



By Carolyn Lee

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For well over 10 years, Steve and Deborah Schilke have dreamed of owning their own vineyard and winery. That dream is now rising out of their grape vines at the intersection of Grant Street and Highway 6.

Work began this week to erect a building that will house Broken Arrow Cellars, complete with winery, tasting room and banquet hall. To the west of the building are two acres of grapes the Schilkes have been cultivating since 2002.

Another two acres is grown near the Schilkes' home in the country.

The name of the venture was suggested by a family cattle brand.

"When that venture broke up we asked to have the brand," Deborah Schilke explained.

The label for the wine, designed by son Dale, consists of the end of a wooden keg with the brand on it, and grape clusters at the bottom.

Schilke said the family, including Dale and three sisters, hopes that the building will be completed this time next year. The 60x120 metal building is being erected by Kent Pribbeno Construction.

As of now the building will house several 500-gallon capacity tanks, "a good start but rather small," she said. Besides the tasting room and banquet hall, Schilke said other things will follow. "I don't want to commit too much because I'm sure it will take a life of its own," she smiled.

Steve will be the primary wine maker, with family members assisting.

"Our goal is to produce semi-sweet to semi-dry red and white wine," Schilke said. "We'd like to get into fruit wine production, too."

The Schilkes' grapes, first harvested in 2007, have been sold to other wineries. They now plan to keep all of their grapes and "would be open to accept" other people's grapes.

Broken Arrow Cellars grows Frontenac and DeChaunac, both red grapes, and Edelweiss and LaCrosse, both white grapes.

They are in the middle of grape harvest, having completed the harvest near the winery Aug. 31, with the grapes near their home yet to be picked.

They took three tons of grapes off one acre alone near the winery, which is "full for us," she said. The grapes are stored in a refrigerated trailer.

Anywhere from 12 to 15 people help with the harvest, which lasts about two weeks per vineyard. Although harvest has been in really hot weather this year, some years it has been very cold, Schilke noted.

The grapes grow from about May 15 to mid-August or beyond. Grapes aren't ready to be harvested until the vines are about five years old.

And that's why the Schilkes have had their dream for so long. It takes a long time for vines to produce.

It also takes a long time to make a good wine, and that's the main goal of the family.