West Newsmagazine

Missing home delivery of *West*?

Click this link to request home delivery of *West Newsmagazine*.

Purchasing property – Promising preservation: Uncorking the Hoffmann Family's plans for Augusta's wine country

March 7, 2021 2,522 Views

Change is brewing in Augusta, birthplace of the nation's first viticultural area.

It's a $100 million transformation that some think will be more cataclysmic than when the Missouri River changed course in the 1870s and left Augusta high and dry.

When Augusta was founded in 1836 by Leonard Harold it had an excellent river landing, which helped the town thrive as a trading center that supported craftsmen, merchants, hotels and wineries. Then, the river cut a new channel and the landing existed no more. What remained was hundreds of acres of fertile river bottom land, which became the foundation of Augusta's viticultural heritage and led to the development of The Weinstrasse (German for "the road to the wineries").

Overlooking Augusta's wine country (Source: Montelle Winery)

Now, those wineries are changing hands and new amenities are coming to the region, thanks, in part, to a drive along The Weinstrasse.

Since Jan. 1, the majority of downtown Augusta along with Balducci Vineyards, Augusta Wine Company, Montelle Winery, Knoernschild Vineyards, Washington Vines and Mount Pleasant Winery has been purchased by David Hoffmann and The Hoffmann Family of Companies.

Hoffman is the CEO of Hoffmann Commercial Real Estate and founder of Osprey Capital, a private equity company. His family's companies own over 50 businesses in 27 countries, ranging from marinas to coffee shops to the Florida Everblades hockey team.

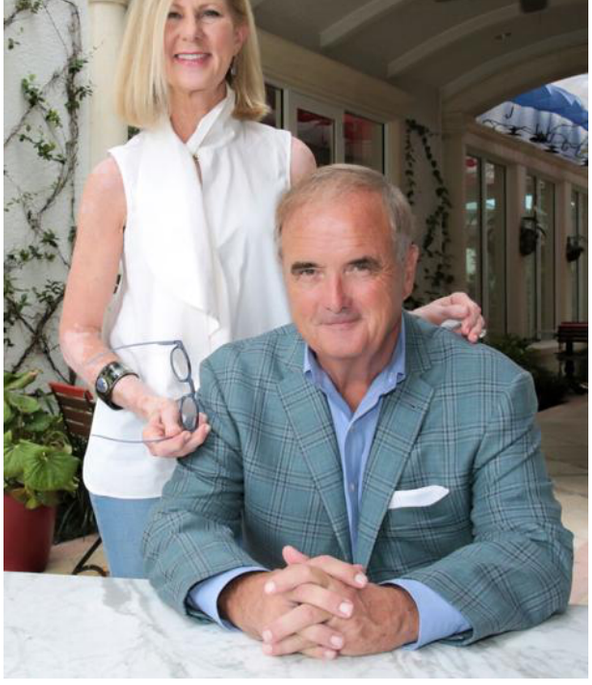
Augusta is the company's newest acquisition but it is not its first small town, regional redo. There have been others, notably the gulf shore town of Naples, Florida.

The Hoffmanns' goal for Naples was to create a hospitality destination by bringing in new businesses and recreational attractions for the tourist trade. The mission was accomplished, which heightened the city's visibility. That project's success had a good deal to do with property ownership. When Hoffman began his Naples' operations in 2015, he and his company became – and remain – the town's largest commercial real estate owners. A financial feat that is set to repeat itself in Augusta.

The Hoffmanns

Hofmann and his wife, Jerri, grew up in Washington, Missouri. He came from humble beginnings. His father drove a milk truck and his mother was a nurse's aide at the hospital in Washington. He and his wife graduated from Washington high schools and still come to visit family remaining in the area (they live in Naples now).

"Our roots are in Missouri," Hoffmann said during the Feb. 25 meeting of civic group Progress 64 West.



Jerri and David Hoffman (Official photo)

It was on a visit to Washington that they decided to take a drive along The Weinstrasse – a drive that led them to the decision to make Augusta the company's next project.

"We thought this would be a great opportunity to develop and invest in the Augusta community – and we thought it could be pretty exciting. Not only for the local people and residents but for the country as a whole, and perhaps the world," Hoffmann explained.

He said his son Greg, who runs the family's global real estate company, will be moving to Missouri with his family.

The questions

While the project is exciting, not everyone is thrilled. Concerns have already been voiced and the questioning has already begun, beginning with the obvious: Why would anyone want to make Augusta into another Napa-like destination? Both locals and wine industry experts agree: Augusta isn't the Napa Valley. The St. Charles County town has its own unique history, charm and award-winning wines.

Fact is, Napa Valley's early wine industry was built on the expertise of Missouri wine makers such as George and Fredrich Muench, who founded Mount Pleasant Winery in 1881. Interestingly, they named the winery in honor of the village before his name was changed to Augusta.

Mount Pleasant has gained national and international acclaim, winning gold metals, as early as the 1896 Chicago World's Fair, for its wines, ports and brandies.

Augusta wines before and after prohibition have been served at the White House.

Mount Pleasant Winery

Last week, when the acquisition of Mount Pleasant Winery, along with its vineyards was competed, it was a shock to many who, over the decades, had watched it and other local wineries grow, prosper and help to reestablish Missouri as one of America's finest wine producing states. With each acquisition, residents, county officials and industry leaders began asking, "What's next?" But much is still up in the air without a solid, written plan to review.

At the Feb. 25 Progress 64 West meeting, County Council member Joe Brazil (District 2), who lives in Augusta and owns Missouri River Excursions in Defiance, told Hoffmann, "It would be nice to get some sort of a layout or master plan."

Hoffmann admitted that things have been happening fast but he expects all acquisitions to be completed by April.

"What I would tell you is that timing took on a life of its own a lot quicker than we anticipated," he said. "We acquired our first property on Jan. 1 and 45 days later it hit the media. Right now, the master plan is on the back of an 8.5 by 11 sheet."

However, Hoffmann reassured those gathered that his company's investment in the 700-plus-acre project is not a fleeting proposition.

"We do move fast. But I want to emphasize we are not developers. As a family, we rarely sell anything. We're not a developer that comes to town, develops something then sells it," Hofmann said. "We come to build, become part of the community and stay forever.

"We've purchased 10 separate buildings in downtown Augusta along with the purchase of our vineyards. In total we're going to renovate 40 to 50 buildings. It's a massive project. By mid-summer, I think you're going to see some pretty dramatic changes."

County Executive Steve Ehlmann, at the Progress 64 West meeting, told Hoffmann, "My only concern is that we don't slow you down in any way." He referenced the time it took to secure approval for a proposed subdivision along the Missouri

Bluffs by NT Home Builders. The council eventually approved that development but it took longer than the county or the developer would have wanted, Ehlmann said. "I don't know if we're going to get a bunch of environmentalists come out from the other side of the river and have things to say about your proposal. It doesn't sound like they should, but those of us who've been around know that sometimes they look at things differently than we do here in St. Charles County. So I just want to help you get what you need from the county in a timely manner. So the sooner we can get started the less chance there is that we will ever slow you down."

Ehlmann pointed to Brazil. "Joe's the one who lives in the district and has all his neighbors asking him, 'What the heck's going on?' He tells them to call me and I don't know either."

The wines

Master Sommelier Glenn Bardgett, who is Annie Gunn's wine director, understands better than most wine's critical role as the lifeblood of Augusta and the area's culture and history. He has served on the Missouri Wine and Grape Board (MW&GB) from its beginning and has been a champion of Missouri wine for decades. He admitted that when news of the Hoffmanns' plans began to surface he had concerns. Following the sale of the Montelle and Augusta wineries, he called Cindy and Tony Kooyumjian, the wineries' founders.

"Cindy and Tony are friends. We worked together on the board for years. When I talked to Cindy and voiced my concerns, she gave me a lot of comfort. She was confident that what's going on will be good for Augusta," Bardgett said.

Bardgett said he had feared that Augusta's transformation would include bringing in non-Missouri juice and wine as has been the case with some Missouri wineries.

"Why (would) anyone want to come to Missouri and drink wines that aren't made from Missouri grapes?" Bardgett asked. "Some wineries bottle wines that aren't from Missouri produced juice. I want wine made from Missouri juice produced by Missouri wineries. For now, it seems the new owners are heading in that direction."

Hofmann has said his vision includes preserving and continuing the promotion of Augusta's historic labels and Missouri wines made from Missouri grapes.

The plan

With the wineries in place, Hoffmann can move forward on other aspects of his plan, including a hotel, a 12-hole golf course, a grocery store and confectionary, a bike shop, restaurants and potentially a gas station. New modes of transportation also are planned.

While the area boasts several fine "bed and breakfasts," the area wineries have long agreed that a hotel is needed. With a hotel, Augusta becomes an overnight destination. That's something the Hoffmanns can manage. One of the businesses found within the Hoffmann Family of Companies specializes in hotel development.

At press time, details on the yet-to-be-named hotel have not been released – only an outline calling for 90 rooms and a spa. Its location will be off of Hwy. 94 and it is expected to be patterned after the Auberge Resort in Calistoga, California. Auberge is a rustic chic, upscale, hillside resort nestled near vineyards, of course.

Golf course architect Rees Jones has been retained to design the 12-hole course adjacent to the hotel. At a Jan. 18 meeting of the Greater Augusta Chamber of Commerce, the course was presented as a 9-hole par 3. The fact that the proposed course design has changed in just over a month, is one example of the rapidly developing details of the project. Nonetheless, the course is being lauded as the first of its kind – being built as part of a winery and promised to be a public course.

As for the rest of the properties, Hoffmann said he plans to keep their historical integrity and renovate appropriately, with targeted businesses to move in. For example, slated for the old Emporium building is a grocery store and confectionary. A bike shop and rental is set to occupy the old Main Street Hotel and provide assistance to visitors to the Katy Trail that runs along the edge of the town.

Three restaurants are planned to open by summer. And, if Hoffmann can pull a rabbit out of his hat, a gas station will be added within Augusta's city limits – a necessity for the development since the nearest gas station is now 20 miles away.

Thirteen miles from Augusta (headed roughly south and west along Hwy. 94) is Hoffmann's hometown of Washington, which he said has reached out and hopes to get involved. As a result, talks are underway to extend the Augusta Wine Trail to Washington via a trolley, which will help with transportation issues along Hwy. 94. To date, four trolleys have arrived and will offer free transportation along with busses running routes from I-64/Hwy. 40 at Hwy. 94 through wine country and over the Augusta bottom roads to Washington and back. Riverboats are another ingredient added to the mix designed to shuttle passengers between Washington and Augusta, with trolley stops at the boat docks.

"We've been working with (Washington) city officials to build a tasting room on the riverfront as well as a dock for two boats. The boat dock on the Augusta side will be a floating dock, which is better in dealing with flooding issues," Hoffmann explained. He also mentioned adding helicopter rides.

While Hoffmann has promised thoughtful renovations with historic preservation in mind, some have expressed concerns that Augusta could morph into a Disney-like destination.

"People come here because of a rich history and culture that has been preserved here. Commerce and conservation have got to be equally expanded in my option," said Ralph Pfremmer, who owns TRA Hospitality, an event marketing and nonprofit consulting firm. Pfremmer is the former executive director (through December 2020) of Magnificent Missouri, a nonprofit that was established in 2012 to conserve and increase appreciation of the Katy Trail and the last 100 miles of the Missouri River Valley. Prior to his involvement with Magnificent Missouri, Pfremmer was the CEO of Trailnet, giving him extensive experience in the creation and management of trails as well as historic preservation.

Expectations are that the new additions will drive hundreds of thousands of visitors to Augusta. And therein lies a major concern – traffic nightmares for residents and St. Charles County. Pfremmer noted that the Missouri Department of Transportation (MoDOT) will respond to the need and expand as the transportation warrants. But he cautioned that transportation issues for food service and auxiliary delivery services must also be considered.

"It can't be an afterthought," Pfremmer said. "The county needs to step up and think of these things. Maybe build alternate routes. It's a challenge that isn't easy but you have to have a balanced approach."

Print

Share this:

Like

Comments

1 comments

1 Comment Sort by Oldest

Add a comment...

Felicitas Korb

Best online home based job to earns extra $15,000 or more online. last month i have got paid $16430 simply doing work online in part time from home. i am now a good online earner and this job just changed my life. very easy to do this work , no special online experience required to do this job all you need to do is copy and paste some stuff online. this job is much better than other regular 9 to 5 office jobs. everybody can get this and start making extra dollars simple by going to this website and follow instructions.

Www.Work37.ComONLY

please don't include ONLY

Like · Reply · 21w

Aqeel Khan

My classmates sister makes $77 an hour on the computer. last month her paycheck was $17565 just working on the computer. read review

Www.Works76.ComONLY

please don't include ONLY

Like · Reply · 20w

Facebook Comments Plugin

Tweet Like 28 Share Save

RELATED ARTICLES

St. Louis County Police Chief resigns

July 30, 2021

Federal Court sides with St. Louis County in COVID-related lawsuit

July 30, 2021

County Health Director says he was subjected to 'racist, xenophobic' behavior

July 29, 2021

SUZANNE CORBETT

Suzanne is a national award-winning food and travel writer and award-winning author of "The Gilded Table" and "Unique Eats & Eateries of St. Louis." Suzanne contributes articles with a focus on food, food history and travel. She is a member of North American Travel Journalists; National Federation of Press Women; International Food, Wine And Travel Writers Association; Les Dames d'Escoffier International; and is a Certified Culinary Professional with the International Association of Culinary Professionals.

View all posts

AUTHOR'S BIOS

View all Author's Bios

NEWSLETTER SIGN-UP

Enter your email and click submit to receive the West Newsmagazine Newsletter.

Submit

to search type and hit enter

Serving Missouri and the greater St. Louis area, as a leading provider of rehabilitation

Stroke • Brain injury • Spinal Cord • Amputee • Wound Care and other complex neurological and orthopedic condition

The Rehabilitation Institute OF ST. LOUIS

Central West End • St. Peters

an affiliation of BJC HealthCare and Encompass Health

Central West End 4455 Duncan Avenue • St. Louis, MO • 314.658.3800
St. Peters 10 Hospital Drive • St. Peters, MO • 636.317.4000

Serving Missouri and the greater St. Louis area, as a leading provider of rehabilitation

Stroke • Brain injury • Spinal Cord • Amputee • Wound Care and other complex neurological and orthopedic condition

The Rehabilitation Institute OF ST. LOUIS

Central West End • St. Peters

an affiliation of BJC HealthCare and Encompass Health

Central West End 4455 Duncan Avenue • St. Louis, MO • 314.658.3800
St. Peters 10 Hospital Drive • St. Peters, MO • 636.317.4000

Serving Missouri and the

Copyright 2021 - West Media Inc. - 21 Publishing LLC.