state. In fact, we receive significantly more sunlight per day than Napa Valley, California during our brief summers. Although around 1900 there were over 3,000 Minnesota farms identified as vineyards, it wasn't until recently that it has become economically feasible. The University of Minnesota has been working since 1908, developing hybrid varieties that combined the winter-hardiness of native Minnesota grapes "*Vitis Riparia*" with the world-famous wine-grapes of Europe "*Vitis Vinifera*". Their goal has been to develop grapes that would both, grow in our frigid winters and produce outstanding wine. The results of these labors are now just starting to show in the varieties released by the University and private breeders over the last 10 years.

Economics of Grape Growing. One of the areas in which people often have questions is with the economics of grape growing. Well it certainly isn't a get-rich-quick proposition but it can be more than a hobby. Including labor costs, spending about \$3500 per acre to establish a vineyard (not including purchasing land) is a reasonable estimate. On-going costs (pest control, labor, etc) run about \$1500/year per acre. There is currently a severe shortage of grapes in the state of Minnesota so selling grapes is never a problem. Once the vines reach 3-4 years old, typical revenue from an acre of grapes would be in the \$3500 range. Not a huge profit margin, but it is at least positive. There are a few Minnesota crop farmers who have been able to leverage their general farming skills and knowledge to significantly decrease their costs (and increase their profits).

If a grape grower wishes to take the extra step of producing wine from their crop, the same acre of grape vines that will produce \$3500 worth of grapes can yield about five times that amount in wine.

Regional Grape and Wine Conference to be in Rochester in 2005. The Minnesota Grape Growers Association (MGGA) will be hosting a national conference on cold-climate grape growing and wine making in Rochester, February 18-19, 2005. This conference, which will include a half-day "new growers" workshop, will be held at the Kahler Grand Hotel in downtown Rochester and is expected to attract new and existing grape growers and wine makers from around the U.S and Canada.

The "Introduction to Grape Growing" workshop on Friday afternoon, February 18th, is \$50. As we'd like to develop partnerships with growers, we will pay 1/2 the registration fee of anyone in SE Minnesota considering growing grapes on a commercial basis. For more information, check out the events page of the MGGA website (www.mngrapes.com) or contact Steve.

About Us. We both work fulltime in Rochester and have three boys. Bonita is a licensed psychologist and the co-owner of Associates in Psychiatry and Psychology in Rochester. Steve is an Information Technology consultant in the Rochester area and is also on the Board of Directors for the state grape growers organization (MGGA). We both have farm backgrounds and part of the motivation to start this project was the desire to give our sons the opportunity to share in the rural experience. Blake, our oldest is 12, Devon is 9 and Miles is 7. You'll see all of them (along with our dog Rusty) out there in the summer helping with the ongoing vineyard care and maintenance.



As we mentioned earlier, if you have concerns, comments, or just questions about our project, please let us know. Steve, Bonita, Blake, Devon, and Miles Patton

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