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Lake Michigan College Launches Midwest's First Commercial Teaching Winery Great Lakes Wine Institute now recruiting students for fall, 2015

BENTON TOWNSHIP, MI – Lake Michigan College is launching the Great Lakes Wine Institute, the Midwest's first commercial teaching winery, where students will learn the art, science, and business of wine. Beginning in fall 2015, students can start earning an Associate of Applied Science in Enology and Viticulture, the science of wine making and the production and study of grapes.

The College created the Great Lakes Wine Institute in response to a rapidly-growing regional wine industry and a demand for skilled professionals to support it. Michigan has doubled its vineyard area over the past 10 years, and is now the fourth largest grape-growing state in the nation. With 107 commercial wineries, Michigan ranks 13th in wine production and the industry draws more than 2 million visitors annually.

The Round Barn is one of eight area wineries advising in the development of the college's program. "With over 35 years in the local wine industry we were honored to be involved with the development of the new teaching winery at Lake Michigan College," said Owner/Partner of Round Barn Winery, Distillery and Brewery, Christian Moersch. "With an annual growth rate of 10-15% and the addition of several wineries over the last decade, it has become harder to find qualified candidates to fill the positions required to make great wine. The best thing about this program is that we can hire people who are familiar with the challenges our industry faces locally rather than hiring someone from out of state who is not familiar with our climate, varieties, and terroir."

Southwest Michigan has become one of the most prolific wine-producing regions in the country. It's what persuaded the Great Lakes Wine Institute's new Director, Michael Moyer, to move from his home in Walla Walla, Washington.

"What attracted me to this region is that it has all the ingredients for serious winemaking," said Moyer. "It has a great climate, well-drained soils, a huge population base, and wineries that are already creating some fabulous wines. People in the wine industry who are living in other parts of the country don't think about Michigan wines. But the wines made here can have the balance of fruit, structure, and alcohol much more common to the old world."

Prior to joining LMC, Moyer worked with Figgins Family Wine Estates in Washington where he crafted a variety of wines for the esteemed Leonetti label as well as Doubleback, Figgins, and Toil Oregon. He also worked with famed California brands, Etude and Peter Michael Winery. He brings academic experience from Walla Walla, where he was instrumental in designing and developing its community college's wine science program. He also holds a Master of Science in Viticulture and Enology from the University of California, Davis, a globally-influential program with a 130-year history.

Moyer was chosen among several candidates interviewed by the advisory committee comprised of local winery representatives, including Joe Herman, owner of Karma Vista Vineyards.

"I'm so impressed we got somebody of his caliber – who not only has an academic background, but a real world background," Herman said.

"Finding the right person to run this program was crucial," said LMC's Vice President of Instruction for Career and Workforce Education, Leslie Kellogg. "Michael has specialized knowledge and experience, and has mentored dozens of students throughout the years who are now part of the fabric of the wine industry. He is passionate about wine making and will surely inspire our future students. We're very fortunate to have him here."

The College has already invested in the program by constructing a small, commercially viable teaching winery located in the Mendel Center for Arts and Technology. Students will study chemistry and microbiology in existing science labs on campus, but will gain the full, hands-on wine making experience at both the College's winery and through participation in a second fall harvest with one of the area's local wineries.

LMC has partnered with Michigan State University for the use of its vineyards, where students will learn about vineyard establishment, soils, plant physiology, canopy management, and vineyard diseases and insects. The program also has a strong business component that covers winery operations, sales, marketing, distribution, and business management.

The College is currently in the planning stages for a new facility that will have a larger production capacity and include an on-site vineyard and tasting room. The College plans to recruit an initial group of 15 students into the program this fall. Potential students may include those with farming or science backgrounds, current winery employees wishing to improve their skills, and wine industry entrepreneurs.

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