

# Wines & Causes

Area wine people have a generous streak

**T**his rap was born when my pal Larry Malmgren asked me to draw readers' attention to a charity wine auction to benefit SMART (Start Making A Reader Today). It's a silent auction from 5:30 to 7 pm Tuesday, March 20, at 525 Mill St., Springfield, featuring a wide variety of wines from many sources. Larry has long been a figure on the local wine scene and, since he retired, active in connecting wines to worthy causes. And he's certainly not alone. In fact, all across the state, vintners and their friends have long been heavily involved in supporting a broad spectrum of charitable causes. Just two (of many) examples:

Robert Canaga is an artist and winefiend who blogs about wine and frequently slogs the vineyards to raise wines and bux for the Oregon Mozart Players.

Jennifer Hilliard is deeply involved with Greenhill Humane Society and organizes the Pours for Paws wine event, usually held at Meriwether, which donates both space and wines.

The wineries and their principals are daily deluged with requests for contributions, and they give generously, sometimes focusing their donations on their particular interests. From a sampling of our local wineries:

Matt LaVelle (LaVelle Vineyards) says that the LaVelles are really committed

to supporting performing arts groups — Eugene Symphony/Ballet/Opera — but are lately taking special interest in their kids' local (Fern Ridge) schools, because "they're hurting so badly right now."

Alan Mitchell at Territorial Vineyards says their company is also interested in supporting their local (Junction City) schools, "especially if it involves music" because "the decline of music (studies) really troubles me." Mitchell also notes that "donation requests are endless ... two or three every day." Territorial does "the best we can."

Kacy Minnis, tasting room manager at Sweet Cheeks Winery, says the "priority for us is local charities" but they donate space and wines for such organizations as Holt International, Volunteers in Medicine and Boys and Girls Clubs. They've dedicated to their yearly fundraiser for scholarships with LCC's Women in Transition Program.

King Estate is our state's largest winery and they're widely known for their donations. LCC's Culinary and Hospitality Program is a frequent beneficiary.

Ray Walsh (Capitello Wines, Eugene) recently donated eight cases of wines (that's a *lot* for a tiny producer) for the Angel Hair Foundation, supporting children who've lost their hair for various medical reasons (e.g., chemo).

More broadly, wineries all across

Oregon have made the annual Salud Auction (November) — benefitting orchard workers and their families, often Hispanic migrants — into a major event, raising umpty-thousands of dollars.

These are just some tastes of the deep generosity of the Oregon vintners in support of charities. We should remember that most of Oregon's nearly 400 wineries are small, family operations, some barely eking by as businesses, but the people who grow our grapes are among the most community-minded of our citizens. They, too, deserve support that comes around.

Which, as usual, brings *us* around to this month's quaffs:

Good Oregon pinot noir at under \$20 is a sign of the times, good and bad: **Elk Cove Vineyards 2009 La Sirene** (\$15) delivers dead-center-of-the-palate cherry flavors framed with food-friendly acidity, well-suited to rich foods like smoked salmon.

**J. Albin 2010 Pinot Gris** (\$10) is drinking beautifully right now, with pretty citrus/pear-like fruit and zippy acidity and a smooth texture. Don't over-chill; serve just cool for best flavors.

It irks me to say so, but our big-shouldered northern neighbors can make really good wines at bargain prices. **Chateau Ste Michelle 2010 Dry Riesling** (\$6.50!) is just fine, with flavors of peaches and minerals, a natural match for spicy Asian foods. The sweeter version is also quite acceptable.

Watch for our kindly local folks' 2010 and 2011 wines. We'll be writing about them next month, just returning some love. **EW**

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