

Whisky distillery launched in Comox

CARLA WILSON
Times Colonist

The first sod has been turned to mark the start of construction for a planned \$2-million single malt whisky distillery in Comox.

Years in the planning, customers will still have to wait — likely 10 years — for the whisky to age once it goes into barrels.

In the meantime, some products will be available likely next year, including cream and fruit liqueurs, said Jay Oddleifson, managing director and one of three partners in Shelter Point Distillery Corp., along with distillery designer Andrew Currie of Scotland and farmer Patrick Evans, who is running a dairy farm on the former University of B.C. experimental farm.

Ground was broken in a ceremony on the site yesterday.

The distillery is located on a parcel that had been part of the farm. Oddleifson said yesterday that barley for the distillery, which will be grown by Evans, will be planted in spring 2009.

Plans call for the 8,000-square-foot building to be at the lock-up stage by Thanksgiving, and for distilling equipment to arrive from Scotland at year's end. An Abbotsford manufacturer is custom-designing special malting equipment.

Customers will be able to buy a cask, with a price tag in the range of \$5,000, and visit it as it ages, Oddleifson said. Each cask holds 240 litres of whisky.

A bottle will likely cost about \$100 in today's dollars.

The distillery is expected to produce about 50,000 litres of spirits annually.

Oddleifson is looking forward to offering a wide range of products, hoping to link up with wineries and other agritourism destinations.

Currie, who built Arran Distillery in Scotland, has high hopes for the business, saying, "Whisky is a really booming industry."

Vancouver Island single malt whisky will be a "very high quality" product, he said. The market will be mainly local. "It is going to be something that connoisseurs would like."

cjwilson@tc.canwest.com