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**From Dentistry to Vineyards: Chris Larsen’s Entrepreneurial Journey**

Success in business is often about vision, adaptability, and the courage to take risks. For Dr. Chris Larsen, that journey started with a childhood dream of becoming a dentist and evolved into owning a thriving dental practice and launching a vineyard in the Quad Cities. His story is one of passion, persistence, and seizing opportunities at the right moment.

**A Lifelong Dream of Dentistry**

Chris knew from as early as third grade that he wanted to be a dentist. Influenced by his Uncle Ralph, who was a dentist in New Mexico, Chris set his sights on the profession and pursued it with determination. After attending Moline High School, he went on to Augustana College and later earned his degree from Southern Illinois Dental School.

While he initially planned to take over his uncle’s practice, his deep ties to Moline led him to stay in the Quad Cities. His career began as an associate dentist, but after years of working for others, he sought more autonomy and control over his practice. In 2000, he made the bold move to start his own dental office.

**Building a Successful Dental Practice**

Chris’s journey as a business owner wasn’t without challenges. In the early years, growth was slow, and he had to rely on word-of-mouth marketing to build his patient base. Unlike many businesses that invest heavily in advertising, Chris never used traditional marketing methods. Instead, he focused on providing excellent customer service, fostering patient relationships, and hiring a strong team.

His biggest leap of faith came in 2004, when he decided to build a state-of-the-art dental facility. The move required significant financial investment and came with risks, but it ultimately paid off. The new location led to a 36% increase in growth, proving that a modern, inviting space could make a huge impact on patient trust and business success.

Over the years, his practice continued to expand. By strategically retaining staff, implementing the latest dental technology, and prioritizing patient care, Chris built a practice that has stood the test of time.

**A New Venture: From Dental Office to Vineyard**

While Chris had achieved success in dentistry, an unexpected opportunity led him into the winemaking business. The idea was sparked by his son’s experience in California’s Napa Valley, where he played baseball near the famous wine region. Around the same time, a patient approached Chris with an offer to buy the historic Old Oaks property—and he took the leap.

With no prior experience in winemaking, Chris, his son, and his nephew embarked on transforming the land into a vineyard and winery. Since 2014, they have built the business piece by piece, planting four acres of vineyards, renovating the historic property, and crafting a vision for a premier Midwest wine destination.

**Creating a Unique Winery Experience**

Unlike many local wineries that focus solely on wine tasting, Chris’s vision extends beyond just selling wine. The winery will feature multiple event spaces, allowing guests to host weddings, corporate events, and private gatherings. The property includes a main tasting room, private dining areas, and plans for a large barn event space.

Understanding the local market, Chris also recognized that many Midwesterners prefer beer and cocktails over wine. To accommodate all guests, the winery will offer a full bar experience, ensuring that every visitor finds something they enjoy.

**Lessons from Dentistry and Entrepreneurship**

Chris’s experience running a dental practice translated seamlessly into his new business venture. His key takeaways for success include:

1. **Invest in Yourself** – Taking calculated risks and betting on your own abilities can lead to long-term success.
2. **Customer Experience is Everything** – Whether in dentistry or winemaking, making customers feel valued is the key to repeat business.
3. **Hire and Retain the Right People** – A strong team is essential for scaling any business.
4. **Location Matters** – Just as with his dental office, selecting the right property for his winery played a crucial role in its success.
5. **Be Willing to Evolve** – Business trends change, and adapting to customer needs is essential for longevity.

**Looking Ahead**

The winery is set to officially open in May 2024, marking a new chapter in Chris’s entrepreneurial journey. With continued expansion plans, including additional vineyard acreage and a large event barn, the future looks bright for this unexpected yet exciting venture.

From building a thriving dental practice to launching a premier wine destination, Chris Larsen’s story is a reminder that success isn’t limited to one industry. With vision, persistence, and the courage to take bold steps, entrepreneurs can create opportunities in unexpected places.