







## *Hand-Crafted Fun*

A mainstay in the Door County economy, Door Peninsula Winery has been producing the finest selection of fruit wine in Wisconsin for over 40 years. Family owned and operated with 50 different wines and a distillery to choose from, Door Peninsula takes the snobbery out of spirits.

For two gentlemen, Carlsville Elementary school was the perfect place to establish Door Peninsula Winery in 1974. Vacant for a decade, the two-classroom, 60 student schoolhouse had been a landmark for the residents of Door County, Wisconsin for nearly a century with its Victorian-era architecture and bell tower. But it would be the basement that sealed the deal. With its thick walls and year-

round temperature of 60 degrees, it would become the birthplace of something iconic in Door County, Wisconsin. In 1984, the business would change hands after Bob and Irene Pollman purchased the winery. Still operating a relatively small operation with no expansion haven't been made since 1974, the grassroots wine movement in Door County was officially on.



“The growth of the wine industry in Door County wasn’t off the ground at all; we were the only ones making wine – small amounts at that,” said owner Robert Pollman. “In 1984, the winery grew 15 to 30% a year for the next 25 years, and we continue to grow every year.”

Growing at such a rapid rate meant doubling the size of the winery. In 2000, the company did just that – making it four times the size of the original schoolhouse and adding a restaurant to the backend. More production space meant bigger tanks and bigger equipment.

“We were growing so fast, just to make a quality product, we had to up all the equipment,” Pollman said. “We started getting into specialized equipment. Everything is temperature controlled, heated and cooled warehouses.”

After another two rounds of expansion – in 2007 and in 2012 – the 24,000 square foot winery continues to crank out crowd pleasing favorites. But if wine isn’t your beverage your choice, the Door County Distillery is here to enchant your senses with clever concoctions of vodka, whiskey, brandy, gin and bitters. But even with the wider range of offerings, wine remains in high demand.



“Winery still grows; we come out with new products every year,” Pollman said. “We began as a fruit winery – we have over 55 different wines right now. About 12 of them are grape, the rest are fruit and fruit/grape blends. We’re known for very fruit-flavored wines. Our fruit wines are second to none; we do a really good job on those.”

## PLAY, THINK, TASTE, LISTEN

When it comes to producing new wines and products for their loyal customer base, Door Peninsula takes an unorthodox and holistic approach to the creative process. “What can we do, what haven’t we done?” said Poll-

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man. “My wine team and I will start playing with stuff and coming up some concoctions – thinking of this and tasting it. Sometimes we’ll put it out on our retail floor and we’ll look for some feedback from the consumer if it’s something they like or not. Then it becomes a label – we’ve done cartoons; you name it, we’ve done it.”

Even with an already impressive array of offerings and notoriety for its fruit wine, Door Peninsula continues to try new things.

“Every year we come out with new stuff,” said Pollman. “We try to get these things started around Christmas time, so when summer

season hits in June/July we have the new product out, but it never happens like that.”

The introduction of a new product for the market must pass through an arduous process with significant wait times and government regulations.

“You need formula approval from the federal government – that’s a 45-60 day wait time,” said Pollman. “Then you got to make a label and submit that to the government as well, that’s another 45 day wait time. Sometimes you get it sooner than that, other times you’re made to wait longer for it.”



But even the wait times can't hold Door Peninsula's creativity and brand development. With sales and marketing acumen already instilled within the internal makeup of the winery through the Bob and Irene, the new offerings are continuing to roll out.

"For wines, we're coming out with Peninsula Pink this year," said Pollman. "We want these things to come out at the beginning of season, so Peninsula Pink will come out in August. We're also coming out with coffee vodka this summer."

"Part of the reason we're doing it is because Door County Coffee is across the street from





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us and it's a pretty big operation," continued Pollman. "They've been here for 15 years. We talked to the owner and came up with an idea to make coffee liquor."

## SMALL TOWN SUCCESS

As the original winery in Door County, the Pollman family's humble roots are firmly entrenched in Carlsville. Located in Sturgeon Bay, a small city in Wisconsin, Door Peninsula's involvement within the community is of paramount importance.

"We've been around for a long time, so we're pretty involved with the community," said Pollman. "There are seven businesses here:

there's us, the coffee shop, the Roadhouse – a bar and restaurant, Harbour Village Campground and Shop's Dairy, which makes us ice cream. We got together about 15 years ago and formed the Carlsville Business Association to help put Carlsville on the map in Door County."

Small town at its core, the 15-18 full-time employees and 25 seasonal workforces are a resilient bunch.

"We go feast, famine here in Door County," said Pollman. "June through October is crazy busy. Holiday seasons busy, but once January, February, March, end of April hits, it's a






ghost town; winters are long, real quiet. But we don't let that get to us; we have a pretty fun, loose atmosphere around here."

In the last 12 years, six wineries have opened up. Now, there are seven wineries in Door County. Pollman isn't worried though; rather he sees it as an opportunity to build business and friendships.





"When other wineries started opening up around here, at first I was concerned that they were going to eat into my business, but in fact it's done the opposite – it's increased my business," he said. "It's a positive thing working with other people, rather than be-

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ing adversarial. About five years ago, we got together with the owners and formed the Door County Wine Trail,” he continued. “Every year month or two we get together and talk about what we can do to promote the wine industry in Door County.”

An hour away from Green Bay and three hours from Milwaukee, Door County remains well connected within its rural surroundings. The commitment to supporting local is a testament to the community’s close-knit admiration for one another.

“We use local fruits for whatever we can,” Pollman said. “We buy local fruit and there are some grapes that we buy from growers in the state of Wisconsin and combine it with what we have in the vineyard.”

“We’re a family business, we started off really small,” he continued. “The winery business is a big business now, and it started with nothing. When we took it over in 1984, the business was failing and my parents put a lot of hard work into it and did some smart things.”



## THE FUTURE

The rich and flavorful legacy of Door Peninsula Winery continues. What started in a schoolhouse 40 years ago has grown into a nationwide brand. With distribution through the Midwest and distributors in Illinois, Minnesota, Michigan and Wisconsin, Door Peninsula has no plans of stopping anytime soon.

“At the distillery, we’re going to more into brown liquors,” said Pollman. “We own a brew-pub about six miles up the road and

we’re making our whiskey out of our beer mash. Just more brown liquors, as we feel that’s the trend.”

“We came out with moonshine last year,” he continued. “We’re looking to just stay ahead of the game and stay current and come up with new and unique things.”

The strong family lineage pushes Door Peninsula forward. As the current owner, the younger Pollman still remembers his early days at the winery in 1993 as well as the rise of not just the grassroots wine movement led by his parents but the winery as a whole. And while they can’t always see eye to eye, variety is the spice of life – and for the Pollman’s and Door Peninsula Winery – the secret to their success and longevity.

“We have all different ideas,” he said. “When my family gets together we have all different thoughts and we go against each other all the time, but this is what’s worked for us over time. We’re not always on the same page, but we talk and work it out and pull the trigger on things.” We haven’t had many mistakes and most things have been successful.”

*Door Peninsula Winery*



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