



The History of the Michigan Wine Trails

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A wine trail is a group of several wineries, typically within the same region, that collaborates for the purpose of promotion. Most commonly, wine trail organizations create brochures that provide useful information about each winery with maps that make it easier for the consumer to visit the area's wineries. Sometimes, road signs, to make traveling easier, are implemented by the group. Other common practices include websites, newsletters, trail events and advertising. In Michigan, there are four major wine trails across the state in 2009:

Leelanau Peninsula Vintners Association (LPVA)

On March 15, 1983, representatives from four wineries on Leelanau Peninsula had an informal meeting initiated by Larry Mawby, vintner of L. Mawby Vineyards of Suttons Bay and Bruce Simpson, vintner of Good Harbor Vineyards of Lake Leelanau. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss a brochure to promote the wineries.

Representatives from the two other peninsula wineries, Boskydel Vineyard of Lake Leelanau and Leelanau Wine Cellars of Omena, attended the meeting. The informal organization of the four participating wineries established Michigan's first wine trail.

Simpson and Mawby arranged the design and production of the first brochure, coordinated its printing and divided the cost equally among the four wineries. While the amount paid by each participant is unknown for the early years, in 1986, each participant paid \$430 for the brochure production.

The cohesive effort to create the brochures continued for several years and eventually expanded to include listings of area restaurants and overnight accommodations. The initial collaboration never became a legal entity.

In 1989, Bernie Rink of Boskydel Vineyard opted out of the group when he decided he was not interested in increasing the traffic through his tasting room. Due to lack of interest, efforts ceased and the group dissolved.

On the 15th anniversary of the initial group meeting, March 15, 1998, a new group was formed, officially organized as the Leelanau Peninsula Vintners Association (LPVA). Founding members included all of the Leelanau Peninsula wineries that existed at that time with the exception of Boskydel Vineyard, as Rink was still uninterested in increasing the number of visitors to his tasting room.

The purpose of the association was, and still is, to promote the wines of Leelanau Peninsula and encourage visits to the tasting rooms of member wineries. The group became a legal domestic nonprofit corporation (501(3)c) on May 8, 2000.



The Leland Wine Fest, one of the state's largest festivals, was founded by the late Bruce Simpson of Good Harbor Vineyards and other members of the Leelanau Peninsula Vintners Association in 1985.

The initial dues were calculated on a sliding scale based on the production of the wineries. The two largest wineries, Good Harbor Vineyards and Leelanau Wine Cellars, paid a large portion of initial funds. After the first three or four years, the due structure was modified. As more small wineries opened and joined the association, the group determined that the tasting room focus, rather than a wider promotion effort, made it more equitable to charge dues that were the same for all members regardless of size. ¹

Today (2009), the LPVA has 17 members and continues to encourage winery tasting room visits with a series of wine trail events, which also serve to produce a large share of the budget for the association. A brochure is produced annually and distributed around the state. E-newsletters and print media advertising are also produced for the trail. The trail's website at www.lpwines.com is a focal point of the association's marketing efforts.

Wineries of Old Mission Peninsula (WOMP)

In 1997, Spencer Stegenga of Bowers Harbor Vineyards initiated the organization of the wine trail on Old Mission Peninsula. His intention was to increase the traffic to his tasting room, which is more remote than the other wineries on the peninsula. Stegenga visited each vintner to determine if they had an interest in a collaborated effort. An informal group was established consisting of Bowers Harbor Vineyards, Chateau Grand Traverse, Chateau Chantal and Peninsula Cellars. Eventually, Brys Estate Vineyard & Winery, Black Star Farms and 2 Lads Winery opened on the peninsula and joined the organization.

The group agreed to share the design and printing costs. Stegenga designed the original map. Each winery contributed \$175 for a total amount of \$700. The first map was printed and distributed in the summer of 1997 and was available in the tasting rooms. ²

On May 24, 2002, the group became a legal entity as a domestic nonprofit corporation under the name of Wineries of Old Mission Peninsula (WOMP). The decision to become a non-profit organization was made to pursue qualifying grants. The legal organization has a board of directors and two committees: events and marketing.

Today (2009), the group consists of all seven wineries located on the peninsula. The main objective of the organization is to increase the awareness of the wineries on Old Mission Peninsula. Two subcommittees, events and marketing, have been developed to further support the objective. WOMP hosts wine trail events, sends e-newsletters and hosts an informational and promotional website at www.wineriesofoldmission.com.

Lake Michigan Shore Wine Trail

In 2001, shortly after Karma Vista Vineyards and Contessa Cellars were established, David Braganini of St. Julian Winery called a meeting in the Apollo banquet hall. The purpose of the meeting was to organize the wineries for a collaborated effort in marketing the wines and wineries of the region. All wineries became members except for Wyncroft Winery, which does not have a tasting room.

The organization was named Southwest Michigan Wine Trail and became a legal entity on February 19, 2002. On May 6 of that same year, the legal entity changed from a limited liability corporation and became a domestic nonprofit organization to qualify for grant funds. Later, the group changed its name to Lake Michigan Shore Wine Trail to align with the region's federal designation as the Lake Michigan Shore American Viticultural Area (AVA) to strengthen awareness for the wines of this region.

The initial fee structure for membership was on a sliding scale based on the production size of the winery. Tickets sold for events further funded the group. Initial tasks

included the planning of wine trail weekends, the implementation of directional roads signs and design of a brochure with winery information and a map. ³

Today (2009), the trail consists of 11 members including Contessa Wine Cellars, Domaine Berrien Cellars, Fenn Valley Cellars, Free Run Cellars, Hickory Creek Winery, Karma Vista Vineyards, Lemon Creek Winery, Round Barn Winery, St. Julian Winery, Tabor Hill Winery and Warner Vineyards. The group hosts a website at www.miwinetrail.com.

Southeast Michigan Pioneer Wine Trail

Daniel Lenet (retired manager of St. Julian Winery's Parma tasting room) initiated the organization of a wine trail featuring the wineries in Michigan's southeast region. His long-time idea for the group was to host a wine festival in the area to promote the region's wines.

In 2003, there was an urgency to establish the wine trail quickly, as matching grant funds were being offered to state wine trails by the Michigan Grape and Wine Industry Council. The deadline for submitting a grant application was in February 2003.

The first meeting was a breakfast meeting in January 2003 at the Cranberry Café in Vandercook Lake (just south of Jackson). The founding members included Pentamere Winery of Tecumseh, Lone Oak Vineyard Estate of Grass Lake, St. Julian Winery (tasting room) of Parma, Tabor Hill Winery (tasting room) of Ann Arbor and two wineries that opened later that year, Sandhill Crane Vineyards of Jackson and Cherry Creek Cellars of Parma. Per Lenet's suggestion, the group was named Southeast Michigan Pioneer Wine Trail.

The group met several times in a short time period to get organized quickly and complete all the necessary tasks. Tasks included filing the organization as a legal entity with the state, writing the bylaws for the organization, determining officers, developing a website, designing a brochure and commencing the planning of a wine festival. Heather Price of Sandhill Crane Vineyards completed the necessary legal documents and filed with the state. The group became a legal domestic nonprofit corporation on February 21, 2003.

Price was also able to quickly write the bylaws and grant proposal using borrowed bylaws and the grant proposal from the Lake Michigan Shore Wine Trail. She initiated the marketing efforts, which included designing a preliminary website, a brochure and an advertisement for *Michigan Wine Country* magazine.

Kip Barber of Lone Oak Vineyard Estate and John Burtka of Cherry Creek Cellars implemented billboard advertisements. The group held its first wine trail event in September 2003 and commenced the planning for their first wine festival, which was held June 2004. The festival was largely planned by Lenet, Barber, Holly Balansag of Sandhill Crane Vineyards, Dan Measel of Pentamere Winery.

The initial officers selected were Barber as president, Balansag as treasurer and Price as secretary. Each winery contributed \$850 to the initial funds for the group. The total amount of \$5,000 coincided with the available matching grant funds.⁴

The current (2009) organizational structure remains the same as when the group first organized. The current president is Maria Measel of Pentamere Winery. The primary goal of the organization is to promote and market the wines and wineries of the regions. The group continues to publish a brochure, advertise its trail, host wine trail events and an annual wine festival. A website is hosted at www.pioneerwinetrail.com.

Published February 2010

Endnotes

¹ Larry Mawby, Email interviews, June and September 2009.

² Spencer Stegenga, Email interviews, June and September 2009 and Ed O'Keefe, Jr., Ed O'Keefe III, Sean O'Keefe, Personal interview, 14 March 2009.

³ David Braganini, Personal interview, 7 October 2009.

⁴ Heather Price, Email interviews, June and October 2009.