

Business News

Upper Shore Regional Council promotes vineyard businesses

By CRAIG O'DONNELL
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CHESTERTOWN — Grapegrowing, which is something few associate with the rural Eastern Shore, has gotten a name and a boost this month from the Upper Shore Regional Council. Its new "shoreVines" Web site at www.shorevines.com is meant to encourage more vineyard businesses on the Upper Shore.

In the name of economic development, for several years the council has been laying the groundwork to bring grape cultivation to the region. ShoreVines' message is 'grow grapes — a vital option for the Upper Shore.'

Walter and Lottie Bowie of Loblolly Productions, Still Pond, created the Web site and print materials for the Cecil-Kent-Queen Anne's recruiting campaign.

In addition to the Web site, there are several minute-long TV spots that will be distributed to cable outlets in Cecil and Queen Anne's counties, according to Loblolly designer and videographer Walter Bowie.

Music behind the spots is by local bluegrass band Chester River Runoff, he said. The idea is to "inspire people to go to the Web site for more information," he said on Monday. The video will also go onto the Web.

Vineyards are where grapes grow. Wineries blend grapes to make wine, and may or may not be associated with their own vineyard.

Eleven vineyards have been established in the three-county Upper Shore area so far: Cassinelli Winery & Vineyards, well-marked by a white fence and sign on Route 213 in Queen Anne's County, may be most familiar to Kent County residents.

The others are Dudley Farms; Piney Grove Cellars; Terrapin Station Winery; Walnut Grove Farm; Crow Farm; Dove Valley Vineyard & Winery; Tilmon's Island Winery; Plain Dealings Vineyard; Mark Cascia Vineyards; and Neff & Son.

About half the growers are in Queen Anne's, with three apiece so far in Cecil and Kent, the

USRC's Jana Carter said Monday.

According to the shoreVines Web site, growing grapes is an environmentally friendly way of coupling sustainable agriculture and land preservation. It can support the family farms that are a long Eastern Shore tradition.

If the location is right, a vineyard can be established on as little as five acres.

Vineyard business plans, developed by the USRC, are available for free on shorevines.com.

The initiative enjoys the support of commissioners from the three counties. Paul Gunther, Queen Anne's County commissioner, chairs the USRC Sustainable Agriculture Subcommittee, and William Manlove, past Cecil County commissioner, is a member.

More information is available by e-mailing info@shorevines.com, or from Carter at 410-810-1375.

About a year and a half ago, the idea of bringing potential Eastern Shore vineyard owners together with management companies got the green light in a report to USRC by consultant Stephen Mudd.

Among his conclusions were that "white varieties would possibly be more successful than the red varieties because of the additional constant heat night and day as compared to the western part of the state where there is more elevation."

However, because regional vineyards are a new idea in the state, the USRC is starting from scratch in some areas. Mudd noted, "some of the regulations in the state of Maryland [have] created real barriers for the industry." He went on to say that Maryland wineries should be able to bypass distributors and sell directly to restaurants and liquor stores. This would give them more profit from each bottle. As the law stands, all retail outlets must buy only from distributors.

Also, he wrote, "I have a concern about the labor available in the area to perform the many necessary tasks a VMC needs to do in a timely fashion."

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By Craig O'Donnell

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