

New wine shop ready for new year and beyond

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Township residents pondering what their glasses should contain when they salute the start of a new year can seek the advice of a new neighbor.

Passion Vines Wine & Spirit Company moved into the township and opened in late November in time for the holiday season.

The company has yet to finish off remodeling work on its new building – previously Somers Point Lumber and Home Supply – but has begun to pass on its knowledge to those in the community.

“What we are trying to do is create a great wine experience,” owner Michael Bray said.

The store focuses on wine and offers an extensive selection but also sells beer and spirits.

Maps hanging on the store’s walls display the location of where wine grapes grow in countries such as France, Italy, Argentina, Chile, Spain and Germany. Sitting below, in racks, are wine from every major producing region in the world.

Bray said there is a story behind wine, and that each evokes history and tradition.

“We love to slow you down, and let you know that you’re drinking more than wine,” Bray said.

Located near the intersection of Zion Road and Ocean Heights Avenue, this is the second store for Passion Vines. The original, in Somers Point, was born out of Point Pub Liquors and has been open for only a few years. It will remain the hub for Passion Vines’ educational classes about wine since, unlike the new store, it has a consumption license.

The store in the township can still offer wine testing, but otherwise is limited.

Still, the new site will be distinctive once the building is tailored to the company’s liking. The current store space at about 2,400 square feet will jump to around 8,000 square feet when several interior walls are removed. The store will remain open during the redesign, which Bray said would be completed by summer. The redesign will include a large, centralized area for information about wine and more shelf space.

Bray said the most popular wines currently hail from South American locales such as Chile and Argentina and that it takes testing and comparing wines to gain experience.

Originally from Brigantine, Bray said for the moment he favors French wines from the southern Rhone region.

“Our goal is to build the world’s greatest wine community,” Bray said.

And for those New Year’s Eve parties, he suggests something with bubbles.