

10 GREAT THINGS TO DO IN NORTHWEST WINE COUNTRY

WINE PRESS

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SPRING 2011

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10 great things to do in Northwest wine country

BY ERIC DEGERMAN

One of our favorite debates about wine comes down to those who view it as the devil's work.

Thanks to a note from an Air Force master sergeant in Richland, Wash., I've got some new material for those folks.

Jerry Butler, a Texas minister, has written a book called *Wine & Spirit*. He credits time with Christian friends in Germany and France for the inspiration.

Meanwhile, the conservative wing of Christianity chooses to overlook events such as Jesus turning water into wine and the role of wine at the Last Supper.

My colleague Ken Robertson readily points out that ranking members of the Catholic church during the Middle Ages boasted of their wine cellars. There are also luminaries such as Martin Luther and Dom Perignon. Unless I'm seeing stars, neither was a teetotaler.

Earlier this winter, Butler told the San Antonio Express-News, "My basic thesis is that wine is a gift of God to enjoy, and unquestionably, the principle of moderation is pervasive through that. But the conservative-fundamentalist mindset was that if it can be abused, it shouldn't be used. We apply it to alcohol, but not to other things like money and greed."

Let's drink to that!

1 The Poet Laureate of Wine Press Northwest. This might be the biggest news to come out of this issue, but yes we plan to add a special someone who may be the most talented and original-thinking member of our team. (Watch out, Juicy McFly.)

His name is Jordan Chaney, and believe it or not, he lives in Washington's Tri-Cities. Editor Andy Perdue came across Jordan at a local literature festival and was astounded by his poetry and his reading of it.

Guests of Col Solare will vouch for

that. He occasionally performs readings at the Red Mountain showpiece winery, and they've booked him four times this spring, including March 26 and April 17.

We recently posted an online slideshow of Jordan reading his first remarkable poem on wine. Look for his first contribution in our Summer 2011 issue. Get a read at billowingwords.com.

2 Swirling around the Pearl. Wineries in the Columbia River Gorge region will take their act on the road March 28, heading to Portland's tony Pearl District. More than 20 wineries will kick off their annual Passport Week with an evening pouring at Urban Studio. Tickets are \$25, which includes a wine glass, small bites and a passport for the April 1-2 weekend back in the gorge. Blow over to ColumbiaGorgeWine.com.

3 Hike the vines on Red Mountain. It seems as if Heather Unwin is always running around at Terra Blanca Winery and Estate Vineyard. Starting in April, she and staff will slow down a bit just after lunch on Fridays and Saturdays. That's when they lead guided walks of the vineyards, a program she calls, "Watch Wine Grow" among the 300 acres.

The walks run 1-3 p.m. from April Fool's Day to Oct. 29. Get up-close and personal with anecdotes, birdwatching and samples of wines connected to the varieties touched in the vineyard. Cost is \$15. Reservations are urged. Lace 'em up at terrablanca.com.

4 Wake up to Sleeping Lady. Another sign that we live in wine country is when a resort builds grand events around food and regional wines.

Well, Sleeping Lady in Leavenworth has been getting down with Wenatchee Valley winemakers for a number of years. The mountain resort in Icicle Canyon — created by famed Seattle philanthropist

Harriet Bullitt — is also a member of Chefs Collaborative, which promotes sustainable food practices.

On April 8, New York Times columnist Mark Bittman spends the evening at Sleeping Lady Mountain Resort to promote his latest book, *Food Matters: A Guide to Conscious Eating*. Wines served at the VIP dinner are 100% Northwest, some from certified organic, if not biodynamic, fruit.

Can't make that? Sleeping Lady stages monthly "harvest dinners" May through October to spotlight local food and wine pairings. Lift the covers at sleepinglady.com.

5 Rooting for the New World. Once a month, Laurent Montalieu and Danielle Andrus Montalieu's remarkable Soléna Estate project in the Willamette Valley will throw open the doors for comparative tastings that pit New World (Oregon) vs. the Old World.

These are often complimentary tastings and staged at the Soléna tasting room in Carlton and the Soléna/Grand Cru Estates gallery in Yamhill.

On April 16-17, it's Chardonnay, which can be almost as controversial/confrontational as Pinot Noir. Get your oak on at solenaestate.com.

6 Derby Day in the Snake River Valley. Among the few sporting events I can get my wife to sit down and watch with me is the Kentucky Derby or the other Triple Crown races. Pre-me, she was a groom for thoroughbred race horses and saw parts of the country that I'll never make it to. She even witnessed a running of The Preakness.

If we're in the Boise area May 7, here's an event I wouldn't have to nag her about. Woodriver Cellars in Eagle — formerly the Winery at Eagle Knoll — is holding its Derby Party. They invite patrons to get "dressed in your best and celebrate the

running of the Kentucky Derby.”

I'd much rather quaff a dry Riesling than a cloying mint julep. Saddle up at wooddrivercellars.com.

7 Wine, whine while your run. Those crazy Canucks. The South Okanagan Winery Association (SOWA) will hold the second annual Half-Corked Marathon on May 28-29.

They expect more than 300 entrants, and it will cover 18 kilometers (11 miles for Yanks). It's modeled after the famed Marathon du Medoc, which lures 8,000 runners each year.

In the Okanagan, runners get to sample wines at each of the 20 participating wineries along the Golden Mile and Black Sage Bench, including our 2011 Winery to Watch — Cassini Cellars. I'm guessing the stretch up to Tinhorn Creek is the toughest. Both the speediest and best dressed will be feted. Cost is \$75. Run over to sowasite.com.

8 Taste Washington Spokane 2.0. The Washington Wine Commission pulled the plug on its annual Taste Washington event at The Davenport.

Don't despair. Vintage Spokane is June 5. Varsity Communications has stepped in, and the remodeled event at the Lincoln Center — while a bit different — should still be a good time.

Varsity produces most major WWC events, including TW-Spo, so it has an “Outstanding!” track record. Go to vintagespokane.com or varsitycommunications.com. Wine Press Northwest is a sponsor, so look for our booth.

9 Gold-winning winemakers go iron. It's been written here that if you read this, then you owe it to yourself to indulge at least one time and dine at The Herbfarm and spend that night across the parking lot at Willows Lodge in Woodinville.

But there's more to Willows Lodge than a place to rest your head. Barking Frog executive chef Bobby Moore ranks with the best in the Northwest, and both he and the lodge are active in the Woodinville wine scene.

Late this spring, Willows Lodge plays host to the second annual Iron Vintner

Challenge. Think of the TV show *Iron Chef*, only with local winemakers working the line rather than celebrity chefs. The lineup features chef/winemakers John Bigelow (JM Cellars), Chris Gorman (Gorman Winery), Chris Sparkman (Sparkman Cellars) and Chris Upchurch (DeLille Cellars).

The early betting favorite in Vegas has to be Sparkman — ex-GM of Seattle's Waterfront Seafood Grill. Watching the entertaining and fast-talking Moore as MC alone will be worth the admission.

Round One is June 8. Admission (\$35) includes tastes from competing wineries. Willows Lodge also offers discounted lodging. Proceeds benefit the Little Bit Therapeutic Riding Center in Woodinville. Start at willowslodge.com.

10 Walla Faces many phases. Walla Faces is a little difficult to describe.

It's a tasting salon/art gallery that pours its own wines. And there are two inns. And the wines come from vines owned by Rick Johnson, who also oversees both Walla Walla Inns and the salon/gallery. One inn is adjacent to the gallery. The other is at the Walla Faces Vineyard, which the Johnsons purchased from the Ahlers in 2006. Acclaimed vintner Matthew Loso, formerly of Matthew Cellars, crafts the “house” wines.

Each week, I spend a few minutes approving Walla Faces calendar items for our free online Wine Events page at winepressnw.com. The Faces is a busy place, with a live performance seemingly every night of the week.

Among the recent performers is Prosser-based jazzman Wayman Chapman, who does an “Outstanding!” job every year providing entertainment at Alexandria Nicole Cellars' Harvest Party. A bunch of my Facebook friends “like” Walla Faces. Take a look at the photos posted there, and you likely will be inspired to check it out. Start with walfaces.com.

🍷 *What is your favorite thing to do in Northwest wine country? Send your ideas to edegerman@winepressnw.com.*

🍷 *Have a Northwest wine item to post on our free online Wine Events calendar? Go to winepressnw.com/events.*