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Oct 29, 2007 7:12 am US/Central

## Finding Minnesota: Olde Country Winery



Reporting  
**Bill Hudson**

LAKE LILLIAN, Minn. (WCCO) — When you think of a school building the thought of alcoholic beverages is probably far from your mind. However, when the Lake Lillian, Minn. school went up for auction, a local businessman's dream came true.

In a western cornfield, rustled by the wind, stands a giant wine bottle. It's like a beacon for travelers, hailing them to the vineyard and winery, housed at a school.

Lake Lillian's former K-8 school has traded grades -- for grapes.

"The building was available and the price was right, and I thought, 'why not give it a shot,'" said Olde Country Winery owner Irv Moen. "This is the 7th grade. This is where all the trouble starts. This is where we make most of our wines."

Irv and his wife Tina Moen bought the former school to live out their dream. They are filling it's classrooms with a yeasty aroma of fermenting wine.

They make 62 varieties from whites to reds, from Luna Rossa to Cabernet.

Just as gymnasiums are places for kids to play and communities to come together, this one is now the winery's entertainment center, a place to socialize and taste wine.

"It also means that we have a lot of people that have attended school who come in and see what we've done here. They're just from every state in the union," said Tina.

The gym's backboards now serve as billboards. Painted vines and lighted grapes wind throughout the school.

"This does four bottles at a time, and it supposedly will do about 400 bottles an hour," said Irv as he shows off the filling machine.

He's been a vintner since Vietnam when he created his first batch for buddies made from coconuts. Today's palates are more refined, from grapes grown locally and around the world, processed in a winery in the most unusual of places.

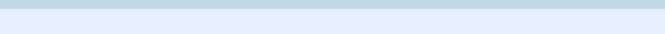
"You might think all we do is work, but I say all we do is wine," said Irv.

Fortunately for Irv, what's in his bottles is a whole lot better than the humor. Irv's winery is open for tours and wine tasting.

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