

# Here's mud in your eye

## LMC wine prof sees greatness

By RALPH HEIBUTZKI  
H-P Correspondent

### BENTON TOWNSHIP

— Wanted: a few good students who enjoy the creative aspect of making wine – but also have the business savvy to make it count in the real world.

That's how Lake Michigan College's new enology and vitology director, Michael Moyer, summarizes his expectations for the students who'll come into the program this fall.

"When I interviewed for my second internship, the winemaker asked if I liked to play in the mud," Moyer said. "He said, 'I like to ask that because winemaking – a lot of times – is a big, huge mess, and you'll have to clean up after yourself.'"

A basic foundation in science, math and business also goes a long way, in Moyer's view.

"My heart is in production – it really is – and also, doing it in a fiscally responsible way,"

Moyer said. "That is my passion. I know about a lot about chemistry, and a lot about lab (work), so that's an important skill, too."

Moyer's comments followed Tuesday's LMC board meeting, in which he talked briefly about the program, and introduced himself to board members.

He arrived at LMC about a month ago and is living in Beckwith Hall until he finds a house for himself and his family.

"This region has all the ingredients to be a great winemaking region. It has a great climate, a huge population base, and they're already doing it" on a commercial level, he said.

That experience is a contrast from Moyer's background in Walla Walla, Wash., where he was a wine science instructor from 2003 to 2010 and worked as an assistant winemaker and enologist.

"What hooked me on this region was the fact that it's serious. Living on the West Coast, and being immersed in the wine industry, you don't think about Michigan wines," Moyer said. "But when I had an opportunity to taste some of the wines being made, I was really impressed."

He holds a master of science degree in viticulture and enology from the University of California, Davis, and is a member of the American Society for Enology and Viticulture.

Moyer's business and teaching skills made him the right candidate for leading a program that fits in with Southwest Michigan's agricultural heritage – and boost its local economy, said LMC's vice president of student services, Clint Gabbard.

See WINE, page A6



Don Campbell / HP staff

Michael Moyer, program director of the Great Lakes Wine Institute, shows off a variety of equipment used for quality control in the wine lab, part of the new Enology and Viticulture program at Lake Michigan College.

## WINE

From page A1

“If you talk to local winemakers in this region, they talk like some combination of farmers and artisans,” Gabbard said. “They’ve been growing fruit forever, but gotten excited about this wine thing.

“When I watched Mike interview, I saw somebody who was instantly comfortable with these folks – who knew how to talk their language, but had something to offer them.”

Joe Herman, owner of Karma Vineyards, sees something else coming out of Moyer’s hiring. He was on the screening committee that interviewed seven or eight candidates before it settled on Moyer.

“I’m so impressed we got somebody of his caliber – who not only has an academic background, but a real world background,” Herman said. “The typical person thinks, ‘oh, you want this to be a big winery?’ No, I want this to be a very esoteric, site-driven winery. That’s where the future is.”

LMC’s commitment to the program – and hiring someone like Moyer to lead

it – boosts the local food and drink movement, which is aiming for an alternative to “big box” food distribution philosophies, Herman said.

“I call it ‘the agriculture counterculture.’ Everything has gotten to be the Walmart-sized operation, to just feed that pipeline. If you want to play that game, good luck to you, because it’s a race to the bottom,” he said.

The college planned to recruit an initial group of 15 students into the program, which logged its first enrollment Friday, Gabbard said.

When the board approved the program last year, it originally wanted to create a stand-alone teaching winery but settled for converting a small area in the Mendel Center for that purpose, Gabbard said.

“We also made the decision – since we have state-of-the-art lab settings in our regular classrooms – to use our labs for some of the chemistry portion of the training that Mike’s going to be doing. That allowed us to start quicker, and most of the equipment is going to transfer to the commercial teaching winery,” he said.