

The new owners of a winery located in an energy-rich part of the state want to give Oklahomans a taste of the past while celebrating the present over a glass of wine. Tidewater Winery, which is two miles south of Drumright, just a short drive off Route 66 on Oklahoma 16, occupies a spacious, historic, brick schoolhouse that used to serve children of oil workers. From noon to 6 p.m. on Saturday, a grand opening is set for the reopened and renamed winery. Last April, seven owners, which include three couples and a retired doctor, pooled their resources to buy at auction the former Tidal School Vineyards. Now, with liquor license in hand, they can sell their wines in addition to hosting events. "We have not had to spend much money on the facility itself," said Jeff Scott, one of the owners. "As times goes by, we will be making improvements, but we've been investing our money and time and our effort in getting wines in bottles and out to the market." A walk back in time Recently, Scott together with Toni Osterhout, another owner, gave a tour of the roomy winery. Aged photos hanging in the hallway tell of a bygone era. In 1915, Oklahoma became the largest oil-producing state in the nation, and the Drumright field with its more than 1,000 wells was the primary reason, reads the caption on one photo. At one time 17 percent of all the American oil was coming out of the Drumright-Cushing area. During Drumright's oil boom in the 1920s, oil baron John D. Rockefeller built the 8,000-square-foot school, known as Tidal School, to help the growing community. It was later acquired by J. Paul Getty and today is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. In April 2004, the former schoolhouse was first converted into a winery called Tidal School Vineyards and the previous owners spent \$500,000 on renovations. Today, under new ownership, the renamed winery continues to entertain and fascinate. Inside the converted schoolhouse, a friendly African Grey parrot, aptly named Merly Merlot, greets visitors with whistles and chatter. A tasting room that doubles as a shop features the winery's eight signature wines

along with sundry wine accessories, including wine-themed napkins, wine chiller bags, T-shirts, bottle openers, tea towels and more. The big, former classroom where students once learned their ABCs and arithmetic now caters to the young at heart, serving as a rentable banquet or reception room. Wooden decks outside the building overlook the winery's acre of cabernet franc grapes. "This has a lot of personal meaning to me and to a lot of us," said Osterhout, seated at a table in the former classroom. Osterhout and her husband, CD, who own another vineyard on the west side of town, own Tidewater Winery along with CD's brother and his wife, Phil and Melanie Osterhout; Art Murphy, a retired orthopedic surgeon; and friends Jeff and Jan Scott. Osterhout, who was born in Texas but moved with her family to Drumright where she attended grades sixth through high school, recalled how her father once worked for the Tidewater Oil Co. (Tydol), which had a large refinery in the town. As a teenager she lived in the community beside the school, called Tydol Camp. She recalled attending dances at the old schoolhouse that is now their winery and how her husband played in a band that performed on the school's stage. When they learned the winery was going to be auctioned, the Osterhouts got together with other family members and friends to pull the deal together. "It is a really cool building," said Scott. "I wanted it to be available to the town of Drumright as a venue, as a city center, as a place of employment, as a place for retail sales. I wanted it to be something that could benefit the town." Wine boom Today, Tidewater Winery is one of more than 60 wineries in the state. Before 2000, only four wineries existed in Oklahoma, said Jamie Cummings, program administrator for the agritourism program through the Oklahoma Department of Agriculture Food and Forestry. "It's just a huge boom," Cummings said. In June, the department launched its "Oklahoma Wine Trails" program, which features 31 wineries in the state that people can tour. She noted that individuals can receive a free passport book at any of the featured wineries

or at select 2014 winery events and collect up to 10 limited edition wine trail charms for each trail they follow. Tidewater Winery is open to visitors from noon to 6 p.m. Thursdays and Fridays, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Saturdays and noon to 6 p.m. Sundays. The winery's eight wines retail between \$12 to \$18 and are sold only in Oklahoma. Several area restaurants that plan to serve the wine include Biga, Andolini's Pizzeria, McNellie's and The Tavern, said Scott, who also is talking to other restaurant owners. All eight wines feature eight different labels that are replicas of building murals in Drumright. Toni Osterhout came up with the label idea and sought permission from the mural creators to have their murals replicated in miniature on the bottles. The label for Red Rush, a sweet table wine, for instance, features the mural depicting the Oklahoma Land Run. As for the future, Osterhout would like to see the winery become a "major" music and art venue as well as a place for hosting holiday parties, murder mysteries, dinners, craft fairs, festivals and more. "A year from now, we'll know if we are a winery that has a venue or a venue that has a winery, but the focus right now is the wine and ancillary things that will promote the entire business," Scott said.

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