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Business

Deer Hill Winery Takes Over Owner's Basement

By A. K. Carroll



Photos courtesy Bill Scanlin



Sometimes a little hobby turns into a big one, expanding its influence as it takes over your free time, your resources and even your home. This has been the experience of Lafayette resident and owner of Deer Hill Wines, Bill Scanlin, whose backyard vineyard turned into a project that turned into a business that is taking over his home.

"We wanted a place (where) we could entertain," Scanlin said of the hosting room that he recently added to the ground level of his house. The room was six months in the making, which seems relatively quick when you consider the final result. The room is rustic and dimly lit with marble counters, beige stone walls and large arched doorways.

Though the wet bar is stocked with sparkling glass goblets and there are murals of vineyards painted in the alcoves and racks of bottles alongside one wall, Scanlin insists that it isn't a designated wine room.

"It's not a public tasting room," he clarified. "I have to get to know

somebody before I have them over." Some of this is on account of city regulations and some of it is simply fitting to the level of Scanlin's winemaking, which is currently something between a hobby and a business.

Scanlin planted his vines shortly after moving into his current home in 1998. When a friend of Scanlin's visited his new property for the first time, he remarked that it would be ideal for growing grapes. "I thought 'what the heck?' It sounds like fun," said Scanlin. "Then you start to get into it."

Scanlin primarily grows cabernet sauvignon, with 600 vines covering roughly three quarters of his 1.5 acres. He also plants patches of cab franc and merlot, which he uses for blending his 95-percent cab. Scanlin's wine is "field-blended," which means that he does little to manipulate it once it has been crushed and fermented. "It is what it is," said Scanlin. And it is pretty good for an in-home production.

But like any hobby, Scanlin

started out slowly and had to learn from his mistakes. He began making wine with a few friends just for fun, and eventually his own vineyard started producing fruit. "I had my mistakes," said Scanlin. "I lost a few years for different reasons. I remember pumping a couple hundred gallons of it down the drain."

There were also the infamous Lamorinda deer to contend with. "I had a lot problems in the beginning with deer breaking in and ruining the crop," said Scanlin. "So I didn't get a crop for maybe four years." Despite this fact, Scanlin's label bears an emblem of the animal. "I finally conquered them," he said.

Scanlin is a member of the Lamorinda Wine Growers Association, a group of 90-100 grape growers that formed in 2005. Only a handful have bonded wineries, including Scanlin. "It kind of legitimizes the hobby," he remarked. "I just thought it would be a good thing to do."

The association is currently pushing for Lamorinda to gain approval as

its own American Viticultural Area (AVA). Right now they are recognized as a part of the San Francisco Bay Area, but that doesn't account for Lamorinda's unique terroir and climate, which Scanlin compares to Napa, with cool nights and warm days. The AVA approval, which should go through by April 1, is exciting for a winemaker like Scanlin. "We get to say there's something special about Lamorinda – the soil, the weather – there's something special about the wine in this area."

Like most hobbies, winemaking is one that Scanlin has scaled up to slowly, but surely. "I've gone to classes. I've talked to people. I've done a lot of reading," said Scanlin. He gets help with some of the physical labor, but calls all of the shots on the overall process. Scanlin describes his wine as drinkable and hearty. "I really like full-bodied, rich wines," he said. "I try to make my wines have that characteristic." He and his wine have made appearances at the Lafayette wine show, the Orinda

Trivia Bee and other local events.

"I haven't pushed it yet," said Scanlin. "I still need to go out and get this put into stores and in restaurants around here." Deer Hill Wines isn't his priority right now, but like the vines in his yard and the number of bottles on his wine rack, the hobby is growing on him.

"If I can produce wine that can command a high price, that'd be great," said Scanlin, who considers wine as a potential retirement business. "I'd like to make and be known for having a really good boutique wine that everyone's after. But I'm not that widely known yet."

Scanlin's dreams for Deer Hill Wines are much like his dreams for the new space in his home, where he envisions winemakers' dinners, corporate business meetings, and social gatherings in the future. "I think a lot of possibilities can happen."

Lamorinda Weekly business articles are intended to inform the community about local business activities, not to endorse a particular company, product or service.

business briefs

If you have a business brief to share, please contact storydesk@lamorindaweekly.com

Reve Bistro Opens in Lafayette

960 Moraga Road
(925) 385-0793 – www.revebistro.com

Executive chef Paul Magu and his wife, Laura, opened Reve Bistro at the former site of Chevalier on Moraga Road in Lafayette. Touted as "your classic everyday French bistro," 5-star chef Magu plans to "pay homage to the French comfort food he fell in love with as a boy growing up in Paris."

Lafayette Green Awards Nominations Requested

The annual Lafayette Awards of Environmental Excellence, more commonly known as the Lafayette Green Awards, recognize outstanding efforts that contribute to a more sustainable community and help the City achieve its environmental goals. Winners are selected by Lafayette's Environmental Task Force using the following criteria: How successfully does the candidate's activities reduce their footprint (current and future)? How much has the candidate's activities helped achieve the city's environmental goals? How much has the candidate's activities inspired others in the community? Can it be replicated? The nomination form can be downloaded from the city of Lafayette website, filled in and submitted online at www.lovelafayette.org. Deadline March 9.

Zach Smith Named January Moraga Employee of the Month

Waiter and barista Zach Smith of Home/made kitchen café and bakery is the Moraga Employee of the Month for January. Since the restaurant opened in 2014, Smith has played an important role as a waiter and barista while also serving as the eatery's beverage manager. He has a popular following among patrons of the popular restaurant. "Zach is a superb representative of Home/made kitchen," said owner and manager Gayle Somers. "He has a gift for remembering names and peoples' preferences when they come for lunch or dinner. He's a big part of our success due to his great customer service." The Moraga Rotary and Chamber of Commerce will present Smith with his award and gift cards to Safeway and TJ Maxx in Moraga at an upcoming Moraga Rotary lunch in February.



From left: Chamber President Wendy Scheck, Zach Smith, Home/made kitchen owner Gayle Somers, and Rotary President Roger Gregory. Photo provided

News from the three Chambers of Commerce

Lafayette

Business Persons of the Year Dinner and State of the City Address at 6 p.m. Friday, Jan. 29 at the Lafayette Park Hotel and Spa, 3287 Mt. Diablo Blvd. For reservations, visit <http://www.lafayettechamber.org/event/2016-business-persons-of-the-year-dinner/>.

Ribbon Cutting for Farmyard Darlings at 5 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 11 at 20 Lafayette Circle.

The kickoff event of the Lamorinda Business Forum (formerly Entrepreneur's Club) will be held at 5:30 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 11 at the Bank of the West, 3583 Mt. Diablo Blvd. Attorney Asha Wilkerson will discuss "Small Business Law – What You Need to Know."

Monthly Mixer at 5:30 p.m. Wednesday, Feb. 24 at Las Trampas, 3460 Lana Lane.

Coffee with the Mayor, Mark Mitchell, at 8 a.m. Friday, Feb. 26 in the Chamber Conference Room.

Moraga

Save the date for the 2016 Business Person of the Year Dinner at 6 p.m. Tuesday, Feb. 23 at the Moraga Country Club. Cost: \$50 per person. For information, email Kathe Nelson at kathe@moragachamber.org.

Valentine-themed Ribbon Cutting for Natasha Grasso Jewelry at 4 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 4 at 386 Park Street, Suite A.

Orinda

Ribbon Cutting at 7 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 4 at Cine Cuvée in Theatre Square.

Outgoing president Sylvia Jorgensen, and retiring executive director Candy Kattenburg will be recognized at the Awards and Recognition Luncheon at noon on Friday, Feb. 12 at the Orinda Country Club. Five chamber awards will be presented to the Business Person of the Year, the Small Business of the Year, the New Business of the Year, the Chamber Member of the Year and the Ambassador of the Year. For reservations, visit Orindachamber.org.

Save the date for "A Night of Comedy," featuring headliner Brad Williams from Showtime's highest rated comedy special, "Fun Size," and Ben Feldmen at 7:30 p.m. Friday, March 4 at the Orinda Theatre. For ticket and event information, visit www.orindachamber.org, or call (925) 254-3909.

Celebrating an Anniversary?

If your business is celebrating a significant anniversary (5, 10, 20 years or more ...) send us a photo of your business, the owner(s) or the staff with specific information about your business and what you're celebrating, and we'll include it in an upcoming issue.