

Cellars Key Winery

After working hard all week in the medical field, both Michael and Carissa Shaffer began experimenting with making wine at home as a little something for themselves to enjoy. As they perfected their recipes, that enjoyment spread to family and friends who became sources of encouragement for them to go further with the crafting and selling of their wines. Carissa decided to enter their wines into various local competitions, and to her amazement, they won! And they kept winning every year for several years thereafter. That is when Michael and Carissa decided that this might be a new path to venture on their road to retirement.



The Shaffer's did not want to take the conventional winery approach.

Carissa said their vision "was to have an intimate boutique style winery, that was pet friendly, but with no food preparation service - because she wanted to support the offerings of her local community which her clientele could bring in and enjoy."

This vision was not left on the shelf as any pipe dream. Carissa made the effort to dive deep into learning about what it took to develop a small winery business like this. "I learned everything I could", she said. "I knew there was a lot that went into starting a small business and wanted to understand all of it, in order to weigh our options." That is when the Small Business Development Center became a resource for Carissa and Michael. A former Lakeland Community College student, Carissa was familiar with the area and excited to meet with advisor, Anita Stocker. "I had very little understanding of business plans, operating agreements and loan navigation," Carissa said. "Anita was my sounding board. I would bounce off ideas and asked her many, many questions."

The Shaffer's expressed how much she appreciated Anita for her assistance in loan education and the development of a business plan which pointed them in the direction of their goal. Carissa advised that the process took about 4 years. "There was a lot to navigate - the bank loans, zoning laws, soil sampling and septic systems. More than I initially imagined," she said. "The process was very educational and fun in a way, as I love to learn new things. But it was also a lot of hard work."

In October 2025, all of Michael and Carissa's efforts finally paid off! Nestled within 8.5 acres overlooking a beautiful vista of Geauga County, Cellars Key Winery opened its doors, bringing the surrounding communities of Thompson and Montville together! With their two dachshund "greeters", Michael and Carissa serve several varieties of their wine in a charming, intimate space where people can mingle, mix and be. Offering live music and private events options.

Within 6 months of opening, Cellars Key Winery has seen an increase in revenue, and added 3 new employees. Carissa's advice to future business owners is "be open to ask for assistance from different resources, like Ohio's Small Business Development Center, to give you guidance as you navigate your own path. And don't give up even when it gets hard, because it will. But in the end, it will all be worth it!"



Michael and Carissa thank Anita and the local SBDC for assisting to bring their vision to *fruition!*