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SANTA ROSA, CALIFORNIA

First wine-tasting room planned for downtown Santa Rosa

Landmark Corrick's store hopes to include facility by August

By PEG MELNIK

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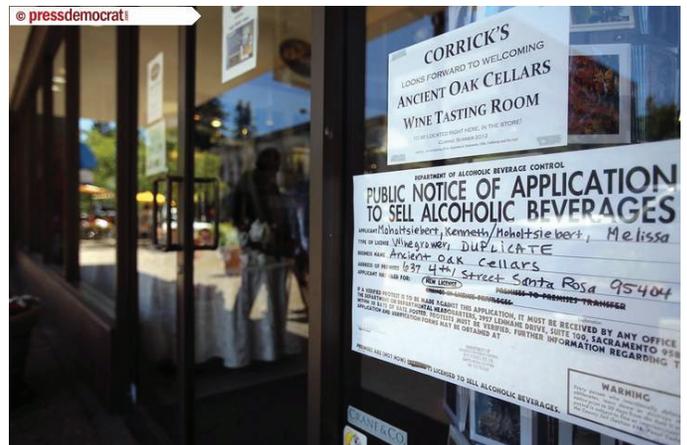
The first wine-tasting room may be coming to downtown Santa Rosa.

Keven Brown, co-owner of Corrick's Stationery Store on Fourth Street, hopes to use part of his store for the tasting room in August.

"I have played with the idea of putting in a tasting room for several years, especially as the downtown has become a destination for tourists as well as for locals," he said. "As a store, we wanted to represent more American-made products ... Representing Sonoma County's most famous product, wine, is a natural extension of this concept."

Brown expects Santa Rosa-based Ancient Oak Cellars would improve the store's foot traffic, which he says now ranges from 200 to 600 people a day. Corrick's also is making room for a frame shop, My Daughter the Framer. Owner Sally Baker is moving her business from the Town & Country Shopping Center and hopes for a July opening.

Corrick's, a downtown institution for almost 100 years, was founded by Brown's great-grandparents, Arthur Rae and Mabel Corrick, in 1915. Brown said the store has 14,000 square feet of space on the ground level and 3,000 more upstairs.



A public notice to sell alcoholic beverages is on display in the window of Corrick's in downtown Santa Rosa. Ancient Oak Cellars will be opening a wine tasting area inside the store. Photo: Christopher Chung / PD

"Both the winery and the framer will be centrally located against our western wall," he said. "The winery will be adjacent to our ARTrails Gallery, surrounded by Sonoma County art. The framer will be just north of there, in the area where we used to show books and maps."

Although Brown declined to reveal what Corrick's would charge in rent, he did say the additional income would help the store's bottom line, especially in a down economy.

"I would not say we're struggling financially," he said. "I think if you talk with any retailer, they would say the same thing. The economy is more challenging to any retail establishment."

"We're seeing a lot of positive growth even in a down economy," he said. "Obviously, any retail business is a little bit challenged. Some departments are up and some are down. China and silver are not selling the way they used to, and that's not a surprise."

Brown was drawn to Ancient Oak Cellars in part because it, too, is a multigenerational business. It is owned by Ken and Melissa Moholt-Siebert, with vineyards on the 31-acre property formerly owned by Ken Moholt-Siebert's grandparents, on Old Redwood Highway next door to Cardinal Newman High School.

The small-production winery makes its wine at Owl Ridge Wine Services in Sebastopol. Ancient Oak Cellars' flagship wine is pinot noir, but it also produces zinfandel, chardonnay and a red table wine.

"I first met Ken and Melissa as customers," Brown said. "We realized only last October that we all overlapped at Pomona College ... We share a great love of music and the arts and our friendship grew from there."

Their collaboration had a synergy, Melissa Moholt-Siebert said.

"We both have a history of strong involvement in the communities where we live and work," she said, "and we're both big thinkers who think about what's best for our communities, not just ourselves."

The winery owners would rather be downtown, Moholt-Siebert said, than in Railroad Square where a few tasting rooms, including a cluster at Cellars of Sonoma, have sprung up to complement the emerging restaurant and club scene there.

"We like the 'vibe' that is on Fourth Street downtown, the sense of place," she said. "We want to be a part of that, and a part of creating that."

The proposal will go before the Santa Rosa Planning Commission on July 12, Brown said.

Meanwhile, the winery has submitted its application for a liquor license to the state Alcoholic Beverage Control board.

Santa Rosa City Planner Noah Housh said his department has been studying some "deficiencies and ambiguities" in the existing zoning code, perceived as barriers to business and out of step with the changing Sonoma County demographic. If the code is changed, the Corrick's project may not even need city approval, he added.

Meanwhile, cross-promotion is Brown's strategy.

"We know that these collaborations will only add to the flavor of our business, especially as we prepare to celebrate our 100th anniversary in 2015," he said.

"We want to be a place for people to come for the best of Sonoma County," Brown said. "That's the direction I'm going."

The Moholt-Sieberts think the plan is a win-win.

"Our involvement in the national wine market means we will draw people from all over to the tasting room in Corrick's," she said.

"The store's foot traffic helps Ancient Oak Cellars while our regional and national draw helps Corrick's."

"We like the 'vibe' that is on Fourth Street downtown, the sense of place. We want to be a part of that, and a part of creating that."

Melissa Moholt-Siebert
co-owner of Ancient Oak Cellars

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