

# Wine

Continued from Page 1A

smoke," he said, "campfire strong."

## Lab backlog leaves winemakers blind

At Lingua Franca Winery, just outside Hopewell, assistant winemaker Kim Abrahams is calling friends at California wineries for advice and studying up on how to handle smoke.

"Everything we've been reading is about intensifying of smoke and time," Abrahams said. To be impacted, she said, grapes must be exposed to "72 hours in an active fire zone."

Wineries conduct sensory analysis on grape juice and they also test grapes for chemical indicators of smoke impact by sending fruit samples to a laboratory. Locally, one is ETS Laboratories in Newberg, which ships samples to St. Helena, California for testing. But this year waiting for lab results isn't an option to determine whether Oregon wineries should harvest fruit.

Fires have been so abundant in California, and now in Oregon, too, that results of samples received this week won't be available until, ETS projects, mid-October.

Many, Abrahams explained, are sending samples anyway, because lab results can legitimize a crop insurance claim.

"Most people are sending in samples so they have it in case they need to dump the wine down the drain," she explained.

Instead of waiting for lab results, Oregon wineries will have to decide whether or not to proceed with harvest based on other factors.

"Mostly we're concerned with the ash falling from the sky. All of our equipment, everything is covered with ash," she said. They are talking about washing the grapes before crushing them.

"We're worried about our crews, we don't want people out there for any amount of time."

Lingua Franca planned to start picking fruit in the days ahead, said Abrams, "we'll see how it goes, if we have to stop picking we'll stop."



Workers harvest Pinot noir grapes for sparkling wine under smoky skies at a Willamette Valley Vineyards site in Dundee on September 10, 2020. EMILY TEEL/STATESMAN JOURNAL



Pinot noir grapes for sparkling wine harvested under smoky skies at a Willamette Valley Vineyards site in Dundee on September 10, 2020. EMILY TEEL/STATESMAN JOURNAL

## At what point is the wine crop lost?

Wineries producing still wines, both white and red, have a few weeks to make a plan. They typically won't start harvesting fruit until the third or fourth week of September.

The decision is accelerated for those producing sparkling wines, one of the Oregon wine industry's hottest new categories.

At Hillsboro's Ruby Vineyard, winemaker Andrew Kirkland pressed sparkling wine grapes the morning after winery owners Steve Hendricks and

Flora Habibi were evacuated from their nearby home near the Chehalem Mountain-Bald Peak fire.

"The winery is on level 2," Kirkland said. "The fire has spread rather quickly, we're sitting on the north side watching it blow east."

He continued to press wine and collect looped overhead, dropping water to fight the fire.

Sean Allen, winemaker at Salem's Pudding River Wine Cellars, evacuated his girlfriend from her home in Stayton on Tuesday.

"It was the scariest thing I've ever seen," he said. "It was noon and it was black out."

Pudding River has closed its tasting room and Allen is focused on bottling. If conditions closer to the winery begin to resemble what he saw in Stayton, Allen said, "maybe we should not make wine this year, not risk it."

Most area winemakers aren't there yet. They're cautiously moving forward, weighing the daily shifting information. On Thursday, the Oregon Wine Board released a statement.

"While we may not know the effect of smoke on this harvest for years, winemakers can implement procedures for mitigating the effects of smoke affected

grapes."

Perhaps the 2020 vintage will yield an abundance of wines showcasing winemakers' creative solutions to managing smoke impact; a year heavy on rosés and other production styles that limit the time wines spend on potentially smoke-impacted skins.

For now, said Willamette Valley Vineyards' director Christine Clair, it's important to keep perspective.

"There's not going to be a Willamette Valley wide consistent harvest for this year. It's all really site specific." The smoke in the air and the orange skies, she said, "it looks really bad, but what we're seeing in the vineyard doesn't look that bad yet."

Previous fires and smoke impact from fires in Southern Oregon, California, the Gorge and even earlier this year in Australia, said Clair, are increasing the body of knowledge around mitigating smoke impact on grapes through the technique of the winemaking process.

"Our winemakers feel they have a lot of tools to work with."

*Emily Teel is the Food & Drink Editor at the Statesman Journal. Contact her at eteel@statesmanjournal.com, Facebook, or Twitter. See what she's cooking and where she's eating this week on Instagram: @emily\_teel*

# Rescue

Continued from Page 1A

## Escaping the fire

Angela Mosso, Angie to most, is a devoted wife and mother.

When her son's baseball team needed a coach, she volunteered. It didn't matter that she barely knew how to throw a ball.

She's also been a dedicated caretaker for her mom, Peggy Mosso, for nearly 10 years.

She had watched the wildfires come out of nowhere and spread swiftly. When evacuation orders seemed imminent, she began packing some of their belongings and putting items on the porch. Her husband could load them when he returned with the trailer he was borrowing from a friend.

He still wasn't home when they went to bed — only to wake up to their house on fire.

The three of them were able to get out, with their dog and three cats, and were set to leave in one of the family's vehicles when something went wrong. Chris figures the car must have caught fire.

It was clear to Angela they would not be able to drive out. She needed to save Wyatt. She told him and Duke, the family's 200-pound bullmastiff mix, to run for it.

Escaping on foot wouldn't be possible for her mother. Peggy, 71, had recently fallen and broken her leg. She was scheduled to have surgery in a few days. Ultimately, Angela knew if she wanted to survive, she had no choice.

She had to leave her mom behind. Peggy Mosso died in the fire. Her remains have yet to be recovered.

Angela got out by walking nearly 3 miles on the blazing hot asphalt. If she had shoes when she started, they melted away.

Chris, the grandson of the creators of Enchanted Forest in Salem, still doesn't know all the details. He never will. Even now Angela has been unable to provide some, they've been difficult to absorb. He hadn't slept since Sunday night and barely knows what day it is.

Angela was transported first to Salem Hospital, then to the Legacy Emanuel Hospital Burn Center in Portland, where she remains in critical condition. In addition to her feet, she has burns on her arms and back.

She's been heavily sedated but knows her son, who's athletic and loves video games, is still missing.

Her instructions to her husband of 24 years, after he visited her on Tuesday: "Don't come back until you find him."

## Searching for Wyatt

What she didn't know was that Chris drove back up North Fork Road that first



Chris Tofte, right, directs volunteers on how to get to his house to continue searching for his son Wyatt Tofte, 13, and his dog Duke in Stayton, Oregon on Wednesday, Sept. 9, 2020. BRIAN HAYES / STATESMAN JOURNAL



Angela Mosso, her mother Peggy Mosso and her son, Wyatt, in an undated photo. SPECIAL TO THE STATESMAN JOURNAL

night, while she was on her way to Oregon's only burn center, looking for Wyatt.

By then, though, the fire had spread. He couldn't make it half as far as he did the first time before turning around and even then, had some close calls negotiating fallen trees. He saw flames rising over the ridge and wasn't sure he could beat the fire down the hill.

Chris continued to search the next day and night, his throat hoarse from yelling his son's name. Friends and family spread the word by posting photos of Wyatt on Facebook. Thousands of people shared the posts.



This photo of Wyatt Tofte circulated on Facebook throughout the search for the 13-year-old from Lyons. SPECIAL TO THE STATESMAN JOURNAL

Some responded by joining the search. Others could only offer prayers.

False hope surfaced when someone posted that the boy had been found safe at a friend's house. If only it had been true.

Friends and family still clung to hope that Wyatt, who turned 13 in February, had made it out safely. But they had seen his mom, her injuries, her bare feet. How long would Wyatt's shoes last?

Chris grew frustrated with the response from law enforcement — limited to what it could do because of extremely dangerous conditions in the evacuation area — and organized his own search ef-

forts.

He gathered a group Wednesday afternoon at the Stayton Park and Ride to coordinate plans, and they caravanned to the base of North Fork Road, the same place where Chris blew past the blockade that still stands.

Then he spoke with Marion County Sheriff's deputies. He listened, obviously distraught over what they told him. He hugged someone, spurned attempts from friends trying to console him, then got in his Jeep and sped away.

Wyatt had been found.

Leann Moore, a friend of Angela's for more than 20 years since they were co-workers at Willamette Humane Society, said he was found in the driver's side of a vehicle on the family's property, with Duke draped over him.

No one knows how or why Wyatt returned.

Earlier in the day, his dad rehashed his worst nightmare. What if he had been allowed past the blockade or blown through it earlier? Could he have saved them?

*The grandmother's remains were later found in the same car with Wyatt. Extended family have started a relief fund for Angela and Chris.*

*Capi Lynn is the Statesman Journal's news columnist. Her column taps into the heart of this community — its people, history and issues. Contact her at clynn@statesmanjournal.com or 503-399-6710, or follow her on Twitter @CapiLynn and Facebook @CapiLynnSJ.*