



Dr. Nicholas Varallo, center, flanked by sons Americo, second left, and Dominic, is joined by his brother, Dr. Mark Varallo, far left, and his father, Americo Varallo, in tasting room of Spring Lake Winery in Lockport. Ronald J. Collocan/Buffalo News

Grapes of growth

With \$100,000 federal grant, new winery in Lockport aims to boost region's economy

BY TERESA SHARP

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TOWN OF LOCKPORT — A local family has been working hard to turn a former gravel pit into a successful new winery and has been awarded a \$100,000 federal grant to help achieve that dream.

Lockport family physician Dr. Nicholas Varallo and his wife, Tamre, along with their children and extended family, hope to open Spring Lake Winery at 7373 Rochester Road in the next couple of weeks.

They recently learned they had won the largest Value-Added Producer Grant in Niagara County from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's

Rural Development Division.

"We're very pleased," said Tamre Varallo. "We've paid for this project ourselves with the hopes of bringing economic growth to the area, so having this support certainly helps."

She estimated that the family has spent \$1.5 million on its project to date.

Applicants for the grants are required to provide matching funds.

A total of 12 farms in New York were awarded grants totaling more than \$1 million as part of a \$21 million package being distributed to 185 producers nationwide.

The grant program helps farmers and agribusinesses develop products that increase the value of agricultural

commodities.

A few years ago, the Varallos planted grapes to make a late-harvest Riesling wine. The Riesling is the "signature wine" that will be sold at Spring Lake Winery.

The winery also will operate the Wine Barrel gift shop to sell grape-related products, Tamre Varallo said. She added that the family already is planning an expansion of another five to eight acres of grapes next year and is eager to start conducting educational tours.

In the next six months, she added, the family hopes to tap into its spring-fed lake and start a bottled-water business at their 78-acre site.

"What we take pride in most is that we are trying to combine commerce, tourism and agriculture

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Family's business 'multigenerational'

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here," Tamre Varallo said. "We are trying to find new ways to build up, restore and maintain the local economy."

She said her husband has been helping make wine since he was a child, learning the process from his Italian parents. Their children — including daughter Cristina, 23, who is currently in medical school, and sons Americo, 24, and Dominic, 22, both studying business — also will be involved in this new venture.

Their mother explained, "This will be a multigenerational business."

Three other local businesses earning matching grants were: Zehr's Farm Market and Nurs-

ery in Burt, which was awarded \$75,000 "to develop an integrated branding strategy that includes signage, containers and marketing"; Blackman Homestead Farm, Lockport, \$25,000 "to implement a business plan for new vegetable and fruit products, such as cherry and pear butter; and Eveningside Vineyards, Cambria, \$17,600 "to plan expansion of their vineyard and optimize their marketing strategy."

Liberty Vineyards in Sheridan, Chautauqua County, was the only other Western New York business awarded a grant — \$98,167 to market wine from Lake Erie grapes.

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