

Project Profile

Location:

417 Fayette Springs Road
Chalk Hill, PA
ridgerunnerdistillery.com

County:

Fayette

Description:

Distillery start-up

Total Project Cost:

\$506,000



Ridge Runner Distillery



People:

During Prohibition, moonshiners waited until dark, then rushed from their hilltop stills to get the hooch to market. Fayette County folks called them ridge runners. In 2011, the state finally opened the door to micro distilleries, and Christian W. Klay, who gave up a computer job to work at his parents' Chalk Hill winery, saw his chance. "I noticed there were a few other wineries that were opening distilleries," Christian says. Why not in Chalk Hill?

Progress:

Today, you can't get away with just building a still in the woods. Christian started by getting planning help from the Saint Vincent College Small Business Development Center. The Progress Fund, which financed improvements to his parents' winery, loaned him \$491,000 to build his own addition to the successful winery incidentally named after him by his parents.

Impact:

"When you go buy a bottle of mass-market liquor, you don't know where the ingredients came from, how they got produced and placed in that bottle," says Christian. Ridge Runner Distillery, across the street from the winery, starts with the wheat, corn, barley and rye from nearby farmers, and adds grape, apple and lavender from the family's vineyard. Visitors can see the process that turns those ingredients into brandies, grappas, ethnic liqueurs and, of course, moonshine whiskey. Then they can enjoy what Christian calls "a taste of Fayette County."

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