

VESTA Student Profile: Karen Marie Soberski

By Emily Gray

Despite the fact Karen Marie Soberski received her Technical Certificate in Viticulture from the VESTA Program in December 2008; she has decided she is not quite ready to leave VESTA behind. Due to her continuing interest in with the wine and grape industry, this year Karen decided that she would also begin to pursue a Technical Certificate in Enology through VESTA. Karen's desire to learn has helped her advance from horticulture student to wine industry employee and it shows through her many accomplishments in the VESTA program.

Karen first became interested in viticulture when living in Southwest Michigan. She lived near the family-owned Round Barn Vineyard and Winery and was drawn to the beautiful location and exceptional wine made by Rick Moersch. Overtime, Karen developed a relationship with the winery and it increased her interest in the wine and grape field.

Karen then realized that she wanted to focus her horticulture studies in the area of Viticulture. While visiting Round Barn in the fall of 2007, Karen asked Rick for advice and he referred her to a friend at Perdue University who was familiar with VESTA. Karen further investigated the opportunity and then contacted Michelle Norgren, VESTA Program Director, and enrolled in the Viticulture program. Additionally, Michelle put Karen in contact with Dick Faltz at the Fox Valley Winery in Northern Illinois, where she would later go on to Field Practicum requirements.



"I am very grateful to all of them for their help," Karen stated when referring to Rick, Michelle, and Dick and the assistance they offered.

Throughout her experience as a VESTA student, Karen found all of her classes beneficial. In particular, she found spending time in the vineyard as she completed her field practicum course components and her vineyard internship to be great supplements to the online class work. Additionally, Karen noted that the workshops she participated in during her Intermediate Enology and Wine Chemistry courses provided her with important hands-on experience, which greatly assist her during her first harvest at St. James Winery in St. James, Missouri.

As the first VESTA Viticulture graduate in 2008, Karen is looking forward to completing her Enology certificate. She finds that the program is an excellent resource to anyone interested in working in or owning a vineyard or winery. As an example, this fall Karen had the opportunity to assist, with the help of her mentor Dick Faltz of Fox Valley Winery and her local college where she received her Business and Horticulture degree from in 2008, in the establishment the college's first vineyard. The vineyard will be located behind the new, state of the art greenhouse that was recently completed in the spring of 2010. Karen believes this is a great opportunity to bring the college and Fox Valley Winery together. The future grapes grown by the students at the college will someday become the wine made in the Fox Valley Winery, 30 miles away. This project, choosing the grape varieties, to planning the vineyard layout has been a great experience for everyone involved. Karen stated she could have not done this project without her experience in the Fox Valley Winery's vineyard and the VESTA classes in the Viticulture program.

Karen finds that being in the vineyard and winery from start to finish, the opportunity to be involved in the entire process of grape and wine production, and the experience of working with the staff at St. James Winery has been one of the most rewarding aspects of her involvement in the grape and wine industry.

According to Karen, "I think the learning process of this industry is life long, but it is an interesting and exciting business and I enjoy it very much!"