

Vintners in 'the lifestyle business'

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Area wineries employ, by one industry estimate, more than 400, and they harvest more than 1,200 acres of vineyards, of Ontario's 18,000.

In all, there are about 90 mainly grape-based wineries in Ontario.

Between events, day trippers and organized bus tours, Colio counts upward of 100,000 visitors a year.

Tourism has become so important the winery is in the midst of yet another major renovation to accommodate visitors.

By Pelee's estimate, the winery in Kingsville and island visitor centre receive 150,000 visitors a year from the world over.

The area's wine and tourism industries consider the opening of the Viewpointe Estate Winery as a significant development.

Built as a destination attraction with tasting areas, cellar and production facilities, the two buildings near Colch-

ester overlook Lake Erie.

The striking architecture was inspired by another alcohol business — whisky distiller Hiram Walker's former Mattawas resort, known as Kingsville's Lakeshore Terrace before being destroyed by fire.

John Fancsy, whose family invested millions in the winery, believes the business is limited only by the area's aspirations.

Viewpointe Estate Winery remains a work in progress, with its retail store open, culinary instruction underway and banquet facility accepting bookings into the spring.

The toughest market challenge, Fancsy believes, isn't attracting a wine aficionado from Toronto or southeast Michigan's tony suburbs but people who live nearby.

Area residents need to be persuaded to drive 30 minutes to sip wines gaining acclaim and awards in Canada, the U.S. and Europe.



INSPIRED BY WALKER: Viewpointe Estate Winery on County Road 50.

Star photo: Nick Brancaccio

"They're exactly the audience we need to convince," Fancsy says.

"I always harp at length about the negativity one encounters here. We have to convince ourselves."

"We're not in the wine business, really. We're in the lifestyle business. And I really want to make this a better place to live," Fancsy says.

He thinks the number of wineries will

plateau at 13 for a couple of years as potential investors watch how the business develops.

Shores of Erie Wine Festival organizers recently snagged an important Ontario Trillium Foundation grant of more than \$115,000 for wine-tourist promotion.

The local tourism industry has also put together winery tour packages as part of its Sense-Sational promotion campaign.

Wineries are an integral element of this area's tourism industry, ranking among five main attractions or elements the industry uses to pitch the region.

"The wineries are a major trip motivator," says Gordon Orr, who directs the Convention and Visitors Bureau of Windsor, Essex County and Pelee Island.

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