

WINERY GUIDE

Small harvest makes for lighter load at wineries

BY MELANIE TACOMA
Record-Eagle staff writer

As most tourist industries in northern Michigan begin to wind down for the winter, area wineries hit their stride. Northern Lower Michigan's wineries get the majority of their traffic in the fall, explained Rick Coates of the Leelanau Peninsula Vintners Association.

"Wineries are very, very busy during the fall for two reasons," he said. "One is that it's harvest time, the other is that it's the time of all the color tours."

Sarah West, office manager at Chateau Chantal, said that most of the tourists who come to the winery in the fall are from Michigan, with many from Grand Rapids and other areas downstate.

West explained that the visitors come in spite of the fact that Chateau Chantal does not offer tours in the fall because tractors and other heavy equipment could pose a risk.

West added that the absence of vineyard tours in the fall doesn't seem to deter wine tasters.

"In four weekends we'll do (the business) we do in the entire month of July," she said.

Dianne Gentel, who works in the wine-tasting room of Ciccone Vineyard and Winery, said that in the fall, many of her customers come to look at the autumn leaves and stop in to taste wine.

"There's something in the changing of the season," she said. "There's a new vitality in the air."

Vineyards' harvests this year will not be as large as usual, as cold temperatures this spring led to a near crop loss for many. West said Chateau Chantal expects about 10 percent of a typical crop, but that the deficiency

won't affect the number of visitors this fall.

According to Shady Lane Cellars winemaker Adam Satchwell, grapes suffered by variety and by their location in the vineyard. He added that the small crop will make things easier for harvesters at a time when many of them

work up to 16 hour days.

"It's not going to be as crazy this year as it usually is around the harvest," Satchwell said.

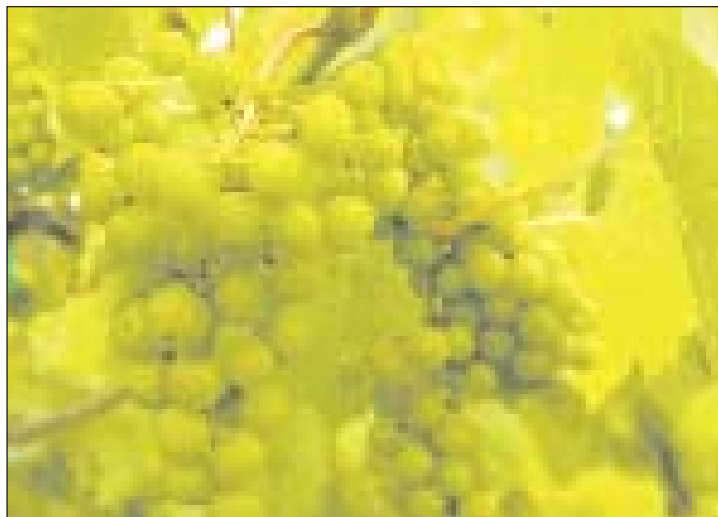
Satchwell said he walks the vineyard daily throughout the growing season, watching the grapes so that he knows when to harvest.

"Around harvest time I hit each block of grapes thoroughly every day," he said. "I walk every single row and take samples. If you know where (the grapes are) each

day, you know when you'll have to start picking."

The quality of area wines has improved dramatically

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