

# DCCVB View: A toast to the spirit of tourism

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I recently sat down with Rick Mamoser, co-owner of Prairie State Winery with his wife, Maria, to uncover the story behind the beautiful new mural that is the toast of the town in Genoa.

Mamoser told his wife last spring he wanted to explore commissioning a mural at their location in Genoa that was powerful and simple and would really draw attention from the street. They've done it. Residents and visitors alike are stopping to take pictures of the new mural, painted on their building at 222 W. Main St. in downtown Genoa.

This beautiful new piece of public art started to unfold months ago, when Masomer was talking to friends at Resource Bank about his mural idea. They referred him to Eulojio Ortega, a muralist from Sandwich they had commissioned for Resource Bank's Hampshire and Somonauk branches.

Mamoser studied Ortega's work at his website – [chicagomuralist.com](http://chicagomuralist.com) – and fell in love with it. He met with Ortega and came away convinced he was the right artist for their mural.

He told Ortega he envisioned having a bottle, glass of wine and grapes on the mural. He didn't want it to be complicated, which also reflects the easygoing style that both Rick and Maria have in their business and personal lives.

Ortega requested one thing. He wanted someone to create a design concept to ensure that they were on the same page before the work began. Mamoser immediately thought of an artist who could help. Someone he and his wife had worked with for years in their business.

Marla Shega had created designs for many of the Mamosers' wine labels, including all the Prairie State labels that are unveiled each year at Nouveau Wine Weekend in Galena. Nouveau is the French-inspired tradition of previewing the first samplings from the fall harvest.

This year, Prairie State Winery will showcase wines in Galena on Nov. 20 and 21 as usual, but will also hold its own event Thursday, Nov. 19, in Genoa. Nouveau Toast & Breakfast will ring in the arrival of the first vintage of the season with wine enthusiasts getting to sample the new 2015 vintage and enjoy complimentary breakfast quiches. Each year, 20 posters with the Prairie State Nouveau label are produced and signed by the artist for collectors. Shega's work can be viewed at her website – [marlaspalette.com](http://marlaspalette.com).

While it's unusual for an artist to allow someone else to bring their vision to life, Shega was eager to be a part of the Mamosers' mural project due to her longstanding relationship with the

couple. She went to work creating the concept design that was given to Ortega. Her design was the inspiration for the mural that Rick Mamoser had envisioned. Now, it was up to Ortega to bring it to life.

He began the project in October and took about 10 working days, utilizing Shega's illustration along with photos that provided the realism he wanted to create.

What makes the work so personal to Rick and Maria Mamoser is a phrase located in the bottom right corner of the mural: "Fruit of the vine, Work of human hands ..."

It has deep, personal meaning for the Mamosers since it adorned the wall in their original location in Genoa. It has a spiritual meaning for them as well, because they hear it every Sunday in church.

Trust me, experiencing the power and beauty of this mural in person is indeed a spiritual experience. Take a trip to Genoa to check it out and let your eyes drink it all in. Remember to go inside and sample the wine produced from Illinois grapes by loving hands. This mural may have been created in 10 working days but the vision behind it represents the love and nurturing of a local business that started 17 years ago.

DeKalb County is fortunate to have local artisans crafting and producing wines, microbrews, whiskey and vodka attracting new visitors to the area every day that we, as residents, can explore and enjoy in our own backyard. Here's a toast to all the hard-working people who are part of the tourism landscape in DeKalb County.

Cheers and safe travels.

- Debbie Armstrong is executive director of the DeKalb County Convention and Visitors Bureau.