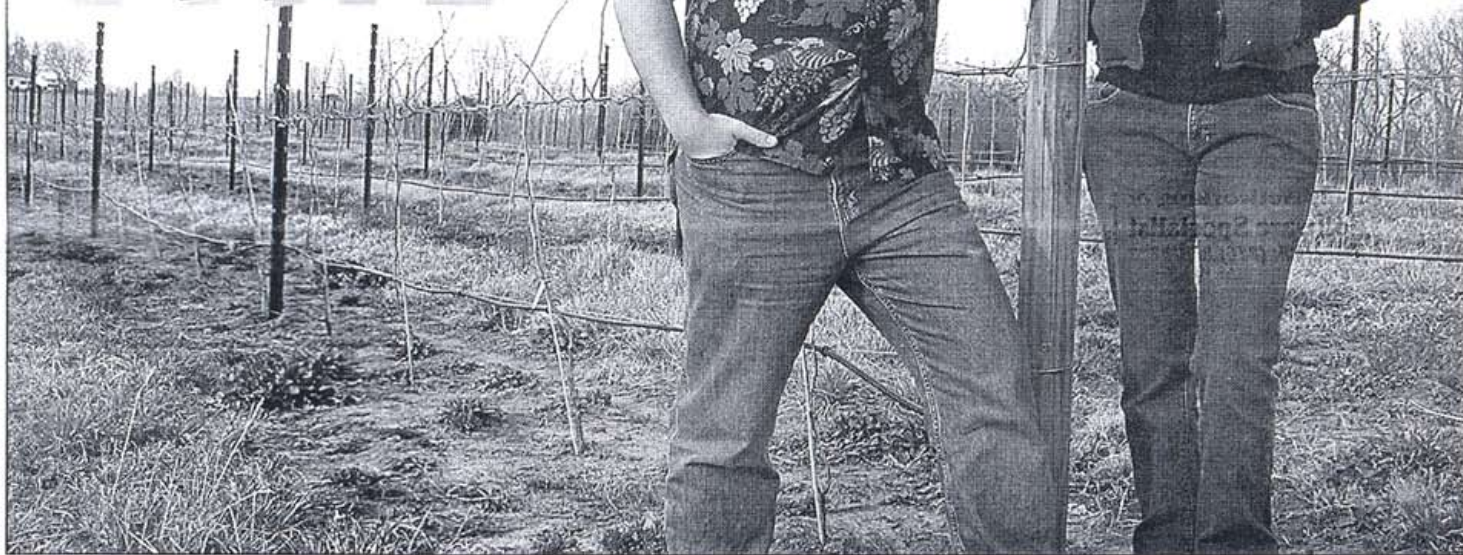


On the VINE



Jason and Colleen Gerke hope to break into the small winery business with their new Jowler Creek Winery. The couple plans to have approximately five acres of grapes of several different varieties.

*Citizen photo by
Jeanette Browning*

Couple takes wine-making hobby to the next level

By Jeanette Browning
Assistant Editor

Jason and Colleen Gerke have wine in their blood. Colleen grew up in California wine country, where her father worked in the industry. Jason grew up on a farm amid the wineries of central Missouri. So when they decided to move out of Kansas City into the Platte County countryside it was obvious they would plant grapes for their wine making hobby.

"I actually took wine-making classes in college," Colleen said. "So it was something natural to do."

For five years the Gerkes made wines at home, and entered local

contests and earned medals for their creations. Over the years their hobby grew, and now the Gerkes are taking it to the next level by forming Jowler Creek Winery. The Gerkes are working their way through the federal and state paperwork needed for their winery and expect to be licensed by summer with their first wines ready by next spring.

The jump to operating a professional winery is not just about turning a hobby into a profitable business however, as the Gerkes also enjoy the idea of starting a company together and working together to create a product.

"It's something we can do together, and spend quality time

together working in the vineyard," Colleen said. "We both work full-time, and it's great to be able to come home from work and go out into the vineyard."

Jowler Creek Winery plans to produce both red and white wines, and the Gerkes are growing Norton grapes, the Missouri state grape, Vignole grapes and plan to get into a new variety, Traminette grapes.

"We want to produce high-quality artisan wines," Colleen said. "And we want to be able to pair them with Missouri foods. So many times people don't know what kinds of wines to drink with different foods so we want to be able to pair ours easily."

Good wines start in the vineyard, according to Jason, and a lot of time is spent among those vines to insure the plants are cared for and safe from the local animals who may think the grapes are a tasty snack. Once the harvest comes around, making the wine itself is in some ways the easy part.

"Really, wines are something you can control all the way from the grape to the customer's table," Colleen said.

The Gerkes started in 2004 with 250 plants, added 900 more in 2005 and plan to plant an additional 2,000 plants in 2006.

"We're starting small, and as the plants mature we'll produce

more," Jason said. "We plan to sell locally to individuals and restaurants and grow from there."

With several small wineries in the Kansas City area starting out the same way, the Gerkes are in good company, including the long-time Pirtle Winery in Weston. They also plan to keep their winery a family affair, and have hosted planting parties with family and friends.

"After a few planting parties, it's a wonder we had any friends, but seriously, it's fun for our friends," Colleen said. "A lot of our friends grew up on farms, so for them to get a chance to get out and get their hands dirty is fun for them."