

Gloucester's vineyards foster a passion for local wines

By KATHLEEN DUFFY

Published in the Courier-Post on Feb. 22, 2012

The fields used to be filled with tomatoes and asparagus before being replaced with apples, peaches and pears. These days, grapes flourish on the 45 acres at Heritage Vineyards in Mullica Hill.

Winemaking is more than an industry in Gloucester County — it's a family affair.

With four wineries in the county, area residents can compare local wines, attend wine-centric events, and even engage in a friendly war over whose vintage is best.

“This year has been our biggest year,” says Richard Heritage, director of sales and marketing for Heritage Vineyards.

“It's mainly because we have access to some of the best grapes — merlot and chardonnay — in the entire state.”

Heritage Vineyards is on land that has been farmed since 1853, making Richard Heritage a sixth-generation farmer in his family.

Operating with the belief that the highest-quality fruit results in the best wine experience, the vineyard won the New Jersey 2011 Winery of the Year award, an annual contest held in the state.

“Ten years ago, the whole New Jersey wine scene was very different,” he says. In the time since, the quality of wine has increased with the demand for more homegrown products. “Vineyards and wine grapes can really be the future of the New Jersey agricultural industry.”

Passionate production

Kenton Nice is a certified public accountant by trade and his wife, Kathy, is a school psychologist. They also own Coda Rossa in Franklinville, where their passion for dry red wine shines through every glass.

“We had a passion for winemaking,” says Nice.

Each Friday night beginning at 6:30 p.m., the vineyard opens to the public for a movie night. Attendees can purchase wine by the bottle or glass, grab some popcorn, and watch a flick with their significant others.

“We’re trying to expose the public to what we do,” says Nice.

Wine choices at Coda Rossa include Chambourcin, a deep red wine, and Ameritage, a Bordeaux style blend of customary favorites — cab franc, cabernet and merlot.

“We focus on dry red wines,” he says. “Traditionally, many of the New Jersey wineries have focused on fruit or sweet wines. We do offer some of them, as well.

“We want to make sure we have a wine for every palate.”

'Cork Wars'

Marsha Gaventa believes she has the “best job in the whole wide world.”

As co-owner and tasting room manager for Cedarvale Winery and Vineyard in Logan, she has her hands full.

Her husband is a fourth- generation farmer and, in addition to five acres of wine grapes, the family farms 200 acres of other produce. All wine is produced and bottled on site and, last spring, they moved to a new production room with more space to host events.

“We’re just really pleased to see the farm move forward in a positive direction,” she says. “I get to meet many different people from all over the place. It’s fun. People feel very welcome here.”

“Cork Wars” is a little playful fun two of the vineyards, Cedarvale and Heritage, engage in.

“If I know someone’s going to another winery, I send them with our corks,” says Gaventa. “Everybody knows about it.”

The corks can be found anywhere—in the love seat, in mulch, or even in the bathroom.

“Whoever has the most corks (at the end of the year) will treat the other winery to dinner,” says Heritage. “I think it’s a really fun thing.”

Heritage Vineyards family associate Amy Weis agrees.

“The customers think it’s fun, and they feel a part of it,” she says.

Family first

As New Jersey's wine profile rises, so does the diversity of its offerings.

"Every winery in the state of New Jersey brings something different to the table," says Heather Brown, who owns Wagonhouse Winery in South Harrison Township with her husband, Dan Brown—a business that began in 2004.

"We have a very young family. We have three small boys. It's hard to come visit us and not see them," she says. "They're very social. There's a lot of young energy in that respect."

The Brown family welcomes customers to bring their lunches and sit outside in the warmer months. The atmosphere at the winery is laid back and comfortable—and very personable.

There is a small gift shop at the winery, selling gourmet condiments, crackers, cheeses, wine openers, candles and gift cards, to name a few products.

"We open our doors," she says. "It's very personal to us. We bring a lot of that personal environment into the tasting room."

With all four wineries in Gloucester County offering unique experiences, Heritage believes that it's necessary to embrace each environment.

"It's important for people to go to three or four wineries. It's a really nice experience," he says. "We're friendly with the wineries down the road from us."

The rapport among the wineries helps to foster a consumer trend toward preferring local products.

"It's a trend that I see; it's clear as day," says Heritage. "New Jersey wineries are really growing."

If You Go

Cedarvale Winery and Vineyard, 205 Repaupo Station Road, Logan Township. Call (856) 467-3088 or visit cedarvalewinery.com

Open Thursdays and Fridays from noon to 7 p.m., Saturdays 11 a.m. to 7 p.m., Sundays 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Coda Rossa, 1526 Dutch Mill Road, Franklinville. Call (856) 697-9463 or visit codarossa.com

Open Fridays from 5:30 to 9 p.m., Saturdays and Sundays from noon to 5 p.m., and other times by appointment.

Heritage Vineyards, 480 Mullica Hill Road, Mullica Hill. Call (856) 589-4474 or visit heritagewinenj.com

Open yearround, Monday through Sunday, from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. Open until 7 p.m. Saturdays

Wagonhouse Winery, 1401 Route 45, Swedesboro. Call (609) 780-8019 or visit wagonhousewinery.com

Open Fridays, Saturdays and Sundays from noon to 5 p.m. Other times available by appointment.

Learn more about New Jersey wines at www.newjerseywines.com.

Winery Events:

Cedarvale Winery and Vineyard

Cold Blue Electric concert, 7 to 9 p.m. Saturday, March 17.

Ceramics and Wine, 7 to 9 p.m. Friday, March 30. Cost is \$15, which includes one glass of wine, sitting fee, and ceramic item of your choice to paint.

5K for the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation, Saturday, April 14, run begins at 10 a.m. Cost is \$25. This is a child-friendly event. Find out more information on www.lmsports.com/cedar012.htm.

Team Ray of Light Cross Country 5K Run/ 1 Mile Walk, Saturday, May 5, run begins at 9 a.m. Cost is \$25 to run and \$10 to walk. Learn more on www.active.com/page/event_details.htm?event_id=2009195.

Mother's Day Wine Trail Weekend, Saturday, May 12, open from 11 a.m. to 7 p.m. and Sunday, May 13 from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. A craft fair also will be held.

Coda Rossa

Wine & Movie Night at the Vineyard, 6:30 p.m. Fridays. Wine can be purchased by the bottle or glass.

Mother's Day Wine Trail Weekend, Saturday and Sunday, May 12 and 13, noon to 5 p.m.

Blues and Wine Festival, Saturday and Sunday, May 26 and 27, noon to 5 p.m.

Heritage Vineyards

Spring Wine & Cheese, Saturday and Sunday, April 21 and 22, noon to 5 p.m. Welcome spring with featured wines and cheeses and enjoy some live mix jazz and blues music.

A Special Evening Wine Event Featuring 50+ Wines from Around the World, Friday, April 27, 7 to 10 p.m. Admission is \$40 in advance, \$45 at the door. Joe Canals of West Deptford and the Mullica Hill Rotary present this event to help fund local and international projects. Event will take place in the Heritage tasting room.

Run the Vineyards, Sunday, April 29 beginning at 9 a.m. A 5-mile run and a 2.5-mile fun run at the vineyard. Free wine tasting, musical entertainment, professionally timed race with Jaguar Chip Timing, provided by Spectra Sports. Register online and view prices at www.spectasport.com.

Mother's Day Wine Trail Weekend, Saturday and Sunday, May 12 and 13 from noon to 5 p.m. This is a special wine and cheese tasting — including imported cheeses, desserts, live music and pink sangria. Admission is \$10 per person.

Wagonhouse Winery

“Wednesday Winesday,” March 7 at 7 p.m., fun night in the tasting room geared toward women. Simply pay for what you sip.

“Cook!,” Wednesday, March 21, 7:30 to 9:30 p.m. Chef Jim Malaby from Blueplate in Mullica Hill will be on hand to teach guests how to make pasta. Space is limited. The cost is \$39 per person.

Gloucester County wines

Cedarvale Winery and Vineyard

2009 Villard Blanc \$16.99

2010 Pinot Grigio \$16.99

2010 Chardonnay \$16.99 (no oak)

2010 Sunrise Chardonnay \$16.99 (oaked)

2009 Cabernet Franc \$18

2009 Merlot \$18

Blueberry Fruit Wine \$12.99

Strawberry Fruit Wine \$14

Cherry Fruit Wine \$15

Apple Fruit Wine \$11.99

Nectarine Fruit Wine \$14.50

Coda Rossa

Cab Franc \$15

Chambourcin \$15

Ameritage \$18

Raspberry Rose \$12

Chambourcin Rose \$12

Peacho Grigio \$12

Bluedonnay \$12

Chamgria \$12

Rascal \$12

Black Bird \$12

Blue Moon Port \$20

Chardonnay \$12

Heritage Vineyards

Cuvee Blanc \$13.99

2010 Signature Chardonnay \$25

2006 Estate Chardonnay \$16

2010 Dry Rose \$16

2008 Cabernet Franc \$19.50

Painted Horse Cuvee \$15.99

2008 Syrah \$16.99

2009 Merlot \$25

2009 Chambourcin \$25

Jersey White \$10.99

Jersey Blush \$10.99

Jersey Red \$10.99

Jersey Moscato \$14.99

Jersey Apple \$10.99

Jersey Peach \$10.99

Jersey Blueberry \$10.99

Jersey Sugar Plum \$10.99

Wagonhouse Winery

2010 Chardonnay \$19.99

2010 Pinot Gris \$19.99

2008 Sangiovese \$14.99

Cabernet Sauvignon \$16.99

Apple Table Wine \$9.99

Blueberry Table Wine \$9.99

Peach Table Wine \$9.99

Strawberry Table Wine \$15.99

Three Boys Brand – All Wines \$11.99