

NEW BUSINESS

Coming soon...wine!

Woelfel Homestead grapes off to good start

BY MARK SHERRY

By this time next year, Jon and Kerri Woelfel hope to be producing and selling wine at Woelfel Homestead just north of New Holstein.

Next year's wine would not be from their grapes, but that day is coming as well as the 900 grape vines they planted in May are coming along very well.

"They look great," Jon said Saturday while hosting an "open barn" for family, friends, neighbors and other invited guests at Woelfel Homestead, located at W1139 Lime Kiln Rd., just off Hayton Road.

In less than six hours, Woelfel and his crew of family and friends planted an acre of grapes in multiple varieties. They have two whites, St. Pepin and LaCrescent; and three reds, Frontenac, Petite Pearl and the very popular Marquette. They also planted a few vines of Somerset grapes as well. "I like the diversity," he said.

Those grapes will not be ready for wine production next year, but Jon said he can purchase grapes from other growers and then produce the wine in the production shed they have started to renovate on the farm. It will be a good tune-up for where Jon said they would like to be five years from now—producing 1,000 cases of wine per year from five acres of grapes. "That's manageable," he said.

Jon is hardly new to wine making. Although he was raised working on the farm of parents Roger and Cathy, he headed out to California's wine country for 15 years. "Slowly I'm hearing about these other wineries popping up" in Wisconsin, he said. The University of Minnesota has been a leader in developing winter-hardy varieties of grapes for cold-weather regions, and more varieties are being developed all the time. The plants the Woelfels put in last spring are from a nursery in Vermont—no stranger to winter weather.

Jon said the Woelfel Homestead kept calling him to come back home and—with encouragement from

family—that is what they did about a year and a half ago. Jon said he is getting reacquainted to Wisconsin winters. That is a taller task for Kerri, who is originally from Louisiana.

Together they have a vision for making Woelfel Homestead a premier ag tourism destination in northeast Wisconsin.

"Kerri has a really strong vision of growing more food on the land," Jon said. While leading a tour on Saturday, Kerri pointed out rows of fruit trees which have already been planted. They might add bees to the farm at some point for honey, and Jon said they will be partnering with a friend who will raise sheep on the property.

Next year the Woelfels will be getting chickens. That will mark a return to a time when the farm always had chickens and the current building by a man-made pond served as the chicken coop. Today a sign which says "Woelfel Pond Resort" is on the side of the building, and inside is grandpa Linus's beer can collection which will stay put.

Jon's parents have already been operating Woelfel Homestead as a wedding/event facility for several years, and the next generation has plans to expand that. They already have been busy this year making additions and changes to the main barn, including adding restrooms. The wood for the restroom walls came off a home which was being dismantled just down the road.

Jon said the barn can be used from May to October and their goal would be to have an event every weekend. It also can serve as a wine tasting venue, with a smaller, year-round wine tasting room planned for the heated shed.

They have converted the former milkhouse into a small bridal suite with its own restroom. Other changes to the property have been and will be made as Jon and Kerri continue to work toward taking the already scenic property and making it into the place of their dreams.



Kerri and Jon Woelfel led a tour of the Woelfel Homestead on Saturday for family, friends, neighbors and other special guests.
MARK SHERRY PHOTOS

