

outbursts

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Virginia Tech study team raises a toast to wine-worker training center

Local government officials sought Tech's endorsement

By Andrea Brunais

A Virginia Tech study confirms what officials in Purcellville, Virginia, had hoped to be true: A workforce education center would give a needed boost to the wine industry in Loudoun County, near Washington, D.C.

The Virginia Tech team surveyed owners and managers of more than 100 wineries and vineyards in Northern Virginia who identified a need for better marketing acumen to promote the industry. They also articulated a need to improve the quality and quantity of grapes so that Virginia wines can develop an appeal to wine aficionados beyond the commonwealth.

Local government leaders proposed creating a Viticulture and Enology Education Center with hopes that such a center would address industry concerns. It would also help solve the problem of a lack of a qualified workforce necessary to grow grapes and produce high-quality wines on a large scale.

"Many in the industry believe they've reached a snag because the region needs talented, trained workers to create a national reputation for Virginia as a wine region of renown," says John Provo, who heads Virginia Tech's Office of Economic Development. "Based on that perception, leaders in Loudoun County, Purcellville,



Tony Wolf, professor of horticulture in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences at Virginia Tech and viticulture specialist for Virginia Cooperative Extension, conducts a short course for vineyard owners at the Alson H. Smith Jr. Agricultural Research and Extension Center in Winchester, Va.

and the regional wine industry turned to the university for a feasibility study and business plan."

The study team concluded that such a center could give the industry some needed juice and recommended that the curriculum begin with a focus on viticulture techniques to increase the quality and quantity of grapes. Areas of instruction might include vineyard site selection and design, cultivar and clone selection, trellis construction, plant pathology, and canopy management.

The team, led by the Office of Economic Development, included experts from Virginia Tech's Department of Agricultural and Applied Economics, the Department of Food Science and Technology, Virginia

Cooperative Extension, and the university-affiliated VT KnowledgeWorks, as well as Bruce Zoecklein, Virginia Tech professor emeritus.

In creating a business plan for Purcellville, the Virginia Tech team pointed out that the town's location gives it the advantage of proximity to the majority of wineries and vineyards in Northern Virginia. A better-trained workforce for those wineries and vineyards would result in higher productivity and more profits.

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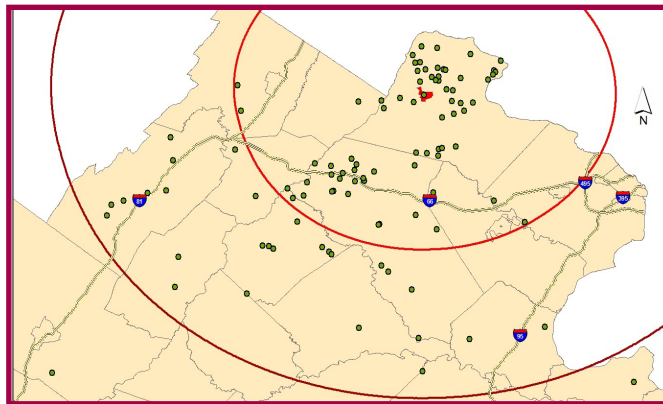


Virginia Tech alumna Erica Adams managed a project in which the university collaborated with industry and other universities (Cornell, Ohio State, North Carolina State, and the University of Maryland) to help vintners select the best spots for planting.

The center would be the first of its kind in Virginia, says Sarah Lyon-Hill, a specialist with the Office of Economic Development. Two similar programs, one in New York and the other in North Carolina, are based at community colleges.

through the Department of Food Science and Technology's enology program, which assists winegrowers to improve the quality of Virginia wines.

"The five-year business plan calls for raising funds and curriculum development to offer a one-year trial program, and leaders in Purcellville are working to deepen their relationships with industry and educators in Northern Virginia Community College," Lyon-Hill says.



Dots show Northern Virginia vineyards and wineries surveyed in the study.

Funding for the study came from the Governor's Agriculture and Forestry Industries Development Fund.

Virginia Tech supports the commonwealth's wine-growing industry in other ways.

- The university's Center for Geospatial Information Technology developed the East Coast Viticulture Suitability tool, which helps vintners select the best spots for planting a vineyard according to soil composition, draining, topography, and weather data.
- Virginia Cooperative Extension supports grape growers and oenologists by conducting research at the Alson H. Smith Jr. Agricultural Research and Extension Center in Winchester, Virginia (related to cultivation and plant diseases) and



The Inn at Virginia Tech's fine-dining restaurant, Preston's, launched a Wine Society almost two years ago. Dinners and wine tastings as well as educational events are scheduled throughout the year. Please call 540-231-0120 for more information. Preston's private-label red and white wines are produced at Prince Michel Vineyards and Winery in Madison, Virginia.

New to economic development team



Scott Tate



Sarah Lyon-Hill

Two new staff members have joined Virginia Tech's Office of Economic Development to replace departing staff members. The new economic development specialists are Scott Tate and Sarah Lyon-Hill, both of whom have strong ties to Virginia Tech.

Tate earned his Ph.D. degree in 2012 from Virginia Tech's ASPECT interdisciplinary program encompassing social sciences, humanities, and the arts. As an Extension specialist, he was embedded in Virginia Tech's Institute for Policy and Governance, housed in the College of Architecture and Urban Studies. Tate's expertise is in regional development, entrepreneurship, and the arts.

Lyon-Hill received her master's degree in urban and regional planning from Virginia Tech in 2012 and is now in her third year as a doctoral student in the School of Public and International Affairs. Lyon-Hill's background lies in international and community development. As a Peace Corps volunteer in Niger, she worked with organizations to coordinate community projects including a women's micro-financing project.

www.outreach.vt.edu

Office of Economic Development

702 University City Blvd. (0373)
Blacksburg, VA 24061
540-231-5278

www.econdev.vt.edu

■ John Provo, director
540-231-4004 ~ jprovo@vt.edu

Outbursts is a publication of Outreach and International Affairs

Guru Ghosh, vice president
Susan Short, associate vice president, engagement

Editorial and graphics staff

Andrea Brunais, 540-231-4691
Keith Pierce, 540-231-7966
Rich Mathieson, 540-231-1419
Miriam Rich, 540-231-4153