

Winemaker lobbies Olympia while building brand

By ERICK PETERSON
For the Capital Press

SEATTLE — Having opened Wilridge Winery in 1988, winemaker Paul Beveridge has seen competitors come and go, and he boasts that his business is the “oldest continuously operated winery in Seattle.”

The business started as a hobby, he said. Then he “started making more wine than he could drink” and decided to make even more wine and market it.

This worked well for his family, as his wife was entering the restaurant business, starting a French-style bistro, which helped him with his first sales.

A lawyer by trade, he lobbied Olympia for change that would benefit Wilridge and other Washington winemakers, he said. After three years, he helped convince the state liquor board to allow restaurants and wineries in the same building.

“That was kind of interesting,” he said. “I spent a lot of time in Olympia, trying to



Wilridge Winery Assistant Manager Sara Gurdey and co-worker Hailee Pinzel pour a glass of wine at a tasting room near Yakima, Wash.

Erick Peterson/For the Capital Press

modernize the wine laws.”

He followed up with other fights related to regulating wine businesses, helping to change rules that dated

to Prohibition. He has done much of this work through professional organizations, including Family Wineries of Washington State, of which

he is currently president. There, he has been pushing for the free market and support for small wineries and wine consumers, he said.

Wilridge Winery

Owner: Paul Beveridge

First opened: 1988

Location: Seattle and Yakima, Wash.

Varieties: Various white and rose wines, red wines and dessert wines

Meanwhile, during the “slow process” of wine industry deregulation, Wilridge continued to grow, expanding into a cooperative tasting room, “The Tasting Room,” at Seattle’s Pike Place Market and planting a vineyard in Naches Heights, near Yakima, Wash.

With growing success, around eight years ago he quit his lawyering “day job” to focus on wine.

The purchase of the Naches Heights property and planting a vineyard were particularly exciting, he said. He planted 12 acres in a test block of 22 varietals: Cabernet Franc, Cabernet Sauvignon, Malbec, Merlot, Petite Verdot, Semillon, Sauvignon Blanc, Syrah, Mourvedre, Viognier, Barbera, Nebbiolo, Sangiovese,

Sagrantino, Pinot Grigio and White Muscat.

More varieties are to come, he said, as he determines the best grapes for the location.

Business is good, both in Seattle and in Yakima, according to Beveridge and his employees. Wilridge Winery Assistant Manager Sara Gurdey said the small tasting room near Yakima can attract 200 visitors in an ordinary day.

People have good reason to drop in, she said. The winery hosts special events, including live music in the middle of the week.

“But the wine is still the thing,” she said. Though people visit for the music and entertaining atmosphere, they buy the wine because it is good, she said.

Sweat, worry and joy mold winegrower’s art

By JULIA HOLLISTER
For the Capital Press

HEALDSBURG, Calif. — Scott Johnsen, a self-described “plant geek,” is one of the winegrowers behind Frei Brothers Reserve and that’s where he likes to be.

“I grew up in Southern California and was introduced to agriculture by my dad,” he said. “I would spend a lot of time by his side learning how to garden, grow and take great care of our plants.”

After graduating from the University of California-Davis, he worked in viticulture and winemaking in France and the Napa Valley, eventually becom-

ing an intern for E.&J. Gallo Winery in Sonoma County and then moving to his current position with Frei Brothers wines.

Johnsen grows Chardonnay, Sauvignon Blanc, Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot and Pinot Noir, as well as few blender grapes like Petite Sirah and Malbec.

But there is one grape that is more finicky than the rest.

“Pinot Noir is the one grape that keeps me up at night,” he said. “Pinot is challenging to grow because of its thin skin, making these grapes more susceptible to fungus, mildew and sunburn. We manage this by planting our grapes in the sites where they grow best, meaning the Russian River Valley.”

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