



TODAY'S SUNBEAM

N.J. vineyard tour comes to county

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By Heather Simione

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PILESGROVE TWP. Wine connoisseurs trekked from all corridors of the Garden State visiting Auburn Road Vineyard as one-stop on their Walk in the Vineyard Wine Trail Weekend.

More than 25 wineries are participating throughout the state, as Garden State Wine Brewers makes it their mission to encourage cultivation and more open space preservation, said Scott Donnini, an owner of the vineyard.

Donnini, a corporate lawyer for the Philadelphia Stock Exchange who lives with his wife Julianne on the 16-acre vineyard grounds moved to the area in February of 2004 from Philadelphia to begin a new business venture with their four partners.

Julianne, a retired lawyer, traded in her brief case for a tractor joked her husband, which he hopes to do upon his planned retirement in the short months ahead.

"We bought this as a very expensive anniversary present for each other in 2003," said Donnini. "We first planned to live in Philadelphia, but that didn't work because when a crisis breaks you need to be here."

A crisis doesn't break often, but it does occur, explained Donnini who broke loose with a story about a bull and two cows running rampant in the dark of night breaking vines.

The Enoteca, which rests in the middle of the vineyard supplies patrons with a relaxed beatnik coffeehouse atmosphere burgeoning with sophisticated flavor.

The family oriented event included a tour of the vineyard, wine-making process, sampling artesian cheeses, and live music. Also for children of all ages, complimentary samples of homemade Italian gelato from La Gelato, and samplings of fresh grilled beef from Benevista Farms based in Pennsylvania were provided to temp the palate.

Local singer/songwriter Bevin Caulfield, provided entertainment with her bluesy style voice as wine lovers sipped on house special fruity Sangria along with other signature wines including Rosalita, and Good Karma.

An admittedly huge fan of Bruce Springsteen, Donnini said some things just blend in with a lifestyle such as a good wine.

"Galileo said good wine is sunlight caught in a bottle," said Donnini. "Good Karma is representation of what we found in working here."

David Davis, the vineyards chief of viticulture, provided bystanders with a tour of the wine-making process explaining from growth to machine the intricate details.

"Rutgers has been putting money into bring wine specialists in for teaching those like us who are self-taught more about the business," said Davis. "From picking the grapes off the vine until they actually make it to fermentation stage a lot of things can happen during the grapes life."

Chris Menold and her husband Ted Menold originally from Camden County, who moved into South Harrison Township to bask in South Jersey's simplistic rural lifestyle said vineyards are often reminiscent of the west coast for many people.

"We like to support local businesses and realized this was here in our own backyard," said Chris Menold.

"We also think it's important to preserve open space and not see another shopping mall go up. Also, we like to drink wine."

Although, the winery has only been opened to the public since 2007, the partners have plans of increasing inventory and marketing to restaurants and local businesses.

The event will run through Sunday at 5 p.m. For more information visit www.auburnvineyards.com or call (856) 769-WINE.

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