

Spotlight

The Winery at Shale Lake

Making Wine is Just the beginning for Central Illinois Newest Destination on Route 66.

A thriving vineyard would be enough for many people. For Susan and David Wesa, their purchase of more than 200 acres with a lake in 2007 opened the door to create the perfect next chapter.

"Retirement for us meant working 16 hours a day to create a relaxing get-away destination for people traveling southwest Illinois," Susan Wesa said of The Winery at Shale Lake, in Williamson. They started their new adventure by planting 4,000 vines and offering fishing memberships on the property's 24-acre lake.

More than a dozen varieties of wine are made and sold on site. The tasting room and outdoor patio overlook the lake that many people also hike around or ride a Surrey-style bicycle down to for picnics. Also on the property are horse stables, riding trails and eight well-appointed rental cabins. The Winery is located southeast of Staunton between Interstate 55 and Historic Old Route 66, just 40 miles from St. Louis.

"We are eager to continue with the next steps of our development plans," David said. National Bank, headquartered in Hillsboro, Illinois, is financing the expansion. "Having a local partner like National Bank was important to us. The loan staff could see our visions for Shale Lake and were excited about a destination for day trippers, weekend travelers and special occasions such as weddings, anniversaries or birthdays. They saw the value of our already established business and the potential for new ventures."

Future plans for the couple include building an outdoor venue for weddings and special events and campground with 78 campsites. Ultimately a banquet center and larger winery tasting room are planned.

"Local Business Bankers have the flexibility to see what the market needs, wants and can sustain. We're right there with them, helping put those plans into motion," said Angie Fears, Associate Vice President, National Bank. National Bank created a loan uniquely structured to meet the needs of the winery's plans now and for the future. "It's exciting to see businesses growing in your own community," Fears said.

For Susan and David, they are growing grapes and a place for families to create many happy memories. The Winery at Shale Lake is open Friday through Sunday with cabins available 7 days a week year-round. Susan and David can be reached at 618-637-2470 or online at www.shalewine.com.



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