

Barbecue and brews

Southern Craft now serving downtown, with plans for brewery

Oak Brewery with plans to begin eventually distributing its beer. Zabala said Carson's recipes include a creme ale, a coffee stout, various seasonal beers and brown ales. "The equipment should be in by August. It will take about a month to set up and a month to brew the first batch," Zabala said.

Nearly a month to the day that Portico closed, Southern Craft Barbecue officially reopened its doors with new food served in a countrified, rustic atmosphere.

Dim amber lights illuminate the restaurant, while the sweet smell of freshly smoked pork continuously wafts from the kitchen area. Zabala said the restaurant's smoker can hold up to 850 pounds of meat at one time.

Tucked away in a corner of the dining area is a shelf full of pit master Tony Wilson's locally made "Southern Craft" barbecue sauce, which comes in Stony Creek Original, Carolina Gold, Alabama White and Texas Tea.

Wilson founded Creeker's Barbecue Restaurant in Elizabethton before recently selling the property.

The list of Southern Craft Barbecue's main entrées include pork belly, chicken tacos, sliced brisket, smoked chicken salad and burnt ends, just to name a few.

Zabala said he believes the jackfruit tacos will eventually be a hit with those who aren't keen on eating meats.

"It's a unique item. It's an Asian fruit that you smoke and it looks just like meat," Zabala said. "When a lot of people think barbecue, they think only meat but we'll have that vegan option."

Southern Craft Barbecue is open daily from 10 a.m. to 11 p.m., and offers a brunch buffet from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. on Sundays.



Zach Vance/Johnson City Press

A Butcher's Club Sandwich from Southern Craft Barbecue



A pulled pork sandwich from Southern Craft Barbecue



A closeup look at the Butcher's Club Sandwich

New designation to help area's wine producers

By JOHN THOMPSON
Elizabethton Bureau Chief
jthompson@johnsoncitypress.com

BUTLER — The region of higher elevation east of the Tri-Cities has long been known for its mountain vistas, hiking trails and Christmas tree farms. Now the region may be recognized for producing distinctive wines.

On Nov. 28, the federal Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau designated the higher elevations of an eight-county area the Appalachian High Country Viticultural Area. The designation affects vintners who are growing grapes on farms above 2,000 feet in elevation in a 2,400-square-mile region, including parts of Johnson and Carter counties in Tennessee, Alleghany, Ashe, Avery, Mitchell and Watauga counties in North Carolina and Grayson County in Virginia.

The Tax and Trade Bureau has created many viticultural areas across the county, particularly in commercially viable wine-producing areas in California and New York. It is used to identify an area of production for distinctive grapes because of the topography, climate and soils. The designation allows vintners to better describe the origin of their wines and to allow consumers to better identify wines they may purchase.

Several of the vintners in the area have worked for years to get the federal designation. They include Johnnie James, owner of Bethel Valley Farms, who filed the petition with the Tax and Trade Bureau to get the region designated as a viticultural area. One of the most active supporters in Tennessee were Wayne and Linda Gay, owners of Villa Nove Vineyards, at 1877 Dry Hill Road, and the Watauga Lake Winery, in a former school building at 6952 Big Dry Run Road, both in Butler.

The Gays have been growing grapes in the region for 12 years and operating their winery for five years. They became interested in growing grapes and producing wine during the time Linda operated an Italian import business in Florida. She said most of the people she did business with in Italy had a family member who was involved in viticulture.

Linda said the designation is good news not only for people involved in viticulture, but also for the region's tourism industry.

"The potential for tourism is phenomenal," she said. "This could mean a great increase in people visiting our area."

Other leaders in the region agreed and wrote to the Tax and Trade Bureau to express support. The writers included the mayor of Johnson City, the Johnson County Tourism Committee, the Johnson County Chamber of Commerce, the Carter County Tourism Association and the Elizabethton Planning and Economic Development Department.

Many of the commenters said they believed the designation could promote economic growth in their communities. One of the commenters, Kayla Carter, tourism coordinator for Carter County, wrote "This designation has the potential to attract new visitors, increase business and agriculture opportunities, but most importantly, it would bring a sense of pride to the region."

Another commenter,



John Thompson/Johnson City Press

Watauga Lake Winery has only been in business for two years, but it has already produced a gold medal wine, Doe Mountain Red, and a silver medal winner with Laurel Creek dessert wine.



Wayne and Linda Gay in their winery

John Hartman, director of planning and economic development for Elizabethton, said he "recognized the economic impact that such a designation could have not only on our city, but also our county and our region."

After the designation was announced, Linda Gay said the one thing still needed was more competition. She said she would like to see more grape growers and wine producers in the region, which would make the new designation more well known and help encourage more tours and tourists in the region.

According to the High Country Wine Growers Association, there are currently 21 commercially producing vineyards on 71 acres. There are also 10 wineries. An additional eight vineyards are planned, and would occupy another 37 acres. Most of the vineyards are located between the elevations of 2,290 feet and 4,630 feet.

According to the High Country petition, the high elevations expose vineyards "to high amounts of solar irradiance, which promotes grape maturation and compensates for low temperatures and a short growing season."

Most of the vineyards in the region are on steep slopes of 30 degrees or more. "Because of the steep slopes, many of the vineyards ... are terraced to prevent erosion, and most of the vineyards' work is done by hand rather than by machinery," the High Country Wine Producers said.

The area is also characterized by a cool climate and short growing season, making it suitable for cold-hardy grape varieties.

With the designation, labels on wines produced from grapes from the region may display the phrase "Appalachian High Country."

Fields of dreams

Area high schools improving athletics facilities



John Thompson/Johnson City Press

Crews work on resurfacing the track at Elizabethton High School.

surface to train on," said Bradley. "It adds to the pride the kids have in their program. There is a lot of excitement."

Community support was a big part of the process. Donations from the LaPorte family made the endeavor possible.

Science Hill's baseball reaped the benefits of improvements at TVA Credit Union Ballpark. The Hilltoppers played their first game on the new synthetic turf infield Tuesday. The

Hilltoppers defeated David Crockett in their home opener by a score of 4-2.

Those are some of the highlights for area teams, but schools have made improvements even in smaller areas. Schools have added stadium-seat upgrades, dressing facilities and the like.

Other schools, like Daniel Boone and David Crockett, are beginning a push for important facility improvements.

Much of the reasoning

behind the upgrades is trying to get a level playing surface for the athletes. If one school has facilities multiple times better than another, it can be seen as a mental disadvantage for the players coming from the school with lesser facilities.

Of course, like most things, it all comes down to dollars and cents. However, community support has been behind all the aforementioned changes, so there's hope for even the smallest of schools.

Healthy Kingsport creating wellness culture

By MATTHEW LANE
Kingsport Times-News

KINGSPORT — The Healthy Kingsport initiative recently celebrated its second birthday, and since then the community-led coalition has worked hard with business leaders, government officials and local school systems to help create a culture of healthy living.

The nonprofit organization does this by promoting awareness, influencing policy and enhancing infrastructure. In the end, the focus of Healthy Kingsport is to make our region a healthier place to live, work and play through increased physical activity, healthier eating and a reduction in tobacco use.

Kandy Childress, executive director of Healthy Kingsport, said the organization had a good year last year, with business contributions topping projections, hitting the \$77,000 goal and then exceeding it by more than \$83,000.

"In 2016, we welcomed seven new sponsor organizations ... (and) we raised another \$106,000 in revenue to

support special projects during the year," Childress said in her annual report. "In total, we raised approximately \$200,000 more than was committed in our 2016 budget."

This budget goes toward a number of initiatives within the community, most notably the Live Sugar Freed campaign, but also Healthier Workplaces and Places of Worship, a Tobacco-Free community, Eat Good — Feel Good, and Walk Across Tennessee.

The Live Sugar Freed campaign is a multi-phase plan by local health and community leaders to combat obesity and type 2 diabetes, the rates of which continue to rise in the Tri-Cities region. Officials are encouraging people to drink water or other healthier beverages instead of sugary sodas, sweet tea, fruit-flavored drinks, and "energy" or "sports" drinks.

Phase one started with a public education campaign to let people know the health risks associated with drinking sugary beverages. The mass media messaging went out on broadcast tele-

vision, YouTube, Hulu, Pandora and Facebook for a three-month period.

"These collective channels delivered a combined 13 million impressions throughout the region," Childress said.

The second phase of the campaign encouraged local businesses, schools and places of worship to adopt healthier beverage strategies by taking a Live Sugar Freed pledge, by not promoting sugary beverages, and offering folks healthier drink options.

Healthy Kingsport drove engagement by offering to provide free bottled water delivery over a period of three months to those organizations taking the pledge.

"To date, 244 organizations have taken a Live Sugar Freed pledge," Childress said. "This equates to both increased and free access to water for approximately 20,000 of the roughly 53,000 people living in Kingsport, or 37 percent of the population."

Course benefits region's runners

By JEFF BOBO
Kingsport Times-News

PHIPPS BEND — Phipps Bend's new 5K cross country course will not only benefit athletic programs at the county's two main high schools and middle schools, but it also has interest from colleges and AAU organizers as a potential location of major meets in the future.

The creation of the new Phipps Bend cross country

course was also the result of preparation and teamwork, and the cooperation and partnership of multiple agencies.

Among those agencies were the Hawkins County Industrial Development Board, Phipps Bend Joint Venture Committee, Hawkins County Board of Education and Hawkins County Commission.

The course was designed in August.