

# M-F winery Ducleaux Cellars cancels in-person tastings

By EMRY DINMAN  
Walla Walla Union-Bulletin

## Passion and a hopeful beginning

It all started with a really bad cabernet.

Dukelow grew up in Richland, Washington, and as an adult he would often go wine tasting with his parents, where he developed a love for the art of fermenting grapes. Dukelow and Turley drank a lot of wine, the pair said, and decided to try making a home brew for the fun of it.

The first batch was terrible. But the experience was intoxicating enough for the duo. Dukelow went to a night school in Seattle to study grape-growing and winemaking, known by those in the industry as viticulture and enology.

In 2013, they produced their first commercial batch, and though the business still was largely a hobby, they weren't producing bad cab anymore.

"You're investing money in grapes, and so you better not screw it up," Dukelow said.

After their kids moved away for college, the pair considered moving to wine country and found a beautiful piece of property in Milton-Freewater three years ago. They named it Ducleaux, a French-sounding play on Dukelow's family name.

The first year, 2019, was dedicated to setting up the business. The next, 2020, was supposed to be about opening Ducleaux's doors.

Turley, wanting to be able to help more with the business, studied with the Walla Walla Community College's Institute of Enology and Viticulture, finishing that program in June 2020. By then the pandemic had hit, but the class had moved from hands-on work to studying models and memorizing charts, and her education was relatively unaffected.

But the business was hit hard from the start.

## Starts and stops

"The first year was about getting things ready to open up, then, about when we were ready, the pandemic hit," Turley said. "It's been starts and stops."

Umatilla County, where their business is, often has had relatively high COVID-19 transmission rates for the state and region. But for a brief moment in 2021, it seemed like things were beginning to return to some sense of normalcy.

This year is a big one for Ducleaux Cellars. They source their grapes from the Walla Walla and Columbia



Greg Lehman/Walla Walla Union-Bulletin

Toby Turley and Chris Dukelow pause during a syrah crush session Sept. 3, 2021, at Ducleaux Cellars, Milton-Freewater.

valleys, but the plan always had been to turn Ducleaux into primarily an estate winery, making wine from grapes they grow rather than relying on another vineyard's product. Now in their third year, vines planted in 2019 are being harvested for the first time.

The business owners had planned to have year-round tastings, and as vaccinations rose and case counts dropped this spring, Ducleaux opened its doors again for Friday and Saturday tastings.

"Our tasting room is in the winery, and we always had the big bay doors open," Turley said. "But that was before the

delta variant took off."

As hospitalizations began to skyrocket again, paralleling or surpassing the worst moments in the pandemic before that point, the couple decided to reverse course. Vaccination rates lagged behind the rest of Oregon and the U.S., and Turley and Dukelow didn't want to be in a position where they had to ask customers for proof of vaccination.

So they canceled tastings altogether. It was not a decision they made lightly.

"It certainly impacts the business plan and reduces revenue and our ability to sell wine," Dukelow said.

But the risk, both to themselves and to their community, was too great, they decided. The senses of smell and taste are fundamental to a winemaker, helping them ensure fermentation is working the way it should and that the final product will be worth a premium.

"If you can't smell that something's going wrong, then you can't fix it," Dukelow said. "You could ruin your whole lot of wine."

Turley added: "I didn't feel that sense of safety that we thought we had. I also didn't want to be the source of spreading COVID, either. I would feel horrible."

To try to recoup some of their lost revenue, the couple has tried to lean on virtual tasting events, an option that has proven popular with some businesses leading team building meetings and the like. And, Dukelow noted, they produce a commodity uniquely suited to sitting and waiting for a better day.

"We are fortunate in that most wine made well does better with aging," Dukelow said. "So it just means we'll have more inventory we'll need to sell when the pandemic's over."

# EO, Herald win two dozen awards in statewide journalism contest

East Oregonian

SALEM — The East Oregonian and Hermiston Herald took home 24 Oregon Newspaper Publishers Association awards at a virtual ceremony on Friday, Sept. 10.

Judged by members of the Arizona Newspapers Association and considered against other Oregon newspapers of similar size, the EO and Herald collectively took home five first place prizes in the Better Newspaper Contest. Along with the rest of the field, the East Oregonian and Hermiston Herald were judged for their work in 2020, which included the historic Umatilla

River floods and the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"I think that the number of awards is a testament to the work that the East Oregonian and Hermiston Herald did in 2020," said Andrew Cutler, the publisher of the EO and Herald.

The East Oregonian ended its run of general excellence awards, taking third place behind The News-Review in Roseburg and the Grants Pass Daily Courier. Prior to 2021, the EO won first place in general excellence nine out of the past 10 years.

Cutler said not continuing the East Oregonian's streak was disap-

pointing but did act as a motivator to recapture the title next year.

Jade McDowell, the former editor of the Herald, had a banner 2020, her last full year with the company before departing. She won first place prizes in the editorial column, personality feature and business or economic issue categories, the latter also producing a third place award for McDowell. McDowell and community reporter Tammy Malgesini placed two and three in the best local column category, while McDowell also won a third place award for enterprise reporting for her work in the East Oregonian.

It also was another strong year

for reporter Kathy Aney, who took home first place in the personality feature category, second place in best local column and two third place prizes for educational coverage and lifestyle coverage. She shared a third place award for best spot news coverage with reporter Antonio Sierra.

Individually, Sierra won two awards: second place in coverage of a business or economic issue and third place for general feature story. Photographer Ben Lonergan was one of the EO's other first place winners, garnering the top prize for best news photo. He also earned second place in feature

photo, second place in sports photo and third place in the photo essay category.

The EO wasn't recognized only for its reporting. Cutler won third place for best headline writing, and page designer Andy Nicolais got a third place award for best page design. Overall, it was a good award year for the EO Media Group, the company that owns the East Oregonian and Hermiston Herald. In addition to the dozens of awards won by EOMG papers, The Bulletin in Bend and The Daily Astorian won first place in the general excellence category in their respective groups.

## Parade marks 9/11



Ben Lonergan/East Oregonian

East Umatilla Fire & Rescue Assistant Chief Jeremy Lasater, left, and firefighter and paramedic with East Umatilla Fire & Rescue, stand below an American flag Saturday, Sept. 11, 2021, in downtown Athena following a 9/11 memorial parade through the county. The parade, which began in Helix, wrapped through Adams and Weston before finishing in downtown Athena.

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