

# A Labor Day to remember



(Photos by Birdie for the Illinois Valley News)



(Photo by Wendy Williams Photography for the Illinois Valley News)

# Area vintners come out on top

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IVN Contributing Writer

The winners of this year's Oregon Wine Competition were announced Aug. 24 and it was with great celebration that Brian Wilson, a winemaker for Foris and Cookoo's Nest Cellars, won a Best of Show Award. Another nearby winemaker, Joe Ginnet at Plaisance Ranch in Williams, also earned a Best of Show Award.

According to Wilson, the competition's results are quite conclusive because three judges of the contest completed a Master of Wine Certification Program which he described as "extremely rigorous and extremely difficult." Wilson added that there are only 35 people with this certificate in the entire United States.

Wilson was born in California and has been making wine since 1980, the year he graduated with a bachelor's degree in economics from the University of Oregon. After graduation he moved back to California to start making wine because the wine business in Southern Oregon was still relatively

undiscovered.

Wilson eventually moved back to Oregon because he longed for the natural beauty of the landscape he had grown to love while attending college. When asked about why he was driven to become a winemaker Wilson said, "I had good fortune when I was growing up. I lived in Europe for a year and my dad was a wine collector, so I started tasting wine and I was fascinated by it. I kind of kept track of it at U of O as a college student and I decided I wanted to do something in viniculture."

Wilson says one of the biggest results of doing well in this competition is increased sales in Southern Oregon.

"We saw a significant bump in sales just in this one week alone," Wilson said.

According to Wilson, Foris is one of the top 10 largest producers of wine in the state and in order to make such a large quantity they buy grapes from vineyards around the Illinois Valley to supplement their output. Although the sales in Oregon are important to them, the scale of their production necessitates national sales and Foris is currently sold in 38 states.

However, winemaking isn't all about awards and glamour.

"When you're working in the cellar, it's a lot of cleaning and it's a lot of getting dirty, wet and cold. And, it's physically demanding."

Despite the arduous conditions, Wilson loves what he does.

"It's a lifestyle," he said. "We don't make a lot of money at it, but it's a good industry to be in. It's all about wine and food and, you know, I love both of those categories!"

Wilson also mentioned, for those interested in making wine professionally in Oregon, that, "The great thing about our industry is the apprentice program is alive and well and an awful lot of winemakers started out by working with somebody else. That's not the case in California."

Another recipient of the Best of Show Award was Joe Ginnet, who makes wine for Plaisance Ranch and sells a significant amount of it to the Illinois Valley. Ginnet, a lifetime Oregon resident, has been making wine commercially since 2006 and is one of the founders of the Oregon Wine Competition. However, he made a point to mention that he

no longer has any hand in running it. Ginnet, like Wilson, was also inspired to make wine from visiting family in Europe in the '70s and said that the best part of making wine professionally is drinking it.

Ginnet also talked about the changing perceptions of Southern Oregon wine.

"We're starting to turn the tide, it's only a matter of time," he said. "The old flyover red philosophy is starting to go away. We're starting to get some serious recognition from international magazines. Things are going to start changing rapidly."

Wilson also weighed in on the evolution of increased popularity in Southern Oregon wines. He said it has been a long and slow process.

"I would think that in the early 2000s things started to change pretty significantly," Wilson said. "We're certainly past the up-and-coming stage and are really starting to garner some significant attention."

Time will only tell where the wine business is headed, but in Wilson's words, "The future is bright."

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