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Napa Valley College unveils new wine education center with record donation from Wine Spectator foundation

Expanded facility doubles classroom space and enhances hands-on training for students in leading viticulture and winery technology program

Monday, May 12, 2025



Napa Valley College is preparing to open the first phase of its new Wine Spectator Wine Education Center this fall, marking a significant milestone for its Viticulture and Winery Technology (VWT) program. The center, funded by a $10 million donation from the

Wine Spectator Scholarship Foundation, represents the largest gift in the college's history and the most substantial contribution ever made by the foundation. On April 9, members of the President's Circle Giving Society, a group of key Napa Valley College donors, toured the construction site wearing hard hats as they viewed the nearly finished facility.

The groundbreaking for the center took place less than a year ago, on May 17, 2024. Now, phase one is almost complete and will soon welcome students for fall courses. The new building will more than double the VWT program's classroom and training space, adding 10,000 square feet of modern learning environments. Among its features are two flexible sensory classrooms that can seat up to 80 students each and a laboratory classroom with 28 lab stations. The sensory lab will be the largest classroom on campus.

Napa Valley College's VWT program is recognized as one of the largest wine technology programs at a community college in the United States, enrolling over 800 students annually. The curriculum emphasizes hands-on training and career readiness, with more than 80 percent of graduates securing jobs in the wine industry. Students come from diverse backgrounds, including recent high school graduates, current industry professionals seeking to update their skills, retirees, and hobbyists. A significant portion of students are also first-generation college attendees.

During the recent tour, professor Paul Gospodarczyk highlighted how the new spaces will enhance learning by bringing wine education to life. Instructor Paul Wagner noted that many students already work in wineries and contribute real-world experience to classroom discussions.

The college campus is located just south of downtown Napa and features a five-acre vineyard and a commercial winery—the first bonded winery at a California community college. The VWT program offers degrees in viticulture, winemaking, wine marketing, and sales.

While phase one nears completion, attention is turning to phase two: a planned Wine and Hospitality Training Center that will include a demonstration kitchen. This future addition aims to provide training in wine marketing, sales, hospitality management,

winery food programs, wine club operations, tasting room management, tourism, and culinary arts related to winery chefs. A capital campaign is underway to secure funding for this next stage.

The Napa Valley College Foundation has supported students since its founding in 1968 through scholarships and emergency relief efforts. In recent years, it has focused on upgrading facilities for the VWT program to keep pace with advances in wine industry technology.

The Wine Spectator Scholarship Foundation was created to support education in wine and culinary fields. To date, it has raised over $30 million through donations from vintners worldwide and fundraising events such as Wine Spectator’s Wine Experience. The new education center at Napa Valley College stands as a testament to these ongoing efforts to connect students with opportunities in one of America’s most renowned wine regions.