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# Napa Valley College Expands Wine Education with State-of-the-Art $10M Center

## Wine Spectator Invests in Future of Napa Valley with $10M Education Center Donation

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Napa Valley College (NVC) recently marked a significant milestone with the groundbreaking of the new Wine Spectator Wine Education Center, a development that promises to transform the college's Viticulture and Winery Technology (VWT) program. This exciting project is made possible by a generous $10 million donation from the Wine Spectator Scholarship Foundation, the largest single gift in the foundation's history. The center is set to significantly enhance the educational opportunities for

students in one of the most prominent wine regions in the world.

On May 17, shovels hit the ground as dignitaries, educators, and students gathered to celebrate the start of construction. Marvin R. Shanken, editor and publisher of Wine Spectator, expressed his enthusiasm for the project, stating, "The ample educational opportunities offered through the Wine Spectator Wine Education Center will allow students to build extensive wine-related skills through an assortment of educational programs and degrees, all designed to enhance their careers." Shanken's commitment to supporting both the college and the broader wine industry underscores the importance of this initiative.

NVC's president, Dr. Torence Powell, highlighted the project's significance, noting, "We are here to celebrate this really impactful moment for our Viticulture [and] Winery Technology program for Napa Valley College, for the valley, and for the wine and hospitality industry." The new center will more than double the program's current classroom and training space, providing 10,000 square feet of state-of-the-art learning environments. Features will include two flexible sensory classrooms and a laboratory classroom with 28 lab stations, designed to give students hands-on experience in wine production and analysis.

Napa Valley College's VWT program is among the largest in the United States, enrolling over 800 students annually. The program caters to a diverse range of students, including recent high school graduates, wine industry professionals seeking to update their knowledge, retirees, and hobbyists. A significant portion of the student body comprises first-generation college students, reflecting the program's commitment to accessibility and diversity.

Located just south of downtown Napa, the NVC campus includes a 5-acre vineyard and a commercial winery, the first bonded winery in the California community college system. The college offers degrees in viticulture, winemaking, and wine marketing and sales, all designed to provide practical, job-ready skills.

Dr. Powell emphasized the center's role in student success, noting, "We have strong job placement, with more than 80 percent hiring rates for our program. So once students go through the program, they move on directly to new jobs and up the ladder into

higher management positions within the organizations they work in." This hands-on, career-focused approach is a cornerstone of the VWT program, preparing students for various roles within the wine and hospitality industries.

Oscar Navarro, an alumnus of the VWT program and now the assistant winery manager at the teaching winery, shared his personal experience with the crowd. "Thank God for this program and for this donation," he said. "Because stories like mine are just waiting to break open. To let the opportunities just flood in for many of us is truly a blessing." Navarro's success story is a testament to the program's impact and the transformative potential of the new center.

Congressman Mike Thompson, who represents Napa County and is an NVC alumnus, echoed these sentiments in a video message. He emphasized that the groundbreaking represents more than just a new facility; it's an investment in the future of the wine industry. "When completed, the complex will attract students and ultimately secure job candidates from across the region, state, and around the globe to help meet demand in the growing hospitality industry in Napa," Thompson said.

The Wine Spectator Scholarship Foundation has a long history of supporting education in the wine and culinary industries, having raised over $30 million to date. This latest donation to NVC underscores the foundation's commitment to fostering the next generation of wine industry professionals. Mel Mannion, senior advisor to the chairman of Wine Spectator, highlighted the foundation's mission, saying, "The foundation has supported many educational institutions, including University of California, Davis, and Sonoma State University, and now has made the largest commitment in foundation history. This gift demonstrates Wine Spectator's affection for and commitment to Napa Valley."

Looking ahead, NVC is already planning phase two of the VWT update: a Wine and Hospitality Training Center with a demonstration kitchen. This new space will provide training in all aspects of wine marketing, sales, and hospitality, including winery food programs, wine club membership, tasting room management, and tourism. A capital campaign is currently underway to secure funding for this ambitious next step.

Paul Gospodarczyk, VWT program coordinator and professor, summed up the spirit of the project, stating, "Learning is the pursuit of happiness. When we learn, we get economic freedom. We get intellectual freedom. We get emotional freedom." This sentiment was echoed by Navarro, who added, "That's what we're shooting for. To just continue to welcome every single person in Napa Valley."

The Wine Spectator Wine Education Center represents a bold step forward for Napa Valley College, its students, and the entire wine industry. With state-of-the-art facilities and a commitment to practical, hands-on education, the center will help shape the future of viticulture and winemaking, ensuring that Napa Valley remains at the forefront of the global wine community.