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Wine Tasting for Saint Mary's Seniors

By Sophie Braccini



Picture a lovely spring evening, nicely dressed young adults sipping wine and discussing art at an Andy Warhol exhibit, or mingling under the trees of a sunny patio. You might think it a gathering of young executives at an art gallery in San Francisco. It is in fact one of the last educational experiences offered to graduating seniors by Saint Mary's College (SMC), a lesson in "savoir-vivre" and world etiquette.

"This is one last chance for the art gallery to expose the seniors to art and wish them well as they graduate and move on," said Heidi Donner of the Hearst Gallery, who organized the event, "we hope they will remember that local museums in each community are reaching out to young people with networking and art evenings that they might want to take advantage of. At the same time, we are giving them a lesson on responsible drinking and appreciation of wine." Donner explained that this year's event was nearly canceled due to budgetary constraints; then Tim Farley, SMC's Director of Community and Government Relations who knows just about everyone, put her in touch with the Lamorinda Winegrowers Association about a week before the event.

Students taste Lamorinda wines on the patio of the Hearst Gallery Photo Sophie Braccini

"We were very happy to be able to help, even on very short notice," said Bill Massarweh, President of the Association. The Moraga

resident and winemaker put together a short presentation for the students. Representing the Association were Susan and Sal Captain, the owners of Captain Vineyard and Bill Scanlin of Deer Hill Vineyard; Mary Massarweh poured for Lafayette winemakers Mel and Diana Haas, and Bill Massarweh poured some wine of his own.

For many students, it was an introduction to how to drink wine. "First, let's start with how you hold a glass," said Massarweh, "you see, I hold mine by the stem, not covering the whole goblet with my fingers." According to the winemaker, this tradition allows for glasses to remain spotless, permitting an undisturbed vision of a wine's color and depth. Massarweh continued by explaining that glasses should be only partially filled, allowing the drinker to swirl the wine in the glass. "Wine has been confined in a bottle for a long time needs to stretch and come in contact with the air; that's why we swirl it before we can really smell all of its bouquet." Then he explained why he inhaled air as he took in his first sip, "this allows the wine to spray into the mouth and touch all the different taste buds at different places on the tongue."

Students were invited to go from table to table to sample the different wines. Some commented that the experience allowed them to taste the wine more fully, being able to distinguish between different grapes, noticing how different alcohol contents created longer "legs" on the side of the glass after swirling the wine. "This is a once in a lifetime experience," said a young woman who asked winemaker Susan Captain if she could plan a field trip to her winery with some fellow students.

During the evening Donner noted, "Some students take a break and go inside to see the Warhol exhibit, then come back for more tasting; all are having a good time while in fact very little actual drinking is taking place." She thanked the Winegrowers Association for its generosity and added that this was the first time that students could meet the actual winemakers. "This adds to their experience, and most of them did not know that right here, in Lamorinda, people are growing grapes and making excellent wine," Donner concluded.

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