

People & Places

Eclipsing a family's dream

James Holesinsky converts Idaho dairy farm into vineyard, winery

By CAROL RYAN DUMAS
Capital Press

BUHL, Idaho — Land that once hosted a small family dairy farm now boasts rows of bountiful grapevines and an award-winning winery. The cows have been gone for decades, and the former milking parlor has been transformed into a winery with old-world ambiance.

James Holesinsky's parents stopped milking cows in the late 1970s and went into the dairy chemical business, but his father always wished there was a vineyard on the farm's green pastures.

At 22, Holesinsky made that happen.

Some friends were planting grapes and had leftover vines. Holesinsky was working in the family business, but being an avid gardener and wanting to honor his father's lifelong dream, he took the plunge — planting 1,000 Chardonnay vines.

His dad, other family members and friends helped with the planting — and the vineyard finally became reality.

That same year, 2001, Holesinsky started taking wine-making and viticulture courses online through the University of California-Davis Extension, later earning a winemaking certification through the program.

The next year, he planted 3,000 Syrah, 2,000 Merlot and 200 Port grape vines.

"And the rest is history. We just started making wine every year from then on," he said.

The vineyard expanded again in 2006, adding 2,000 Cabernet Sauvignon and 1,000 Riesling vines. Muscat vines were added in 2007.

But it isn't easy growing grapes so far inland; they need good drainage and good airflow.

"Both are equally important. We learned the hard way,"



Photos by Carol Ryan Dumas/Capital Press

James Holesinsky transformed his parents' Buhl, Idaho, dairy into a vineyard and winery.

he said.

Most attempts at growing grapes in the area end in failure because of the frost. It freezes the vines back to the ground every year, he said.

He tried growing grapes on all 14 acres of the farm, but only 6 acres turned out to be suitable for grapes.

He adds to his own harvest by contracting grapes from the Hagerman, Idaho, area and bottles about 700 cases of wine a year.

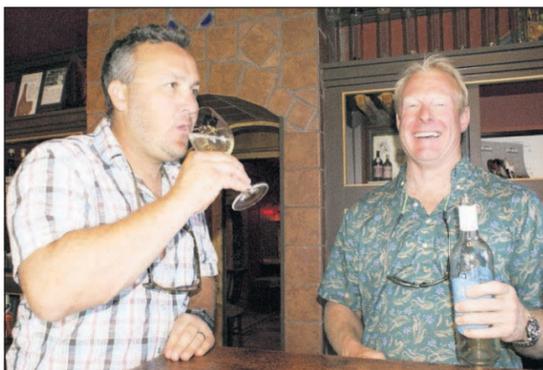
He prides himself on using French-style wine-making techniques for his red wines — aging on the lees, the dead yeast cells and other particles that remain after fermentation and settle as sediment. He also lets the wine sit in oak barrels for about two years, longer for some wines, before tapping it to the bottle.

"Most people mismanage the lees; you have to make it aerobic. That's where you get all your flavor," he said.

Good wine takes patience, dedication, time and experience. Along the way, some things don't work out, he said.

"You have to stay with the method and perfect it ... make it your own. It's a lot of fix it as you go," he said.

His goal is to create world-class wines with no shortcuts, no impurities, no over-processing or over-filtering and no additives, and his wines have won numerous awards in



Vineyard and winery owner James Holesinsky, left, and winery manager Eric Smallwood.

prestigious competitions.

"When someone buys my wine, I want them to taste it and know that this is what wine is supposed to taste like," he said.

Helping Holesinsky is winery manager Eric Smallwood, who handles marketing, sales, distribution and new-product development. He came on board a year ago, and is also training to be a wine maker.

The two have been friends for years. Smallwood had been working in North Dakota as a concert promoter, but was back in Idaho on a visit when he and Holesinsky started talking about taking the winery to a higher level.

"James needed someone to come in and run the winery because he's been tied up with his other business," the chemical business he bought from his

parents, Smallwood said.

The winery self-distributes to retailers and restaurants in the Boise, Sun Valley and Twin Falls areas.

One wine — Blackout, a Syrah and Cabernet Franc blend produced for the solar eclipse — had a wider draw. The wine was featured on NBC's "Today Show" in mid-August in a segment about food and drink celebrating the eclipse.

"It's been the most successful release of the winery ever," Smallwood said.

The winery produced 112 cases, and it sold out in about three weeks. People from all over the country are still contacting the winery, trying to get their hands on it, he said.

"It's really been surreal. It was the first label I've ever done on a wine bottle, and it hit a home run," he said.



Western Innovator

James Holesinsky

Age: 39

Established: 2001

Location: Buhl, Idaho

Grape acreage: 6 acres and contracted grapes from nearby vineyards

Wines: Syrah, Merlot, Chardonnay, Riesling, Rose, red blends and dessert wines

Awards: Idaho Wine Competition — 2 gold, 2 silver, 3 bronze; Northwest Wine Summit — 2 gold, 1 silver, 5 bronze; Idaho Wine Festival — 1 gold; Denver International Wine Competition — 2 gold; Critics Challenge International Wine Competition — 1 gold; Riverside International Wine Competition — 1 bronze; Savor Northwest Wine Awards — 4 silver

Employees: 1 full-time, 1 part-time and a few seasonal workers

Tours and tastings: By appointment

The winery will soon be coming out with a new blend and a new label — Idavine, tied to how popular Idaho wines have become, he said.

The winery already applied for federal label approval and expects to have that certification by mid-October. It will also start marketing wine in pouches, and it prides itself on locally sourcing all its graphic designs and screen printed labels.

Holesinsky also plans to transition back to organic. The vineyard started out certified organic and still grows the grapes organically, but delays in organic inspections were limiting his marketing and he ended up letting go of the certification.

The winery is open for tours and tastings by appointment, and its dessert wines are currently only sold on site.

Calendar

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20 Northwest Locations

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Friday-Saturday Sept. 15-16

U.S. Cattlemen's Association Producer's Forum. Bighorn Resort, 1801 Majestic Lane, Billings, Mont. Updates and roundtables will cover legislation, the cattle market, trade and other topics of interest to cattlemen. Roger Johnson, president of the National Farmers Union, will be the keynote speaker on Saturday.

Through Sunday, Sept. 24

Washington State Fair. 10 a.m.-10 p.m. Fairground in Puyallup, 110 9th Ave. SW, Puyallup, Wash. The Washington State Fair, commonly referred to as the Puyallup Fair, is the largest single attraction held annually in Washington. Closed Tuesdays. Website: www.thefair.com/

Tuesday-Wednesday Sept. 19-20

Central Oregon Occupational Safety & Health Conference. The Riverhouse, Bend, Ore. Cannabis worker safety and health will be a topic, and small agriculture employers can learn about becoming conditionally exempt from Oregon OSHA inspections. Website: safety-series.event.com/central17

Thursday, Sept. 21

OSU Small Farms School. 8:30 a.m.-4:30 p.m. Clackamas Community College, 19600 S. Molalla Ave., Oregon City, Ore. This day-long event features classes in a variety of topics important to small-scale farmers. Sponsored by Oregon State University Extension, the Clackamas Soil and Water Conservation District and Clackamas Community College. Website: <http://smallfarms.oregonstate.edu/small-farm-school>

Saturday, Sept. 23

15th Annual Yamhill-Carlton FFA Alumni Benefit Dinner and Auction. 5-9 p.m. Carlton Legion Hall, 158 East Main St., Carlton, Ore. Social hour and silent auction start at 5 p.m. Dinner and live auction are at 7 p.m. Tables for eight may be reserved for \$100 and individual tickets may be purchased the night of the event for \$15. All proceeds from this event directly benefit the Yamhill Carlton FFA Chapter through the funding of scholarships, student leadership training, travel to events and more. To reserve tables contact Doreen Van De Grift at 503-319-1948. For more information contact us at ycffa.alumni@gmail.com

Goat Education Day. 8:30 a.m.-4 p.m. OSU Southern Oregon Research and Extension Center Auditorium, 569 Hanley Road, Central Point, Ore. Choose four classes from a selection of 11, two in the morning and two in the afternoon, for \$35. Or choose two morning classes and cheesemaking in the afternoon for \$50. Class topics are geared to both beginner and advanced goat owners from Getting Ready for Kidding Season and Holistic Goat Care to the foundations of Nutrition and Feed and the Making of Goat Milk Soaps and Lotions. Presenters include Dr. Charles Estill, OSU veterinarian; Gianacis Caldwell, author; and Christina Strickland and others from the Rogue Valley Dairy Goat Association. Register online at <http://bit.ly/JacksonGoatEdDay2017> or call 541-776-7371. Ask about a youth discount. Cost: \$35 to \$50. Website: <http://extension.oregonstate.edu/sorec/SF-classes>

Sunday, Sept. 24

Summer Farm Day. Noon-4 p.m. Ruby & Amber's Farm, Dorena, Ore. Sponsored by the Willamette Farm & Food Coalition. Website: willamettefarmandfood.org

Thursday, Sept. 28

14th annual Oregon Farm Bureau Classic Golf Tournament.

12:30-6 p.m. Stone Creek Golf Club, 14603 S. Stoneridge Drive, Oregon City, Ore. A fundraiser for the Oregon Farm Bureau PAC. Website: <http://oregonfb.org/events-2/>

Friday, Sept. 29

Fall Forestry Educational Seminar. 8 a.m.-5 p.m. Cowiitz Regional Conference Center, 1900 Seventh Ave. SW, Longview, Wash. Sponsored by the Washington Tree Farm Program, this seminar includes information on managing and maintaining tree farms. ATFS certified tree Farmers are \$70 (\$105 with spouse), others are \$80 (\$120 with spouse). Register by Sept. 8. Website: watreefarm.org

Tuesday-Wednesday Oct. 3-4

Drone World Expo 2017. San Jose Convention Center, 150 W. San Carlos St., San Jose, Calif. The Expo will feature a robust exhibit floor, visionary keynote speakers, timely and industry-leading educational programs and networking events. The business-to-business event attracts over 3,000 professional attendees from a variety of industries from agriculture to law enforcement. Website: drone-worldexpo.com

Friday, Oct. 6

Goat workshop. 5:30-8:30 p.m. Creswell Community Center, 99 S. First St., Creswell, Ore. Basic health topics such as diseases to be aware of, vaccinations and hoof health. Nutritive values of feeds including browse, hay, grains, and protein and mineral supplements. Poisonous plants for goats and methods for weed management. The presenters will be Dr. Charles Estill, Shelby Filley, OSU Extension Service Livestock and Forage Specialist and Melissa Fery, OSU Extension Service small farms agent. Website: <http://smallfarms.oregonstate.edu/south-valley/events>

Saturday, Oct. 7

Hoop House Production Workshop. 9 a.m.-3:30 p.m. Western Nevada College Fallon Campus,

160 Campus Way, Fallon, Nev. Taught by a seasoned professional with a background in research and commercial production, the workshop is ideal for intermediate or advanced growers. Attendees will learn about best practices that apply to all hoop house production, the eight most profitable crops, best practices for vining, fruiting and leafy crops and advanced practices and techniques for hoop house production. Website: wnc.edu/specialty-crop-institute

Saturday-Sunday Oct. 7-8

Alpaca Harvest Fest. 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Alpacas of Oregon, 21345 SW Aebischer Road, Sherwood, Ore. Help EasyGo Farm and Alpacas of Oregon celebrate our bountiful harvest of colorful alpacas and beautiful fleece. Get up close to the alpacas — hand feed them and meet the babies, females, herdsires and "fiber boys" — less expensive alpacas for fiber artists, companions and pasture mowers. Shop for sweaters, gloves, scarves and more. Website: www.easygo-farm.net/AOOHarvestFest

Tuesday-Thursday Oct. 10-12

Oregon Vegetation Management Association, Seaside Civic and Convention Center, 415 First Ave., Seaside, Ore. Hours for the event are 10-6 p.m. Tuesday, 8 a.m.-6 p.m. Wednesday and 8 a.m.-noon Thursday. Website: ovma.net

Saturday, Oct. 14

Northwest Farmers Union 2017 Convention 8 a.m.-11 p.m. Walla Walla Community College, 500 Tausick Way, Walla Walla, Wash. The Northwest Farmers Union annual convention, which hosts producers and supporters of agriculture from around Washington, Idaho and Oregon, is an event that has a multitude of educational speakers, farmer/rancher speakers/attendees, honorary awards and general networking and camaraderie. The event is our gathering for our membership to come together and enact our grassroots

policy for the upcoming year as well as help guide the many programs that we work to implement for our membership. Members can vote on changes to the policy and structure of the organization as well as take part in leadership opportunities and network with other leaders from around the region. Cost: \$50 Website: www.nwfu.org

Saturday-Sunday Oct. 21-22

All About Fruit Show. 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Clackamas County Fairplex, 694 NE Fourth Ave., Canby, Ore. Taste hundreds of varieties of apples, pears, kiwi and grapes. Website: <http://www.homeorchardsociety.org/events/>

Wednesday-Saturday Oct. 25-28

90th National FFA Convention and Expo. Bankers Life Fieldhouse, Lucas Oil Stadium, Indianapolis, Ind. Website: <https://www.ffa.org/>

Thursday-Saturday Oct. 26-28

Washington State Sheep Producers Annual meeting and convention. Hilltop Inn, 928 NW Olsen St., Pullman, Wash. Among the many events on the agenda are presentations by the Washington State University Department of Animal Sciences, the University of Idaho Department of Animal and Veterinary Sciences and by Dr. Brian Joseph, Washington State Veterinarian. Website: www.wssp.org

Thursday, Nov. 2

Four-Part Farm and Ranch Succession Workshop 6-8:30 p.m. Online or Clackamas Community College Harmony Campus, 7738 SE Harmon Road, Milwaukie, Ore. Learn from an attorney, an accountant, an appraiser, a banker, the director of Oregon State University's Austin Family Business Program and farmers who've been through the process. Receive free one-on-one succession counseling sessions between each event. Part one of four parts. Cost: Free. Website: <http://bit.ly/2eYcPcX>

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