The math of grapes

The Palisade area's wine prowess has ripened the area for a theme hotel

By Elizabeth Aguilar, Denver Post Staff Writer

The Western Slope town of Palisade will host the state's first wine-themed hotel, expanding in-town lodging options for tourists drawn to the region's vineyards and tasting rooms.

Richard and Joan Talley plan to open the 80-room Wine Country Inn next spring. The $2 million project will feature wine-tasting areas, catering facilities, meeting facilities, a health club and an outdoor pool.

"It's something we feel is an idea that has come of age," Richard Talley said. "The wine industry in Colorado is growing.

The Palisade area hosts 75 percent of the state's premium wine grape vineyards, according to the Palisade Chamber of Commerce.

Colorado's wine industry generated more than $54 million of retail value during the 2009-2010 fiscal year, according to the Colorado Wine Industry Development Board. Besides a few small bed-and-breakfasts in Palisade, there has been nowhere else for visitors to the area to stay, said Jan Johnson of JG Architects, which designed the Wine Country Inn.

Those who want to make a weekend out of the experience also have to drive an hour to Grand Junction for a hotel.

"It's the perfect complement to Palisade," Johnson said.

Johnson describes the design for the inn as a "farmhouse vernacular" with porches, gabled roofs and wood siding.

"It's a contemporary version of a farm-and-ranch-house building," he said.

The hotel will sit on 7 acres of active vineyards.

The Talleys, who split their time between Grand Junction and Edwards, have been the best tenants for years but never worked on something so Thomes in exciting, Richard Talley said.

The couple has been toasting the idea for more than a decade.

Every time the Talleys traveled to California and Italy, they thought about bringing home the idea of wine-country lodging. Last fall, when land at one of the vineyards went to auction, the Talleys snatched up seven.

"It will be on the bluffs overlooking the country in the actual vineyards," Richard Talley said.

Palisade has about 27 wineries and a growing downtown with new restaurants, bars and gift shops. A study this year by the town identified lodging as the top need in the town.

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"The hotel will do wonders for our winery," Naomi Smith said. "It's really exciting, it's a long time coming for Palisade, but it's a very needed change.

Now, the Smiths have set in motion a plan of their own. With investors, they hope to develop 5 acres into a retail and residential complex to access the Inn and their winery. Grande River produces 5000 to 7000 cases of wine a year.

"It's going to be a high-end development," Naomi Smith said. "Palisade is really ripe and ready to take off, and I think these kinds of things are going to help.

The Smiths and the Talleys worked with the town of Palisade to ensure the land into Palisade so it could get the much-needed city services. In turn, Palisade will collect sales and room taxes from the inn.

For the Talleys, who have owned five hotels over the years, the Wine Country Inn is an entirely different experience.

The others have been chains, such as their Quality Inn in Grand Junction and the Best Western Ecuador Southwest that they own with their son.

This time, they are funding the entire project and hope to keep the inn independent.

The Talleys, both 68, have definite plans for how the inn will operate. They envision afternoon wine receptions, big breakfasts and guests strolling around the porches with wine in hand.

"We are doing this because we want to do it and we are excited about doing it," Richard Talley said. "We feel it is the culmination for working very hard and very long to be in the position to do something like this and we are having a good time doing it.

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