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## Lamorinda Wine Growers Mean Business

By Sophie Braccini



Chris Avant discussed future plans for The Barn at a recent open house. Photo Sophie Braccini

is turned into wine that can be sold under its own label), one more in process, and two have licenses to sell their wine." That will soon make eight different Lamorinda wines sold to the general market. The group as a whole counts 75 members, all grape growers with properties ranging in size from less than half an acre to 10 acres.

The first step is to get a new logo and slogan that will, according to Haag, give the group a fresh look. "We also want to showcase the Moraga Barn (at the corner of Viader and Country Club Drive in Moraga) as a destination for people to participate in local wine tasting, meet the winemakers and growers and purchase local wines," she adds.

LWGA will continue to be part of local events, including the Moraga Pear and Wine Festival on September 24. The new Board plans to consistently reach out to community groups such as garden clubs and chambers of commerce to find synergies and establish partnerships. It plans to work with cities to continue to be valued members of the community and good neighbors.

The ultimate goal of the new Board is to establish Lamorinda as an American Viticulture Area (AVA), a federal designation. "If we can get this, it will change everything," believes Captain, "An AVA would really brand our wines and grapes and increase the value of land in the area. But it is a long and complex process that needs to be documented. We have started to work on it."

The specificity that the group is planning to highlight in their application is the unique Lamorinda climate - with less lingering fog than on the other side of the tunnel, and cooler summer temperatures than neighboring Walnut Creek. "We need a wine climate specialist from UC Davis to conduct the study," says Captain adding that the group has already started to talk to the university and people are getting involved and offering help. "This is not going to happen overnight," warns the new President, who is nonetheless infused with enthusiasm for the project.

There are other aspects to LWGA's mission. "We need to educate our growers on best practices to grow sustainably," says Captain, "for example, the hills and the soil here are perfect for grapes; it does not need to be flattened or fertilized." The whole membership meets quarterly to listen to an expert in one of the different aspects of making wine. "We want to encourage suburban wine grape growing in Lamorinda," she adds, "we are part of this community, we want to participate in its beauty, and by promoting the most environmentally and economically safe farming method, we will also improve the overall grape quality and flavor."

The group also continues to maintain a strong tradition of social activities. "Once a month, we meet at the Moraga Barn, taste wines, mingle and discuss some of our every day issues," says Haag, "for example, how to grow grapes with the abundant wildlife in the area!"

For more information, go to [www.lamorindawinegrowers.com](http://www.lamorindawinegrowers.com).

You could say that Susan Captain and Carol Haag are nothing short of powerhouses. These two women, recently elected the new President and Secretary, respectively, of the Lamorinda Wine Growers Association (LWGA), are taking on the mission to make Lamorinda the next wine destination in the East Bay, with the support of the group's board and membership. Both professionals and well connected, Captain and Haag understand what it takes and are gathering the means to reach their ambitious goal.

"It has always been in our mission statement that one of our association's objectives was to 'promote the Lamorinda community and its status as a winegrowing region, enhancing the marketability of Lamorinda-grown grapes and Lamorinda-made wine,'" said Captain a few weeks after her election as President of LWGA, "but along the way, the social aspect of the group took over and we lost sight of how important it is to market the unique persona of our region." She believes that the new Board is reaffirming the original idea now that the size of the group makes the objective more realistic.

"Our group has grown so much over the past few years," says Haag, "We now have five bonded wineries (licensed facilities where harvest

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