

# SMALL BUSINESS PROFILE



**growNOW**  
A program sponsored by Ohio Treasurer  
**Kevin L. Boyce**

*Growing Ohio's Small Businesses. NOW.*

## Family farm converts to a popular winery using *GrowNOW* loan

A financially, struggling fruit farm and produce market finds new life and escalating profits as a destination winery along scenic Lake Erie.

Siblings, Tom, Steve and Cindy Swank owned a retail farm near Geneva in northeastern Ohio that faced declining business. The family-owned farm struggled while competing with larger grocery and chain stores in Ash-tabula County.

The family members wanted to keep the farm, but discussed other business ideas for the land and the barn. While attending a Geneva Area Chamber of Commerce event, Tom and Cindy connected with Jim Pearson and Richard Trice. The group's diverse backgrounds helped them design a successful business plan that converted the fruit and produce barn into a wine bar.

Cindy Swank had worked in the hospitality industry as a pastry chef. Tom Swank was an experienced farmer. Pearson and Trice both brought strong business backgrounds to the table. Trice is the senior director of operations at University Hospitals in Geneva and Pearson serves as the city manager of Geneva.

With the assistance of a reduced interest rate *GrowNOW* loan from the Ohio Treasury, the owners could afford start-up costs as well as budget for operations and employees.

Finally, The Winery at Spring Hill was ready to open for business on March 7, 2009, with 15 part-time and 3 fulltime employees. According to the owners, more than 120 people were waiting outside on opening night.

Business continued strong through the first year. Tom Swank said The Winery finished well ahead of its projected sales budget of 3,500 gallons of wine. In all, The Winery topped 5,000 gallons in wine sales. The ambitious wine selection includes many traditional flavors, fruit wines and premium makes, all made locally.

Besides wine, patrons dine on appetizers and cheeses, while others sip coffee brewed from locally-roasted beans.

The Swank's family farm now supports six acres of wine grapes and still produces various other fruits that are used in the making of wine and pastries.

The Winery hosts private parties and live events on the patio during warmer months. Plus, bands entertain the crowd from the outdoor bandstand.

During the first year, the owners were overwhelmed with party requests and had to turn some business away.

"The potential for future growth is unlimited," said Trice. "We are already thinking about expanding our parking and adding more areas to host parties."

The owners expect 10% growth in year two, but said The Winery will likely exceed that estimate based on current sales figures.

This year, seven more part-time employees were hired to fill server, kitchen and wine bar positions. High school students occupy some of these part-time jobs. While working, they are being taught cooking skills and how to operate a restaurant.



Owners of Spring Hill Winery (pictured left to right) - Tom Swank, Richard Trice, Cindy Swank and James Pearson.



The Winery at Spring Hill is housed in a converted produce market. Ashtabula County has 22 wineries.

## Close-up

### Business

The Winery at Spring Hill  
6062 S. Ridge Rd. W.  
Geneva, OH 44041  
(440) 466-0626  
[www.thewineryatspringhill.com](http://www.thewineryatspringhill.com)

### Year Started

2009

### Service

Wine bar, roasted coffees, special events and live entertainment

### Bank

Andover Bank

### Information on *GrowNOW*

[www.grownow.ohio.gov](http://www.grownow.ohio.gov)  
or call (800) 228-1102