



Meet Robert MacBlane, owner of Seneca Cheese Company...

1. Describe Your Business:

Seneca Cheese Company is a retail cheese store in downtown Watkins Glen. It incorporates a space where customers can sit down with a cheese board, then pair it with their favorite wines and beers. Seneca Cheese Company intends to serve primarily local cheeses, wine, and beers. Wine will be available by the glass or by the bottle. "For all intents and purposes,

it has kind of morphed into a cheese, wine, and craft beer tasting room or bar," Robert explained. "We are not going to be a full-service tasting room. That is not our intent. We will have cheese boards, maybe with charcuterie, seasonal fruit, nuts, or crackers. Initially, I'm not sure if we will have much more than that, but after the first year we will grow into whatever the customer wants."

2. Tell us your story:

"My whole life I have wanted to own my own business, but I have never been able to come up with a viable concept," Robert said. "I would paralyze myself trying work it out, and eventually I gave up. Then a friend of mine came up to me last August and said 'We need to open up a cheese shop.'" At first, Robert didn't understand the concept. But he did some research, visiting several locations across the country. Robert said. "I visited places that were beer, wine, and cheese experiences. And that is really what this will be. We have wineries, breweries, and creameries in the region, but no one has put them together in one location."

3. What has helped you succeed and gain experience?

"I come from an HR and sales background," Robert said. "I started out in sales, and from there I was promoted into HR. I think that combination of sales and HR is really unique. I understand the business aspect of it. I understand gaining respect, trust, and credibility, which will bode well in this business. And hopefully that along with my people skills from my HR background will be an ideal fit for what it is that I'd like to do here."

4. What inspires you?

"Oh, that's my family," Robert said. Robert and his wife have two kids, and both kids have left home to pursue their dreams. Their daughter attends SUNY Maritime. Their son doing a ski internship in the Canadian Rockies. "We're all about the kids," Robert said. "It's interesting because my kids' lives have morphed into what they are now because of the experiences we've had living on Seneca Lake. Every weekend during the summer we were at the lake. Every weekend during the winter we were at Greek Peak. That's why my daughter and son are doing what they're doing."

5. What keeps you up at night? What are your challenges?

"Right now what keeps me up at night is the operational aspect of the business," Robert explained. "Every waking minute I am thinking about the operations, the labor costs, the waste. I'm thinking about the customers and what they're going to want. I'm trying to find the optimal way to tackle those things. I'm going to have customers who want to come. What scares me is wondering if I am doing it right so that they want to come again."

6. What is your favorite local activity?

"We love the lake," Robert said. "We love it so much that we moved there full time. We've had a place on the lake since 2003, but just moved there full time. It's just the simple things. My favorite thing to do in the morning is to grab a cup of coffee and sit on the dock. Our favorite thing in the evening is to take a glass of wine down to the dock and celebrate the sunset. It's just fun. It's a different pace of life. People are genuinely nice and friendly. Everyone is willing to help."

7. Is there anything else we should know about you?

Seneca Cheese Company plans to open in early in the spring of 2019.