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Article published - Apr 26, 2006

Ceago resort expansion approved

Fetzer's \$150 million project between Lucerne, Nice endorsed by Sierra Club

**By MIKE GENIELLA
THE PRESS DEMOCRAT**

Lake County supervisors Tuesday unanimously approved a \$150 million plan to expand Jim Fetzer's lakefront Ceago del Lago into a high-end Wine Country spa and resort.

Fetzer's early California complex of organically grown grape vines, tasting room, olive orchards and lavender fields is located along Highway 20 and the shores of Clear Lake between Nice and Lucerne. It is the most dramatic example yet of a rush of development proposals for a county once better known for its shabby shoreline.

Fetzer's five-year expansion project won the endorsement not only from all five county supervisors, but from the local Sierra Club chapter as well.

"Even though it calls for converting some agricultural land for development, we believe Ceago can serve as the model for future projects," said Victoria Brandon, chairwoman of the Lake County unit of the Sierra Club.

Brandon said she hopes the Fetzer development will set new standards for a long list of housing-related developments in the county's planning pipeline, including a 1,200-unit project near Lower Lake and a 600-unit project in the city of Clearlake.

Brandon said she also believes Fetzer is helping the county's agricultural community by linking his farming operations to a blossoming agro-tourism movement around the globe.

Fetzer was jubilant after Tuesday's unanimous board vote, praising both the Sierra Club and the county Farm Bureau for their support.

"Greener days are ahead for Lake County," said Fetzer.

Fetzer said his immediate plan is to begin work on a new restaurant at the current Ceago complex.

Within 3-5 years, Fetzer said he envisions completing construction on a 50-room lakeside hotel and spa, along with 50 nearby cottage-style "casitas" for extended visitor stays.

Across Highway 20 to the north, Fetzer said he will build a visitor-friendly "demonstration" winery, and a cluster development of 63 condominiums along the edge of a recently planted vineyard.

Fetzer said he's convinced there's a strong market in the Bay Area for "a lifestyle of health, wine, food, recreation and nature."

Three weeks ago, Fetzer's Ceago was the site of a day-long workshop conducted by the University of California on how farmers can better learn to "harvest tourist dollars."

"I believe we have set new standards for quality development in Lake County, while creating a new model for agro-tourism in Wine Country," said Fetzer.

Fetzer is the former president of the once family-owned Fetzer Vineyards winery in Mendocino County. The Fetzers were among the first to embrace the marriage of food and wine.

As such, Jim Fetzer is no latecomer to the "green movement" in the wine industry.

In the late 1980s, Fetzer oversaw the family winery's creation of Valley Oaks Farm near Hopland, a Wine Country showcase featuring organically grown vineyards, gardens and cooking demonstrations. Brown Forman, a Kentucky liquor conglomerate that now owns Valley Oaks, recently announced it was closing the complex and putting it up for sale.

Fetzer said Ceago will serve organically grown food in the new restaurant, along with its wines.

Fetzer said he's installing a crush to retrieve oil from Ceago's olive orchards for skin preparations in his proposed spa resort.

"We will use everything we grow on the farm, and show visitors how it's done," said Fetzer.

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