

Brandywine Vineyards

(Continued from Page A22)

spring and prevent frost damage during the delicate bud stage."

"We have to be honest, and say, yes we are a Pennsylvania winery, but probably our largest market is the greater Wilmington area. There is a large concentration of affluent wine drinking people there," said McKeon.

McKeon began drawing up a plan for the property, laying out the vineyards and designing the winery. Production estimates, and costs were figured, and funding was sought.

McKeon recalls, "When I first started looking for a loan, I very boldly picked up the phone and told the bank officer I wanted to borrow \$1.2 million. They were very polite and didn't laugh, and then explained if they lent that much money to one person and he defaulted it would take the bank under."

Back to the drawing board. McKeon revised his plan, refining it and cutting costs. Still no lenders were willing to assume the risk. Then he went to the ADC and asked for help in finding a lender.

The old college try

"The development plan went through 15 iterations," explained McKeon, "each time it went through an iteration the funding being sought was smaller and hopefully more intelligently planned. I went to 15 to 17 lending institutions and was turned down by them all, until I finally got funding from the Agricultural Business Division of American Bank, in Reading. American Bank would only OK the loan if I could get a Small Business Administration guarantee. The Small Business Administration refused two applications before OKing a third proposal."

When things seemed to be falling together, other disruptive forces began to come into play. The site McKeon selected for the winery was met with local opposition. The Citizens To Stop The Winery organized.

Bob McRae a member of the ADC explains, "Initially McKeon had selected a site in New London

township. His building permit was turned down because the site was zoned strictly residential and the winery didn't fall into any other special exception categories.

"When McKeon moved the proposed site to Franklin Township he also met opposition from residents of Franklin Township who didn't want the winery in the township. Franklin Township is a dry township and prohibits retail sales of brewed and distilled spirits. This is when the Agricultural Development Council got involved in township meetings.

"We (ADC) felt the winery was an accessory use to an agricultural operation, and we set about to find out what we could do to prove that."

ADC acted as a resource linker for McKeon. They contacted Secretary of Agriculture Penrose Hallowell, who personally wrote a letter citing many agriculturally-related land and tax laws of the Commonwealth that define agricultural products in such a manner as to include viticulture and the products thereof. ADC did some document digging as well, turning up plenty of proof that the winery was in fact an agricultural accessory use.

The information was compiled and presented by McKeon's attorney to the zoning hearing board. When the Citizens To Stop The Winery could not present any proof that the winery was a commercial use the permit was granted.

Breaking new ground

The major problem confronting McKeon was not all the small obstacles he had to overcome, but the novelty of establishing a vineyard in southeast Pennsylvania. McKeon not only had to learn how to go about it himself he had to educate everyone along the way.

"The point is, if we were doing this in California there would be no shortage of bankers that would understand the problem. They might not agree with me, but they would at least be able to grasp the problem and work it. But here in Pennsylvania it's difficult. In fact, several bankers openly said to me, 'We don't know that there is

anything wrong with your proposal, we just don't know that it's any good."

Taking root

When all the necessary approval had been given, McKeon and Olsyn were able break real ground. The first five acres of grapes were planted in May 1982. An additional 10 acres were planted this past spring. Six varieties are presently being grown. Olsyn plans to plant an additional 10 acres each spring, eventually the vineyard will have 65 acres in production. Construction of the winery began in August 1982. The township granted the winery a five year sanction that permits them to produce wine from grapes purchased in Pennsylvania. In five years, they will be required to produce 50 percent of the raw material they manufacture.

Fruits of determination

Imparting a little local color to his wine business, McKeon named his winery "The Brandywinery." He started making wine in October 1982 and started selling the wine on March 9, 1983. All the wine made thus far is from juice purchased from Erie County. Next year the first grapes from the Brandywine vineyard will be harvested.

Two-thirds of the wine produced at the Brandywinery are white, one-third is red, reflecting consumption trends. The wine selection includes Aurore, Seyval Blanc, Niagara, Catawba Rose, Leon Millot, and for local flavor Concord, Brandywine White, Hunt Cup Red, and soon to be added Brandywine Red.


By 1992, McKeon estimates the vineyard and winery will be producing and processing 250 tons of their own grapes. These grapes will yield some 260,000 bottles of wines.

It's never been easy to start a vineyard in Pennsylvania. William

Penn failed three hundred years ago in an attempt to start one. At last McKeon and Olsyn have succeeded in establishing a vineyard that the Brandywine Valley has thirsted for for years.



Visitors to the winery are given a tour by McKeon. Wine is fermented in large plastic vats, which are neutral to the wine.

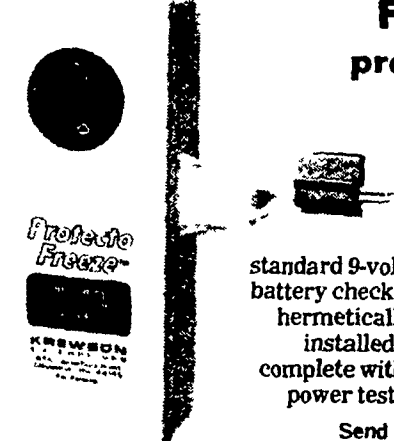


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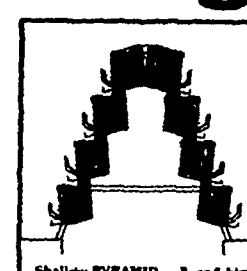
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