

Grower sees success in unlikely location

By ERICK PETERSON
For the Capital Press

YAKIMA, Wash. — Phil Cline describes himself primarily as a grape grower. This is appropriate, he said, because he is involved in many more wineries than his own operation, and most of his days are spent working for others.

“I manage vineyards for other people,” he said. “I probably grow more different types of grapes than any other grower in the state, except for the nursery that makes the plants.”

In all, he grows 100 acres of grapes, with 31 varieties. His Naches Heights Vineyard only accounts for five of the varieties — Pinot Gris, Chardonnay, Riesling, Syrah and Gewurtztraminer — and 8 1/2 acres, first planted in 2002.

Prior to planting grapes, he was in the apple business — a member of the third generation of an apple-growing family in the area. Hail storms damaged his apples, however, and forced him out of the business.



Erick Peterson/For the Capital Press
Naches Heights Vineyard owner Phil Cline of Yakima, Wash., leans against the logo of his winery, painted onto a van.

Concerned about his next step, he thought he would try something new. A friend who is a winemaker told him that he could do well in grapes, so he thought he would give it a shot.

People were skeptical, he said — not of him, but his chosen location. The elevation of Naches Heights was thought to be too high — 1,740 to 1,800 feet above sea level — for grapes.

Cline, however, knew better. He was familiar with other area growers who were successful growing at similar elevations, dating back to the 1970s.

And yes, he confesses, most other vineyards are at lower elevations in the Yakima Valley. The lowest one that he manages is at 900 feet. He adds that elevation is important; it provides the proper temperatures for grapes.

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