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Grayson College, Cities of Denison and Sherman Announce New Strategic Plan for Regional Wine and Craft Beverage Industry

A new strategic plan to unite local businesses and foster growth within the developing industry of craft beverages was revealed today at Grayson College. Grayson College President Jeremy McMillen, along with Sherman Mayor Cary Wacker, former Denison Mayor Robert Brady and Denison Development Alliance President Tony Kaai announced the details of an initiative that will make the Texoma region renowned for its excellence in wine, brewing and distillation, as well as the ancillary industries that support viticulture and fermentation.

“Professionals in our region have a wealth of experience in many of these unique industries, and this new coordinated effort will propel our area into the forefront of this emerging field,” said McMillen. Outstanding partnerships involving Grayson College, the cities of the Texoma region, local industries, supporting institutions of higher education, Cognac, France, and an active and vital Cooperative will unite the existing regional wine, beer, and distilled spirits businesses, and pave the way for new businesses to open.

The planning process began last spring when representatives of the College and the cities of Denison and Sherman, engaged Texoma Council of Governments (TCOG) to facilitate the process. The group gathered ideas from stakeholders including College officials, local municipality and economic development representatives, and owners of the Texoma region’s vineyards, wineries, and the new brewery and distillery operators. Over several months of discussion, the group produced a bold vision statement for the region.

The vision statement states, “The Texoma region will be world-renowned for its excellence in wine, brewing and distillation, as well as ancillary industries in viticulture and fermentation.” These unique operations make up the craft beverage industry, and Grayson College will build upon its

international reputation to become known as “The Texas Center of Excellence for Viticulture & Fermentation Sciences,” which will include the existing T.V. Munson Research Vineyard and proposed new Winery. Further, the Texoma Appellation will be the most productive in Texas, and the many vineyards and wineries, agricultural producers supporting the industries, breweries and distilleries will play a significant role in making the Texoma region a major destination in Texas tourism.

The Strategic Plan to achieve this vision includes specific action items and success metrics for year one and several goals for years two through five, and then longer-term goals to be achieved within ten years. The first action item, hiring a new director for the viticulture/enology program, has already been completed. Andrew Snyder took the reins of the program this semester. He is a graduate of GC’s Viticulture and Enology program and the wine executive program at the University of California-Davis, and earned a bachelor degree in international business from Schiller International University in Heidelberg, Germany. He also earned three master’s degrees in adult education, communication and human relations, all from the University of Oklahoma. His expertise includes more than 10 years on the cultivation of grapes and winemaking, and eight years of teaching experience.

“Grayson College has a rich history of educating Texas’ grape growers and wine makers. To have a part in the expansion of our mission to include other craft beverages while attracting tourists to the very area that T. V. Munson planted his vineyards is both exciting and rewarding. Mr. Munson grafted grapevines; we hope to graft together these craft beverage industries to promote responsible consumption and enjoyment for our consumers.”

Other ambitious goals include the creation of a craft beverage cooperative, a partnership between Austin College and Grayson College to take the Munson Research Vineyard and proposed Winery to a new level, a marketing program and several tourism initiatives, including an interactive regional craft beverage map created by TCOG’s GIS program. Also, a summer conference is planned to be held at the Hilton Inn Conference Center.

More information about the Texoma Craft Beverage project can be found on a newly-unveiled website, www.texomacraftbeverage.com, where visitors can also take a virtual tour of wineries, breweries and distilleries in the Texoma area through an interactive map developed by the GIS & Planning program at TCOG.

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Additional information from the Strategic Planning Partners

(supplemental quotes and/or story ideas)

Quotes from strategic planning partners:

- Subject expertise: marketing efforts and the development of a brochure, incorporating the new Texoma Craft Beverage logo, Website, Interactive Map [Susan B. Thomas, PhD, TCOG]

“The twelve year-one action items are presented in a new brochure, incorporating the new Texoma Craft Beverage logo,” said Susan B. Thomas, PhD, TCOG Executive Director

- Subject expertise: economic development [Tony Kaai, Denison Development Alliance]
“Building a new industry in our region will bring new investment, new jobs and most of all very creative entrepreneurs,” said Tony Kaai, President of the Denison Development Alliance. “We have already been successful in bringing a new distillery to Denison and a micro-brewery is scheduled to open by December of 2014. These two projects will result in over \$2 million in new investment for the area,” he added.

- Subject expertise: Tourism connected to the Craft Beverage Trail [Donna Dow, Denison Main Street Director; Eddie Brown, Sherman Chamber of Commerce]

The Texoma region has a great deal of potential to develop tourism around the craft beverage industry. “We have an existing wine trail featuring T.V. Munson's home as well as the vineyard with all the root stock he developed at Grayson College. These assets are unique to our area. Working with the businesses, we hope to develop this economic engine in our area,”

said Donna Dow, Director of Main Street, Downtown Denison. Eddie Brown, Executive Director of the Sherman Chamber of Commerce added, "The Texoma Region is a great place to live, work and play. Sherman is proud to work with our community partners to tell our story about our great city and all we have to offer to our visitors, businesses and others. Sherman is especially happy to have great shopping, the arts and the many restaurants and hotels for visitors and families."

- Subject expertise: The Craft Beverage Conference [Anna McKinney, Denison Chamber of Commerce]

As part of the Strategic Plan for the Regional Wine and Craft Beverage Industry, we're excited to announce the first annual Craft Beverage Conference to be held June 12-14, 2015. Headquartered at the new Hilton Garden Inn Denison/Sherman at the Texoma Event Center, the Conference will include vendors, educational workshops, craft beverage reception/tasting and craft beverage excursions. Organizers expect the event to attract large numbers of attendees from a several state area. "More details and registration information will be released in the near future," stated Anna McKinney, Denison Chamber of Commerce President and Chair of the Craft Spirits Conference Committee.

- Subject expertise: Texoma Craft Beverage Alliance [Sherman Mayor Cary Wacker]

A critical component of the plan is the creation of an association, the Texoma Craft Beverage Alliance. "The new association provides a framework to build regional strength and visibility of the brand, as members work together on marketing, promotion and even cooperative purchasing as a group," said Cary Wacker, Mayor of Sherman.

- Subject expertise: Laws and regulations within the Texas wine and spirits industry [Gabe Parker, owner of Homestead Winery]

Gabe Parker, owner of Homestead Winery, played an important role in the planning process. An officer in the Texas Wine Grape Growers Association, Parker helped the team understand the myriad of laws and regulations surrounding the wine, beer and distilled spirits industry. "Development of industries in fermentation science requires an understanding of and

compliance with State and Federal laws and regulations. The best method for accomplishing a successful business is through both knowledge of the process of fermentation and how product is lawfully moved to the consumer,” Parker said. Other new craft beverage businesses, such as Ironroot Republic Distillery and 903 Brewers, have recently opened in the Texoma area.

- Subject expertise: Opening a new business in this emerging field [Ironroot Republic Distillery owners Robert and Jonathan Likarish; 903 Brewers owner Jeremy Roberts] *Other new craft beverage businesses, such as Ironroot Republic Distillery and 903 Brewers, have recently opened in the Texoma area.*

Ironroot Republic Distillery, owned by Robert and Jonathan Likarish, relies on local, fresh ingredients. “It is important to us that all of our products are made from scratch,” says owner Jonathan Likarish. “We work very closely with a grain mill in Muenster, Texas to produce the finest spirits. We also look forward to collaborating with local brewers and distillers to develop unique concepts.”

Jeremy Roberts, head brewer and co-owner of 903 Brewers, along with his wife Natalie, stated, “We are excited to be a part of a community where the local leaders support your business. On an average Saturday we are bringing in 150 to 200 people from the DFW area that want to tour our brewery. With Ironroot Republic opening their distillery we are hoping to take that number to 400 by the summer of 2015. We are constantly promoting our brewery but also our community. It's awesome to see Sherman and Denison becoming the next big place to visit.”

- Subject expertise: collaboration and vision for the project [Texoma Council of Governments]

Susan B. Thomas, PhD, and Randy McBroom, PhD, facilitated the development of the plan. Dr. McBroom stated, “This has been a wonderful experience, seeing everyone come together to create a vision and collaborate on a plan that can have major impacts on the Texoma region.”

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