

THE BELLINGHAM HERALD

POSTED: Monday, Oct. 10, 2011

Stomp over to a Whatcom County winery in October for 'crush month'

DEAN KAHN - THE BELLINGHAM HERALD

When I think about making wine, I think about Lucille Ball on "I Love Lucy" getting into a wrestling match with a fellow grape-stomper in a large wooden vat.

I gather there's more to it than that.

You can find out for yourself when the seven businesses in the Whatcom Wineries Association host their first "crush month" celebration with open houses, tours, displays, samples and other activities the last weekend of October.



The association began a few years ago to let more people know that wine-making is a going and a growing concern here.

"You can 'buy local' right here in Whatcom County and buy some really great wines," said Heather Gorum, part-owner of Willow Tree Vineyard in Everson.

They call October "crush month" because wine grapes are ready to be harvested, or soon will be. Once the grapes are gathered, they are crushed, de-stemmed and pressed for their juice, which, along with yeast, forms the basis of wine-to-be.

Different wineries use different grapes, which ripen at different times, so you should call each local winery or check its website if you hope to see their grapes being processed before the end of the month.

"We're at the mercy of the grapes every year," said Tracey DeGraff, who co-owns Glacial Lake Missoula Wine Co. in Blaine. "We have to let the grapes tell us what to do; we don't tell them what to do."

Because of that iffy schedule, the wineries in the association have all agreed to host public events Oct. 29 and 30. With luck, at least some of them will still be doing the hands-on work of turning grapes into wine.

Visitors that weekend may be able to sample 2010 wines from the barrel, sample new releases from the 2009 crop, eat wine grapes, and taste juice squeezed from the grapes.

"The juice is fantastic," said Eileen Turk, who works in sales at Mount Baker Vineyards & Winery.

If visitors are lucky, they even might see winery workers "punching the must."

"Must" is the juice and pulp from crushed grapes, including the skins. For red wines, the skins are left in the must for awhile, along with the yeast, so the juice takes on the skins' red color.

During fermentation, the mix bubbles up, so workers use tools or other equipment to "punch the must" back into the mix to provide more red color.

"You have to push that back down and put the skins back inside the juice," Turk explained.

For people who prefer a more hands-on approach, Mount Baker Vineyards welcomes volunteers who want to help pick the winery's local grapes. Call Mount Baker at 360-592-2300 for details.

If you like to watch the toes-on approach, the folks at Glacial Lake Missoula Wine still use their feet to crush their grapes, although they can't promise they'll have grapes to stomp during visiting hours.

"We will be stomping in small amounts," DeGraff said. "Everyone's really surprised that we still do that."

The spirit of Lucy lives on.

MORE DETAILS

For news from the Whatcom Wineries Association, see whatcomwineries.com.

Wineries in the association are:

Dakota Creek Winery

3575 Haynie Road, Blaine

360-820-4752

dakotacreekwinery.com

Dynasty Cellars

2987 Haxton Way, Bellingham

360-758-7919

dynastycellarswine.com

Glacial Lake Missoula Wine Co.

1678 Boblett St., Blaine

360-332-2097

glmwine.com

Masquerade Wine Company

2001 Iowa St., Suite F, Bellingham

360-220-7072

masqueradewines.com

Mount Baker Vineyards & Winery

4298 Mount Baker Highway, Everson

360-592-2300

mountbakervineyards.com

Vartanyan Estate Winery

1628 Huntley Road, Bellingham

360-756-6770

vewinery.com

Willow Tree Vineyard

5551 Finsrud Road, Everson

360-592-4505

willowtreevineyard.com

Reach DEAN KAHN at atdean.kahn@bellinghamherald.com or call 715-2291.

Read more: <http://www.bellinghamherald.com/2011/10/10/2217460/stomp-over-to-a-whatcom-county.html#ixzz1aayyr23J>