One of the bright spots in Virginia’s economy in recent years has been the explosive growth of the wine industry. Its economic impact is nearly $750 million annually, according to a study conducted by Gov. McDonnell’s office. Between 2005 and 2012, the number of wineries in the state grew from 130 to nearly 200 and the number of full-time jobs rose from slightly over 3,000 to nearly 5,000.

The viticulture and enology program at PVCC has been at the center of that growth, providing the tools for grape growing and wine making to some 400 students from around Virginia since 2005. With the wineries of the Monticello Wine Trail as their classrooms, students have learned by doing the tasks that shape a vintner’s year. Last year, in partnership with the Thomas Jefferson Foundation, students began a vineyard at Monticello, planting pinot noir grapes on the slopes of Montalto.

Students have gone on to enter the industry by starting their own wineries and vineyards or by becoming tasting room managers, wine educators, sales representatives or assistant winemakers. One student is now enrolled in the highly regarded graduate program of viticulture and enology at the University of California-Davis.

PVCC’s program has gotten a recent boost with a scholarship established in memory of Chris Breiner, winemaker and managing partner at Stone Mountain Vineyards in Dyke.

Breiner, who died in February, was known for creating Italian-influenced Virginia wines and working to promote Virginia vintages. He served as vice president of the Virginia Wineries Association and was past chair of the Jeffersonian Grape Growing Society/Monticello Wine Trail.

He supported PVCC’s viticulture and enology program from the beginning, teaching the bottling class at Stone Mountain and helping with the wine marketing class.

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Wine Industry

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Friends and family established the Chris Breiner Scholarship for Viticulture and Enology to honor his memory and to support students who will be the future grape growers and wine makers in Virginia. The annual scholarship covers the cost of either certificate program. Contributions to the fund may be made to the PVCC Educational Foundation through the Office of Development.

Gregory Marcellus is the first scholarship recipient. Marcellus moved from Florida to Powhatan in 2007 with the dream of establishing a winery on a family farm there. Despite some investment disappointments and his full-time “day” job with an aging agency in Richmond, he and his wife and two daughters have continued to prepare the soil and farm the land. Their five years of farming now make them eligible for federal assistance for planting. Marcellus says the scholarship will “provide me increased knowledge and credentials necessary to receive these loans without further financial strain on the family.”

He began the program in July with a course in pest control.

The viticulture and enology program is just one example of a program PVCC has developed to support high-demand industries in recent years. Numerous programs in health care, a training program for the defense community and the culinary arts program to be launched in 2013 are others.

These programs have been a community effort. Employers have opened their wineries and vineyards for students, hospitals and other health care facilities have provided clinical space, and many businesses, foundations and individuals have provided critical start-up funding. Because of this community cooperation, students are preparing today for jobs that will serve them well into the future. They will benefit, as will we all.

Students plant vines on the terraced slopes of Montalto.