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The Anniston Star

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Uncorked: Wine tasting goes to the dogs

by Pat Kettles

Special to The Star

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Some winery dogs are more famous than their owners. Many are featured in a series of coffee table books like "Wine Dogs of Napa Valley," "Wine Dogs of Italy" and "Wine Dogs USA."

Wine dogs perform different roles for wineries. Randal Wilson's standard schnauzers, Belle and Dixie, are trained to chase deer from Wilson's White Oak Vineyards, located just off Highway 9 in Iron City. Wilson has sensors located in different areas throughout his vineyards. Each sensor emits a unique signal that sounds in Wilson's bedroom. The dogs know by the signal emitted where to go in the vineyard to chase off marauding deer.

There are only two among the vineyard dogs I have met. Moose was a member of the official welcoming party of B.R. Cohn Winery in Sonoma. The late canine was a "Blab," the progeny of an English bulldog and a black lab. I experienced an up close and personal encounter with the appropriately named Moose when he parked his sizable derriere on my feet because I happened to be standing in his sunny spot on the tasting room floor.

I met Sissy at Swanson Vineyards in Napa. The late Sissy, a black lab rescue dog, applied herself to vineyard management checking the brix, or sugar level, of prized Swanson grapes by eating them. Sissy's owner, Swanson vineyard manager Pam Bond, shooed Sissy away from the grapes out of concern, I thought, for the dog's digestive health. It turned out Bond was more concerned about the value of Swanson's prized Napa grapes on which Sissy was dining.

Frenchie, a bulldog belonging to Jean-Charles Boisset and his wife Gina Gallo, has his own winery and wine label. Frenchie Winery invites dogs to "Come Bark With Us." Patrons of Frenchie Winery are invited to bring their four-legged family members to enjoy the comfort of a shady dog suite, complete with wine barrel beds, from which owners may watch their pampered pets via the "Frenchie Cam" while enjoying the human wine tasting experience.

Not all animals have such pampered lifestyles or meaningful occupations. Many are neglected and abandoned to indiscriminately breed. One local organization struggling with the problem of overpopulation of abandoned and neglected animals is SAVE, acronym for Saving Animals Volunteer Effort. SAVE is a non-profit organization dedicated to halting pet overpopulation by providing access to low-cost spaying and neutering.

Tyson Fine Wines and Things, located at 3326 Henry Road in Golden Springs, is hosting for the third year a Howl-O-Ween benefit wine tasting for SAVE from 5:30-7:30 p.m. Thursday. Proceeds from the tasting and donated items — including a large format bottle, a Jeroboam, holding the equivalent of four standard bottles — will go to SAVE. Everyone is invited to join in the Howl-O-Ween fun. Wine representatives Gina Stephens from International Wines, Leigh Monroe Barall of Pinnacle Imports and Clay Rivenbark of Rush Wines will be on hand pouring an array of wines from their portfolios.

Stephens will feature a selection of Washington state wines from the Magnificent Wine Company producers of House Wine including House Chardonnay, Fish House Sauvignon Blanc, House Red, Steak House Cabernet and Mountain Merlot. Harvey Steiman of Wine Spectator Magazine has said of these wines, "The minimalist labels and low prices belie the BIG personality of the wine itself."

Barall will pour sips of Evolucio Dry Furmint from Hungary, described as being crisp like chardonnay from Chablis in France. Furmint is the grape varietal more often used in making late harvest sweet wines from Hungary, but this wine is bone dry.

Barall will also pour a Zazou red blend from the Languedoc region of France. Zazous were part of a subculture in France during and after WWII made up of young people expressing their individuality through wearing avant-garde clothing to rebel against conservatism imposed by the Nazis.

Rivenback will pour private label Rush wines from distributor Rush Garner. Especially popular in this area is Rush sparkling wine. Rivenback will also pour a Moselland Black Cat Riesling from Germany in homage to Halloween and to the cats SAVE serves.

Howl-O-Ween wine tasting

articles

- A benefit for SAVE (Saving Animals Volunteer Effort)
- 5:30-7:30 p.m. Thursday at Tyson Fine Wines and Things, 3326 Henry Road, Anniston, 256-236-9910.


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