

DOBSON, N.C. — When Charlie and Ed Shelton started Shelton Vineyards in 1999, the Yadkin Valley was in its infancy and the brothers had to look elsewhere for talent. They realized that must change if the area was to become a bona fide wine region.

Nearly two decades later, after investing heavily in the winemaking program at nearby Surry Community College, the Sheltons hired winemaker Ethan Brown, a Surry County native and graduate of the college's Shelton-Badgett North Carolina Center for Viticulture and Enology.

Brown is a proud alumnus of the college's \$5 million winemaking school and comes to Shelton Vineyards after working as winemaker at two Yadkin Valley vineyards.

"Years ago when we began thinking about the Shelton-Badgett North Carolina Center for Viticulture & Enology, we envisioned graduates from the program at Surry Community College working in the local community to help it grow and prosper," Charlie Shelton said. "We are so proud to make this a reality with Ethan Brown."

Brown, 27, was most recently winemaker & head brewer at West Bend Winery and prior to that was winemaker at Olde Mill Vineyards, his family's winery in Dobson, which closed in 2016. He also has a degree in chemistry/fermentation science from Appalachian State University.

"I'm a native Yadkin Valley winemaker and consider this new position the holy grail for winemakers in this state," Brown said. "Shelton Vineyards is the largest family-owned estate winery in North Carolina and a huge opportunity."

Brown, who has won numerous international awards for his wines, plans to stay true to winemaking techniques that have made Shelton wines among the most desirable in the South, while challenging himself to make each vintage better than the previous year. He is excited to have 90 acres of grapes to work with, including well-known varietals like Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Merlot, Chardonnay and Riesling. He also looks forward to working with two grapes he sees emerging as stars in the coming years: Tannat and Petite Manseng.

"Tannat is a red wine that is really going to be more prominent in the future," Brown said. "Petite Manseng is probably the best white I have ever made. It is a white that is gaining momentum and just this year we planted three and a half more acres."

Although his primary responsibility is on the winemaking side, Brown has been very involved with the viticulture team at Shelton Vineyards. That goes back to his days in his family's vineyards 15 minutes away, as well as his days at Surry Community College, where the curriculum focuses on both making wine and growing grapes.

"My start came when the viticulture and enology program at Surry Community College was getting started with seed money from the Sheltons. They were the ones who really spearheaded that program," said Brown. "Now I'm here at Shelton Vineyards, so everything has come full circle. It's quite a story."

"We are very fortunate to have such a fine young and talented person here at Shelton Vineyards," Ed Shelton said. "He is a good example of the quality people who attend Surry Community College and the graduates they produce."

Shelton Vineyards will host a “Meet the Winemaker” event on Saturday, Sept. 29, from 1-4 p.m. as part of North Carolina Wine Month. Brown will be in the tasting room to meet guests, discuss the winemaking process and sign bottles of wine purchased at the winery.

For info on Shelton Vineyards, call 336-366-4724 or visit www.SheltonVineyards.com.

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