

Published March 10, 2010 12:08 am - It took "an absolutely grand idea" for the Ashtabula County Civic Development Corp. to open its checkbook, but the Geneva Wine and Culinary Center fit the description, CDC Executive Director Norah Anderson said.

## Proposed Geneva Wine and Culinary Center garners added support, funds

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GENEVA — It took "an absolutely grand idea" for the Ashtabula County Civic Development Corp. to open its checkbook, but the Geneva Wine and Culinary Center fit the description, CDC Executive Director Norah Anderson said.

"We are very, very excited about this project and its potential for Ashtabula County's tourism industry," she said.

The proposed center began with a \$20,000 grant from Growth Partnership for Ashtabula County for the educational wine and culinary center, for a feasibility study. To further the project, CDC added \$200,000 to the culinary center project as part of its tourism and recreation-centered 2010 campaign. The center "fits in perfectly" with CDC's 2010 campaign theme and outline "Building on Our Strengths: Living and Playing in Ashtabula County," Anderson said. The funding campaign includes quality-of-life infrastructure development supporting recreational and cultural projects, economic development and an educational impact fund to promote financial literacy among county residents.

Response to the proposed educational wine and culinary center in Geneva has been "phenomenal," City Manager Jim Pearson said.

"We were shocked and amazed by the news (of the grant)," Pearson said.

This agricultural, wine and culinary center could be used to help new food-related businesses in myriad ways, assistant city manager Jennifer Brown said, including enabling product development and sharing marketing strategies and business plans. Brown said the creation of jobs, the launch of new small businesses and ensuring the vitality of the city's downtown area are the project's main goals.

"The facility would feature a winery, brewery, restaurant incubator, condominiums, offices, retail and educational spaces, grape-growing history or a museum and any combination of these," the proposal from Poggemeyer Design Group Inc. shows. "It may also serve as a launching place for tours of the region, a farmers market, an agricultural resource center and an experimental vineyard," the proposal shows.

Brown said users of the center potentially could include vegetable and fruit growers, meat processors, cheesemakers, caterers, grape growers and chefs or cooks.

"It's economic development through tourism enhancement," said Scott Becker, CDC president, who also is president of Plasticolors. "We're focusing on a positive perspective instead of deficit thinking — building on our strengths."

The seed money for the wine and culinary center will be used to provide matching funds for other grants, Anderson said.

The city hopes to house the center at the Geneva Elementary school, which will be vacant when the school district consolidates the school and the Platt R. Spencer Elementary into the new Geneva-Platt R. Spencer Elementary School, on Austin Road, in August.

The culinary center isn't the only Geneva-area project to receive CDC funds: The Geneva-area Recreational, Educational, Athletic Trust aquatics and medical center also will benefit from \$100,000 in CDC support. This fourth phase of the GaREAT complex will include an Olympic-sized competition swimming pool with an additional recreation and rehabilitation pool. The medical and professional facility will be part of the pool complex.

“(GaREAT) is economic development in its finest,” Anderson said. “What an exciting project to be a part of.”