

## Wine school toasts past and future

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The three-storey building where Brock University professors teach all things wine and grape has given Erin Norton a future.

The 27-year-old chemistry masters graduate was facing a life in the lab before deciding to sign up for a one-year certificate program in grape and wine technology.

Last year, Norton spent hours studying the biology of grapes and wine chemistry at Inniskillin Hall, the hub of Brock's Cool Climate Oenology and Viticulture Institute (CCOVI).

"Within a month I knew this is where I should be," Norton said.

On Wednesday, Norton and about 150 others gathered to toast the 10th anniversary of Inniskillin Hall, which was built to teach a future generation of winemakers and help build Ontario's young wine industry.

After much fundraising, the doors of the \$6.1-million building opened in June 1999 — two years after CCOVI accepted its first students.

Since then, more than 75 students have graduated from the oenology and viticulture program and 24 masters and PhD students have been trained.

Horton, a St. Catharines native, said she learned so much from the institute that has given her her future, but wants it to continue to evolve.

"Hopefully, it will make more connections with other industries, and more wineries, and also other programs out there," said Horton, who is graduating from the winemaking program this fall.

"Getting us out there and getting more contact with the wineries would be great."

CCOVI officials say making more connections with the wineries and grape growers is the wine school's future.

Two years ago, CCOVI was asked by the grape and wine industry — which helped create the program in 1997 — to broaden the school's focus to address pressing needs of the industry.

CCOVI was originally created as research institute for major, long-term projects that relied on government grants.

Director Debra Inglis said the wine school has listened, and expanded its focus from strictly

science-based research to other areas such as business marketing, agritourism and wine culture.

The institute also plans on reaching out to wineries and grape growers and offering them applied research services to address immediate grape-growing and wine-making problems, she said.

“We’ll be able to address issues immediately now as they come up,” said Inglis, who has been with CCOVI for 10 years.

Wine mogul Donald Ziraldo, co-founder of Inniskillin Wines in Niagara-on-the-Lake, said CCOVI has an important role to play in the future of the Canadian wine industry.

The school needs to help the industry with research and innovation to make more great products — such as icewine — to make it competitive on the global stage, he said.

Countries such as Italy and California “will kill you in the marketplace unless you have a great product and stay innovative and find your niche,” said Ziraldo, who led the fundraising campaign in the late 1990s to build Inniskillin Hall, with John Howard, owner of John Howard Cellars of Distinction.

“That’s what we have to do — find our niche.”

Brock University president Jack Lightstone called CCOVI a “poster child” of marrying academic pursuits of faculty and students with helping Niagara.

“If we can’t make CCOVI work, why would you expect to make anything else work with respect to our goals serving the community?” Lightstone said.

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#### Timeline of Brock University’s Cool Climate Oenology and Viticulture Institute

- 1996 — CCOVI established by Brock and partners the Wine Council of Ontario and the Grape Growers of Ontario
- 1997 — First students enter Oenology and Viticulture Program in September.
- 1998 — Construction on Inniskillin Hall begins in June
- 1999 — Inniskillin Hall opens in June. Key features include biotech and viticulture labs, sensory evaluation lab, teaching and research winery and 43,000 bottle cellar and Canadian wine library
- 2000 — First students graduate in June
- 2007 — First PhD student graduates