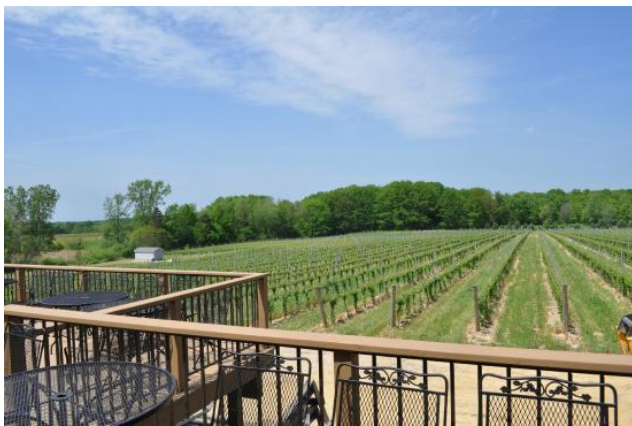


M Cellars

Matt Meineke got his start making wines like many people, in his kitchen. But unlike most, he has turned his home wine-making passion into a successful business. He and his wife Tara are the proud owners of M Cellars, just over the Lake County line in Ashtabula County's Grand River Valley. The Meinekes, from Mentor, started literally from the ground up as grape farmers.



They purchased a little over 12 acres of land and studied the art of wine grape growing. They tore out the Niagara grapes that were grown on the property previously and planted wine grapes from California, Presque Isle in Pennsylvania and from another vineyard in Conneaut, Ohio. Varieties included Reisling, Pinot Noir, Pinot Gris, Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Petite Verdot, Grüner Veltliner and Chardonnay. In three years they sold their first successful harvest to already established local wineries. But they always knew they wanted to open their own winery. That's when they contacted Andover Bank and the Ohio Small Business Development Center and started working with counselor Marty Gareau.



They needed to find the best way to finance a winery that would also include a tasting room and places for customers to relax and enjoy some of their wine and some light appetizers.

Marty directed them toward the SBA 504 loan as being the best route to go. They needed capital to build their winery building along with equipment to support their operation. Marty worked with banking partner Andover Bank to make their dream come true. They worked together to help them get not only their SBA 504 loan but also the SBA 7A loan they needed. Marty was with the Meinekes when their 504 loan was presented to the loan committee and advocated for its passage. Matt Meineke says,

“Without the support of Marty and the SBDC, we wouldn’t be here.” “He believed in our vision,” said Meineke. He’s glad the SBDC program is around to support small businesses, who in turn support the economy.

The new winery opened for business in November 2012 and has already won nine medals at two



international wine competitions:

The Indy International Wine Competition and the San

Francisco International Wine Competition. They are hitting their numbers and are continuing to grow their business.

When asked to give advice to other entrepreneurs, Tara Meineke suggested you have a really good business plan and to make sure you have enough capital to make it through the first couple of years. “Really know your business subject and don’t stray from your business plan due to any outside pressure,” said Matt Meineke.

