

The Giving Vine

A look at how the local wine industry gives back to the community BY LANCE SPARKS

The popularity of Oregon wine, especially our pinot noirs, has soared. From a handful of wineries in the 1970s, we have seen a near-explosion: Now there are more than 400 wineries in the state, with that number increasing almost daily. Wine contributes several billion dollars annually to Oregon's economy. The wineries and their owners also contribute greatly to various Oregon charities and nonprofits.

How, and how much?

EW decided to discuss the matter with some local wineries and their owners, known both for the quality of their wines and their generosity to deserving causes. We called Danuta Pfeiffer of Pfeiffer Vineyards; Jonathan Scott Oberlander of J. Scott Cellars; Alan Mitchell of Territorial Vineyards & Wine; and Ed King of King Estate. We asked how often they get requests for donations of wine and how they have responded.

Organizers for charities often approach prospective wine donors with two pitches: first, the worthiness of the cause (almost all meet this criterion) and second, that the winery will benefit from exposure to guests invited to a benefit.

Since the requests for donations can come at a rate that may seem overwhelming, some winery owners have chosen to focus their donations on certain interests.

Winery owners who spoke to EW gave answers that ranged from funny (one, who shall remain unnamed, says the requests come so fast "it sounds like rain on a tin roof") to regretful ("We wish we could give to all. We just can't.")

As we talked, Danuta Pfeiffer checked her e-mail. She had two requests: "Today, a local dog park asked for wine — and diabetes!"

Jonathan Oberlander estimates the number of requests at about "three a week." Alan Mitchell processes "easily once a week, minimum." King put the number at "hundreds a year, from all over the country."

This rate has forced owners to focus their giving either on the local communities or on specific charities that somehow touch the owners' interests.

Ed King is CEO of Oregon's largest producer —

ALAN MITCHELL
OF TERRITORIAL
VINEYARDS



PHOTO BY TRASK BEDORTH

300,000 cases from 1,000 acres, plus other sources — and King has resources to make some special contributions to the community; for example, King Estate donated 4 acres of land and partnered with Lane Electric and Solar City to build a solar array on the property. All power generated by the array goes directly into the grid, not just the winery.

King also sponsors Food for Lane County programs — "because no one should go hungry," he says — such as the annual Chefs' Night Out. Additionally, King Estate donates food directly from its extensive orchards and gardens.

The Pfeiffers' facilities are located near Junction City, and Pfeiffer notes that they give frequently to their adopted community: "Definitely Junction City High School, the library, local food aid."

Pfeiffer makes the point that their winery is also committed

to furthering research into Fanconi anemia, the disease that took the lives of two daughters (Kirsten and Katie) of the late Dave Frohnmayer, former president of the University of Oregon. Additionally, Pfeiffer Vineyards sponsors the area's annual Daffodil Festival, "a big community bash," Pfeiffer calls it.

Sponsorship is a means of contributing money that doesn't involve contributing wine, very important for small producers like Pfeiffer. Mitchell noted that Territorial's co-owners, Victoria and Jeff Wilson-Charles, sponsor The Shedd musical programs, and Territorial is also a direct sponsor of Art and the Vineyard. Partly because Mitchell has kids in Junction City schools, the winery actively supports JC athletics.

Michelle Kaufmann of the Oregon Wine Board (OWB) summarized a report on charitable giving released this year — in 2014, OWB studied contributions to charities, using data from 2013, showing that wineries generated an estimated \$3.5 million in charitable giving for that year.

OWB found strong support, especially for Salud!, an annual wine auction devised in 1994 by winery owners and some physicians from Tuality Healthcare in Hillsboro, intended to provide funds and medical services for the seasonal workers who pick the fruit, prune the vines and, as King says, "make wine possible."

Since 2005, the November event has been hosted at McMenamins Edgefield. Additionally, Portland-area charities receive benefits from the March black-tie Classic Wine Auction. Down south in Jacksonville (Oregon, that is), the August-held Oregon Wine Experience raises funds for Children's Miracle Network.

In November, winemakers hold the Gorge Gives Back and donate a percentage of sales "to area charities and causes." Wineries in Washington, California and other regions are also active contributors.

Oberlander of J. Scott Cellars says, "We try to spread the love around."

Of their giving, Pfeiffer says, "It's about being a responsible, good neighbor."

King puts it this way: "It's part of our mission. We live here, too. We're proud to be part of this community." ❖

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