

Life in LAMORINDA

A Day at Briones Regional Park

By Sophie Braccini



Severin Borenstein with dog Wilbur taking a walk Photos by Sophie Braccini

The pleasure of going to Briones Regional Park starts on Happy Valley road in Lafayette. On the narrow winding road, where the speed limit is 30 mph, the sight of beautiful homes and large planted gardens is the perfect introduction to the nature one is about to experience. The ride is only about 12 minutes from downtown Lafayette and you'll need \$5 for parking in the Bear Creek staging area, one of five that the park offers.

Briones is a 6,000 acre regional park with magnificent vistas of rolling hills, cool shady

canyons and miles of hiking trails.

The wild life at Briones is incredibly diverse with assorted birds, mammals, reptiles, and invertebrates making up the local population. Mountain lions have been spotted at Briones and encounters with rattlesnakes are not infrequent.

For Tutu Sharon of Lafayette and her family, Briones is their absolute favorite park. They come often with the children for barbecues and picnics in the shade of the ancient oak trees. For this day, they've chosen a picnic spot by the nearby creek. They like to go down to the creek and then hike up the hill to be in the middle of a deep forest. Sharon's daughter, Kimberley's only regret is that the park is not open for overnight individual camping. She comes during the week as well with her dog and loves the incredible scenic views the park offers.

For Marc Tausig, Rebecca Szatmari and Al Kress, Briones is a different story. The 2 men are archers and Briones contains one of the few archery ranges in the East Bay. Approximately 45 acres

of archery range are set out like a golf course. There, you move from target to target until you have completed the course. The targets are made of foam to look like wild

life in their natural surroundings. The local Archery Club has about 65 members of all ages. Barbara, Marc and Al spend a big part of their Sunday at the park enjoying

archery, hiking and the natural surroundings. While Rebecca doesn't shoot arrows, she loves the freedom of being outdoors.

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Tutu Sharon, grand daughter Cassie, daughter Kimberley, grand son Aaron (sitten), grand son Tyler and foreign student Deiane from Spin (standing), having a great afternoon under the trees.

Grapes are Growing on the Hills of Lamorinda ... continued from page 1

Jim became interested in winegrowing through a friend who owns a winery, but he was also challenged with the maintenance of a 3-acre hillside where grass and weeds presented a fire hazard in the dry summer months. To solve the problem and fuel his interest in wine, Jim and his wife Leslie planted 1,500 pinot noir vines in 1999 and had their first wine produced in 2002. Jim chose pinot noir grapes, because he feels that Lafayette's climate with its cool evenings and hot, but not sweltering, days provides a good environment for this variety. Jim finds himself out working in his vineyard many evenings. "I work in the construction industry, and it can be stressful. I find the 15 to 20 hours a week that I spend pruning and training my vines calming, pacifying."

One of the goals of the Lamorinda Winegrower's Association is to obtain a specific Lamorinda appellation. The appellation would officially designate Lamorinda as a winegrowing region and provide a significant marketing advantage for the sale of grapes and wines from the area. "I think the growing conditions in the area actually are quite good for growing top-notch wine grapes. The quality of the fruit that I've found so far has been

exceptional," notes Dave Parker.

The group is also committed to sustainability. "Although we have to use practices to make winegrowing economically feasible, we try to treat the vines and grapes as naturally as we can and avoid introducing unnatural elements into the environment," states Dave. And of course, the group's meetings always start and end with a wine tasting to provide members with an opportunity to further their wine education and to socialize.

As he looks out the window at the vines growing down the hillside that stretches below his home in Moraga, Joao Magalhaes has a fabulous view and an interesting vision. Upon completing the construction of his Spanish-styled home about five years ago, Joao planted 430 vines with the intention of growing enough grapes to make wine to enjoy with his friends and family. Although he finds that he often has "to share" his grapes with the birds in the area, Joao's vineyard yielded 40 bottles of pinot noir in 2006.

But Joao's plans for winegrowing have blossomed. An early member of the Winegrower's Association, Joao is working on the concept of developing a wine tasting room and small-scale wine production facility in Moraga, pos-



Wine barrels at Dave Parker's Winery



sibly located near the Moraga Shopping Center. He envisions a pedestrian-friendly complex with a small inn or bed and breakfast and other hospitality businesses to compliment the production facility and benefit the entire community. According to Joao, the proposal has received positive feedback from several members of the community, and as Lamorinda develops as a boutique winegrowing region, Joao sees the proposal as a perfect fit. "We are adding value to a treasure."



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