Dunn County's first winery on tap

By Pamela Powers

MENOMONIE - People can get a taste of Europe just a few miles from Menomonie.

Cottage Winery and Vineyard, Dunn County's first winery, is comprised of buildings designed to make visitors feel as if they are touring a European vineyard.

Flower boxes line windows at the site. The buildings' stone facades mimic European architecture. Brick pathways line vineyard grounds, which also are home to a stone bridge and waterfall.

The winery, owned by Tom Jorgensen and his daughter, Teresa Jorgensen, opened in mid-July.

Planning for the venture began three years ago, when the Jorgensens planted 2 acres of grapes. The grape varieties include Frontenac, Frontenac Gris, Marquette and La Crescent, all developed at the University of Minnesota.

This fall the first small harvest at the winery will occur. The Jorgensens expect a full harvest next year.

Tom started making wine seven years ago and decided he wanted to expand wine making into a family business.

"We like the European style," Tom said. "The idea started that we would have a small winery and grow from there."

As Tom toured wineries to gather ideas of his own, he noticed many Wisconsin wine producers make wines but don't cater to customers by offering them an attractive space to enjoy a glass of wine or two. So the Jorgensens decided to build their vineyard with a European flair.

"Our idea is we wanted people to come, stay and enjoy a bottle of wine," he said. "We're three miles from the freeway, but it seems a lot farther."

Teresa, who has a background in event planning, joined the venture, and the duo decided to make the winery available for weddings and other gatherings.
There are three ceremony sites on the winery grounds, two of which have small cottages. The sites seat 75 to 200 people and are named Sandstone Bluff, Vineyard Terrace and Sunset Vista. They offer views of the vineyard and other vistas surrounding the 15-acre site.

"We wanted to give the area somewhere else for ceremonies," Teresa said. "They can be used for a wedding, an anniversary, a birthday party or any celebration."

The Jorgensens and a few vineyard staff members provided most of the labor to build the new winery. One highlight is a man-made waterfall designed to reflect a cottagelike environment.

The main building, the Wine Tasting Building, lives up to its name. In addition to offering wine for tasting and for sale, the space includes sitting areas and a gallery that showcases local artists' work.

In September the Jorgensens plan to feature two wines each month, an effort to offer wines from around the world. Featured wines will cost $15 to $25 per bottle.

Wines sold at Cottage Winery and Vineyard are not available at regional stores.

"Our philosophy is, 'We are learning and we would like our customers to learn with us,' " Teresa said.

The Jorgensens also plan to offer musical entertainment on weekends and allow fundraising activities for local organizations at the winery.

Joel Bonnar of Eau Claire is the only full-time employee at the winery and vineyard. For Bonnar, who has a degree in biology from UW-Eau Claire, working at Cottage Winery and Vineyard is a dream come true.

On a recent day Bonnar and volunteer Megan Sayer, a UW-Stout student gaining experience working at the winery, pruned grapevines. Although Bonnar drives 30 minutes to his job, he said he feels like he travels beyond Wisconsin when he works.

"It feels like you are in Napa (Calif.) or it has a European feel," he said. "It is just a unique experience."

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If You Go

What: Cottage Winery and Vineyard; cottagewineryandvineyard.com.

Where: N7391 Highway F, about three miles north of Menomonie or one-half mile north of the intersection of Highways 25 and y F.

When: Open noon to 6 p.m. Thursdays through Sundays, and starting in September will be open 6 to 8 p.m. Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays as a wine bar.