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Brothers retire to operate a winery

By **Bill Michelmore - NEWS NIAGARA BUREAU**

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Larry Manning once ran a manufacturing company.

CAMBRIA — Brothers Larry, Sean and Chip Manning grew up in Cambria and then moved away to different towns to pursue successful careers.

Larry ran his own company manufacturing valves for the steel industry; Sean became an executive in the electronics industry; and Chip worked for Allegheny Ludlum Steel Corp. in Lockport. They raised families and produced nine children in all.

Though still relatively

young, each of the brothers recently retired around the same time and decided to do something completely different — open a winery.

Freedom Run Winery at 5138 Lower Mountain Road unofficially opened in February, adding to the growing Niagara Wine Trail, an increasingly popular tourist attraction that began in 2002 with two wineries and now has 10, with another 10 being developed.

The official grand opening for Freedom Run was held Saturday, with 11 varieties of wine and a feast of roast duck, lamb and beef prepared by Lancaster Country Club's Executive Chef Warren J. Drew.

Niagara Weekend sat down last week with Larry Manning, who runs the winery with his wife, Sandra, and with Sean, Chip and Chip's wife, Vickie. Kathy Baker, tasting room manager, and winemaker Robert A. Green also are key employees.

How did it happen that you and your brothers came back home and opened a winery?

We were raised in a house on Upper Mountain Road. We played all over the Niagara Escarpment when we were kids. We built a fort in those woods. We were very close. All through our lives we had a sense we'd one day be

working together. We had no idea what it would be and we never thought it would be a winery. ***Are there other members of your family living in the area?***

I have a brother, Jim, who runs a corner store in Cambria with his wife, Tammy; and two sisters, Amy Lynn Manning, who lives on Upper Mountain Road, and Denise Czynry, a registered nurse in Buffalo. Her husband, Dave, also helps us in the winery. Our father, Harry, passed away three years ago. Our mother, Maureen, still lives up there on the hill. Our parents gave us our work ethic. We're all hard workers, and we like to give back to the community that helped make us what we are today. ***Will the winery do that?***

This is more than just a building. We want the winery to become a community event that will bring people together. With the purchase of the 90- acre farm for the winery came the old stone homestead that was built in 1826 and which we plan to turn into a champagne house, like the hundreds they have all over France. We're going to use the barn at the back for old-fashioned barn dances and other community events. We really want to see the Niagara Wine Trail grow and prosper, and we work with all of the wineries to make that happen.

What's the significance of the name Freedom Run?

We named it after the Underground Railroad, which was such an important part of the history of the Niagara area.

Tell us about the wine you produce here.

We planted six varieties of grapes: Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Chardonnay, Riesling and Pinot Noir. There are 12,000 vines on 10 acres and we produce about 50,000 bottles of wine a year. The wine is stored in 3,000-gallon stainless steel tanks. The red wine is aged in French oak barrels that are shipped directly from France. We sell the wine to people visiting the winery and to local liquor stores and restaurants. We also feature specific wines for area restaurants that host wine dinners.

Your labor of love sounds like it also will be very profitable.

Wineries will be the next big growth industry in the Niagara region, a forecast that has been backed up by Cornell University in a research study. We have the perfect microclimate for growing wine grapes. We see the Niagara Wine Trail increasing to 25 wineries in the next five years. And with the wineries will come new restaurants and hotels.

Are you getting many visitors already?

From all over the world. They don't come specifically to see our winery, of course, but they read and hear about the Niagara Wine Trail from the TV and tourism magazines when they check into their hotel or motel rooms. We've had visitors from places as far apart as Hawaii and France.

How significant is the recent recognition of the Niagara Escarpment as an American Viticultural Area?

It puts us right up there with other famous wine-growing areas like France's Bordeaux and Champagne regions.

The architectural detailing of this building is remarkable. Tell us about that.

We wanted something modern and original. My brother, Sean, is a potterymaker and glass blower and he made the washroom basins and the colored glass front of the tasting bar. Sean also painted the murals of grapes and grape leaves on the concrete floor of the processing room. The top of the tasting bar is natural granite from the jungles of Brazil. I designed the woodwork, including the maple beams and the bamboo floor.

The three Manning brothers who used to play together along the Niagara Escarpment seem to have really latched onto something.

We love it, and we love the community. We want this winery to go through all the generations. Between our two boys, Matthew and Jarid, and 15 nieces and nephews, we know we have the talent.

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