

DeKalb County

Leave the City and Find a Bold Spirit

By Pat Szpekowski

There's something special about taking a summer ride in the country to explore and experience new adventures. Whether it's antiquing, shopping or visiting farmers markets, it's a fun treat to capture a rare find and sample the very best wines, craft beers and bold spirits locally produced in DeKalb County.

"Nowhere is the pride of craftsmanship more apparent than within the breweries, wineries and distilleries of DeKalb County," says Erin Reynolds, interim executive director of the DeKalb County Convention and Visitors Bureau. "From award-winning wines to signature craft beer to hard spirits enjoyed by visitors from around the world, these makers produce bold flavors that can't be found anywhere else."

There are five such establishments located within a short drive of the city of DeKalb, located in the heart of the county.

"These local treasures will leave visitors with a newfound sense of appreciation for the talent, work and results produced by some of the finest liquid craftsmen in the U.S.," adds Reynolds. "They all provide tours of their winemaking, brewing and distilling expertise."

The Forge Brewhouse, in DeKalb, is more than a taproom. It's a working brewery where owner and operator James Heinrich and his wife co-owner, Lisa, take their craft very seriously. Ingredients are locally sourced wherever possible, whether it's hazelnuts from Chicago or apples and pumpkins from nearby Jonamac Orchard. The Forge offers 13 beers on tap and a popular root beer.

Whiskey Acres in DeKalb began with a dream. Fifth-generation farmer Jamie Walter and his partner have grown every ounce of corn, rye, barley and wheat on the family farm to produce flavors unlike what's found anywhere else. Have a drink on the distillery's flagstone cocktail patio, take a tour, or enjoy some pours. While you're there, you might consider booking a wedding, meeting, or party in the new 4,200-square-foot visitors center.

Not too far away, Jonamac Orchard, in Malta, is producing signature hard cider, apple wine and apple ale. The sprawling 105-acre farm offers up country hospitality and classic fall-time fun, plus fresh fruit and baked goods around late summer and fall. Juice from Jonamac's apples is transported to Prairie State Winery in nearby Genoa, where it's carefully fermented and bottled into



Jonamac Orchard, in Malta, is a 105-acre farm that produces hard cider, apple wine and apple ale. The orchard is also known for its fresh fruit and baked goods, available in late summer and fall.

10 varieties of apple wine. Jonamac's Cider House, open around orchard season from August to November, is the place to sample a spectrum of spirits.

Prairie State Winery and its Prairie on State Wine Cellars, in Sycamore, are the bold vision of former high school teachers Rick and Maria Mamoser. Established in 1998, their winery has become well-known and their varieties have garnered many awards, including numerous Best of Class and Gold Medals. The lineup includes reds, whites, blushes, desserts and fruit favorites.

Waterman Winery & Vineyards, in Waterman, handcrafts regional wines as well. Its vineyard sits in a valley and appears as though it's lifted from California wine country. Tastings of Waterman's authentic, handcrafted red, white and fruit wines are available from April through December. Experience true rustic charm of a century-old farm and fresh countryside air during your visit.

"Make the trip and visit our makers," says Reynolds. "Discover the bold spirits of DeKalb County."

Find out more about these unique bold spirits and craftsmen at dekalbcountyevb.com. ■