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Uncorking Career Opportunities Online, 2012

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UNCORKING CAREER OPPORTUNITY

Kent State’s one-of-a-kind degrees meet needs of area’s growing wine industry.

By Heather Thomas, public relations major
Cultivating vineyards, fermenting grapes and producing top-quality wine are just some of the crucial responsibilities of a wine maker. But the opportunities to develop these skills are not as common as one may think.

Fortunately for the industry and potential employees, Kent State University at Ashtabula responded to the needs and demands of a growing Ohio industry through an affiliation with the Viticulture Enology Science and Technology Alliance (VESTA).

“We’re very excited to provide students the opportunity to study and eventually work in this industry that is so important to our region,” says Dr. Susan Stocker, dean and chief administrative officer of Kent State Ashtabula. Kent State Ashtabula’s enology and viticulture majors are offered in an area that contains more than half of Ohio’s wine-grape acreage and is home to the majority of the state’s 151 wineries.

Ashtabula County is home to 20 wineries that are visited by nearly 500,000 people annually. Local wineries and vineyards in Lake, Geauga and Ashtabula counties provide students with hands-on training and real-world experience before graduation.

Senior Special Assistant to Academic Affairs Lori Lee says VESTA was looking for states with existing wine industries that have an economic influence, and Ohio was a prime candidate, so Kent State Ashtabula was approached by VESTA to get involved. VESTA continues to partner with Kent State by helping with curriculum development and other requirements.

Students have the opportunity to learn the ins and outs of vineyard selection, wine grape growing, grape juice fermentation, and other biology and chemistry-related aspects of the wine industry.

**Online Curriculum Available Statewide**

The advantage of online courses means that not only anyone in the state can participate in Kent State Ashtabula’s new programs, but also anyone in the country.

Students can earn an Associate of Applied Science in Enology, the study of wine and winemaking, or an Associate of Applied Science in Viticulture, the study of vine growing and grape harvesting, online. The two-year programs prepare students for skilled jobs in Ohio’s 500-million-dollar wine and grape industry, and are the first associate degrees related to winemaking offered in the state.

**Grape Expectations for Ohio**

“The viticulture program will help me start a vineyard on a portion of my family’s farm in Kingsville,” says Jeff Cline, enology and viticulture student. “This program will help with everything that I want to accomplish to start a new business.”

“The availability of these wine programs at Kent State Ashtabula will shorten [on-site] training time, and provide us with an elevated quality of wine professionals for hire,” says Debonne Vineyards owner Tony Debevec. “In addition, those who go to college have more than just the technical skills to bring to the workplace. They come with new ideas and experiences, as well as industry connections.”

“I believe that wine making is a huge area for growth here in the Midwest,” says Cline. “There are a lot of areas that can use the economic growth … and whether I might use the skills to open a winery or work for one, the winemaking job market is growing not shrinking.”