

| CHIPPEWA VALLEY, WI



Wisconsin Wine and Other Surprising Revelations

By Rand Mor

Look out the window of an Eau Claire-bound flight as it approaches the airport. You'll see the expected lakes, rivers, farmland and wooded hills. Then, on the right side, a different kind of cultivated landscape emerges. It looks like something out of California's Napa Valley. Yes, indeed, it *is* a vineyard. Grapes that manage to mature in the course of a 156-day growing season are just one of the Chippewa Valley's unexpected treasures.

The collection of towns—Eau Claire, Chippewa Falls, Menominee—in this west-central Wisconsin valley just 100 miles east of Minneapolis are united by a can-do attitude and an enviable lifestyle. Tom Kell, a partner in the River Bend Winery, understands the benefits of life here. The valley native spent much of his childhood in Milwaukee but returned to Chippewa Falls after college. He worked in the family's corrugated container business here for 30 years. When it sold to a larger company he chose to stay in his hometown.

"My wife Pam and I have traveled all over the country and around the world, but there's no place I'd rather live. When I am home I can sit and look out over the lake [Lake Wissota, a 6,000-acre body

of water created by the damming of the Chippewa River]. It's beautiful and peaceful. When I was working at our company my commute was maybe 12 minutes. I would be upset if I had to wait for two cars ahead of me at a stop sign. It's a very easy lifestyle, but we still have plenty of activities. There are so many small towns around here, and they all seem to have events and festivals. There's so much on the calendar you can't possibly do it all. We have good restaurants and plenty of shopping and of course the brewery [Leinenkugel] and two wineries. [Autumn Harvest Winery, an offshoot of a family-owned orchard, makes 11 different wines from apples and grapes.] And we have this beautiful environment."

Jeff Darley agrees. He is a member of the executive leadership team of the Darley Company, a manufacturer of fire trucks, pumps and other equipment for the fire, emergency and defense industries. It serves a market spanning more than 100 countries. Even though the firm is based in the Chicago area, he chooses to live in Chippewa Falls where the Darley Company production facilities employ more than 200 people—a workforce Darley credits with being "honest, trustworthy, intelligent, knowledgeable and absolutely dedicated to their place of employment."

In addition to the business advantages of the Chippewa Valley, Darley lauds the recreation opportunities. "I love the outdoors life," he said. "Hunting, fishing, boating on the lake. Most of the family chose to stay in Chicago and I do travel there several times a month, but I am very happy to live where I do. It's the best of all worlds. Airport travel is very efficient. There are no lines, no congestion. It's easy to get to Chicago, and from there we can get direct international flights to our global markets such as Beijing. When our international clients come to visit it's nice to be able to take them to see the production plant and it's very easy to do that. Many of them have never seen snow. So if it's winter we try to get them out on the lake ice fishing. In the summer we go boating. There's a lot to do here." ■

DID YOU KNOW?

* The world's first supercomputer was developed in Chippewa Falls by native son Seymour Cray. His accomplishments and those of other Chippewa Valley innovators are presented at the Museum of Industry and Technology.

* Those grapes are special. Tom Kell explained that the vineyard produces four varieties of specially formulated cold-weather grapes developed by the University of Minnesota to grow in cooler climates like that of the Chippewa Valley. The Frontenac, for example, can produce grapes after a winter with temperatures as low as -30 F. The cold-weather varieties form the basis for all of River Bend's wines.

* Leinenkugel calls this valley home. Revered in the upper Midwest since 1867, the artisan beer has been available in many major markets since 2006. It's still made here. Brewery tours are a highlight of any visit.

* This is a cyclist's paradise. More than 50 miles of bicycle trails cross the wooded hills, marshes and farmland of the Chippewa Valley. It's possible to ride all day without ever dodging an automobile.

GRAPES AND VINEYARD: STEVE BAKER

CYCLISTS AND LANDSCAPE: VISIT EAU CLAIRE

**YOUR TICKET TO
WESTERN WISCONSIN**

DAILY FLIGHTS FROM CHICAGO
www.ChippewaValleyAirport.com

Chippewa Valley
REGIONAL AIRPORT

Hines Goldsmiths

307.733.5599 • 80 Center St.
Jackson Hole, Wyoming
www.hinesgold.com

Hand Made in the U.S.A. Since 1970