

Published February 09, 2010 07:02 pm - Mark Winchell is jumping up and down over Geneva's proposed wine and culinary center, calling the project "a major economic driver for the region, county and for Geneva."

## Convention and Visitors Bureau director praises proposed center

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GENEVA — Mark Winchell is jumping up and down over Geneva's proposed wine and culinary center, calling the project "a major economic driver for the region, county and for Geneva."

"The potential for this center is absolutely unlimited," Winchell, executive director of the Ashtabula County Convention and Visitors Bureau, said.

Winchell said the county's reputation as a quality wine destination is growing fast, and a culinary center is the perfect complement to local vintages.

"What Geneva is developing is only a complement to what is already here," Winchell said. "This is a wonderful opportunity moving forward, with the success of our growing wine industry."

"The wine industry is a wonderful tourism draw, and it draws a certain kind of tourist, a tourist that comes looking to spend money, who is looking to have a quality experience and is willing to pay for it. This center will help attract and maintain our hook on those tourists."

Winchell even said the culinary and wine center, which is in the feasibility study phase and may be located at the Geneva Elementary School building, is a "regional draw."

"I mean, (the center) would absolutely be a regional draw. There is nothing like this between New York and Indiana. There are a few in California, and this would certainly be the first of its kind in Ohio."

Beyond bringing people here to visit, Winchell said the culinary center would be a catalyst for economic growth.

"The potential is unparalleled," he said. "An enormous amount of thought went into this idea, and the potential is fantastic. This would bring a whole new segment of tourists — culinary tourists — to our area. This will make Ashtabula County a culinary destination."

Winchell said he asks Ashtabula County residents to support Geneva's new plan for economic outreach.

"It is important for people to keep an open mind about (the wine and culinary center)," he said. "Geneva, with its success in joint economic development districts; the Geneva-area Recreational, Educational, Athletic Trust; and other ventures is the perfect place for this project."