

## PAW PAW WINERIES WORTH VISITING

Nestled between the corn and soy bean fields in the heart of Michigan's fertile farmland near Paw Paw is wine country. Although wineries have been sprouting up all over Michigan, the Paw Paw area is the heart of Michigan wines, making the state fourth in the nation in wine producing. Only California, New York, and Washington state rank higher.

There are many wineries in the region that offer tasting and tours, but the main concentration is within a 50-mile radius of Paw Paw. Most wineries in the area belong to the Lake Michigan Shore Appellation, a co-op of wine producers.

### *WHY PAW PAW IS HOME TO FINE WINES*

In the last few years Michigan wines have made California sit up and take notice at wine competitions and many Paw Paw wines are at the top of the list. Much of this is due to what is known as the "lake effect". Kissed by the breezes of Lake Michigan, the summers of southwest Michigan become a bit of California transported.

Climate, weather, topography, and soil composition must be perfect for the vines to produce and for grapes to ripen properly. Southwest Michigan has all this.

### *WHAT DETERMINES A FINE WINE*

Each winery has its own system, but the basics of how the grape gets from the vine to the bottle are the same. Unlike other crops, the optimum harvest time for grapes sometimes lasts only a couple days.

Depending on the variety of wine to be made from them, each particular kind of grape has to be picked when its sugar content is at a certain level. White wine grapes are crushed at their peak of perfection and the juice is separated from the skins. Red grape skins, on the other hand, remain with the juice to enhance the color and flavor.

### *EACH WINERY IS UNIQUE*

Most every winery in the Paw Paw area offers a special niche to separate it from its brothers. Many of the wineries' buildings are old and have been renovated to capture a particular period and style. It makes for a rewarding day to see as many as possible and make comparisons. In the city itself there are only two wineries, both established in the 1930's.

### *ST. JULIAN WINERY*

Paw Paw is home to St. Julian Winery even though it has satellite wine-tasting facilities around southern Michigan. It was named after the patron saint of the town in Italy where its founder grew up. It produces a large line of red, white, and blush sparkling and dessert wines. Catering to the pocketbooks of the average American, it is becoming a favorite phrase in the area that their wines rival the imports in quality, but are priced American.

### *WARNER VINEYARD*

Warner Vineyard and Warner Wine Haus, across the street from St. Julian, is Paw Paw's other claim to fame. Its hospitality room was built in 1898 and was the original waterworks station for the village of Paw Paw as it held water from Artesian wells. In 1967 Warner Vineyards purchased it and, using lumber from old wine casks and period ornaments, refurbished it to its present state.

Warner also boasts champagne-aging caves and displays of clever baskets, rocking horses, and other items made by entwining grape vines.

#### *OTHER WINERIES*

Paw Paw is a good place to start, but don't stop there on your wine tour. Take the back roads to Frontenac Winery in Decatur or Fenn Valley in Fennville, to name a couple. A sure stop on the list is Bronte Winery in Hartford where Al Capone's vats are. The area is rich and is waiting to be discovered and savored.