



The BUGLE

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Ah, Vino! Wheel out the press, its harvest time

By Steve Ayers

Staff Reporter

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It is not the kind of harvest where you see machinery grinding its way slowly across a field.

It is a much more ancient process -- one that still requires the hand of man (or woman).

And it is becoming more prevalent in the Verde Valley with each passing year.

We're talking about the wine grape harvest.

Starting in mid-August valley vineyards began harvesting what will be a record crop. As will be the case next year, and the next year and for the foreseeable future.

"This is rapidly becoming a major industry for the valley," said Barbara Predmore, who along with her husband Bob, own Alcantara Vineyards and Winery in Camp Verde.

VVN/Steve Ayers
Ask any wine maker and they will tell you, you can never predict when a crop is ready for harvest, but one the grapes reach a specific level of sugar, known as the Brix level, the harvest is on and the work will go 24 hours a day until the fruit is processed.

Calculating an average yield of three to four tons of grapes per acre, this year's harvest should bring in about 40 tons. That number does not include the valley's oldest vineyard, Echo Canyon in Page Springs that is currently for sale.

Next year the tonnage is expected to rise to 75 tons.

According to Rod Snapp, owner of Javalina Leap Vineyard in Page Spring, there are at least four more vineyards that will be producing in the next three years and more that are being planned.

Snapp, who also plants vineyards for customers said he is aware of acreage planted for Hart Ranch Vineyards, Cornville Ranch Vineyard, Sycamore Canyon Vineyard and Clear Creek Vineyard. All are Verde Valley vineyards and all are scheduled to be up and running by 2010.

Existing wineries such as the Predmore's Alcantara and Snapp's Javalina Leap are planning to expand their vineyards over the next few years.



Page Springs Winery, which has yet to harvest their four acres in the Verde Valley, is also harvesting the 60 acres they also have planted in Willcox. That crop is making its way to the Verde Valley to be processed into wine.

"By the time it's all harvested we will process about 170 tons this year," said Lisa Rhodes of Page Springs.

VVN/Steve Ayers
Bob and Barbara
Predmore check the
status of there first-
ever vintage Merlot.
The Predmores,
owners of Alcantara
Vineyard and Winery
in Camp Verde started
harvesting on Aug. 9
and finished on the
23rd. The entire
process is done by
hand.

She said she expects they will harvest their Verde Valley grapes ready in the next couple weeks.

For most of the other winemakers, this year's crop is already in barrels, making its magical transformation.

Even if winemakers don't always agree on when the grapes are ready they agree on one thing -- when the grapes are ready, the grapes are ready.

Unlike most crops, such as corn or alfalfa, where the harvest date can be marked on a calendar, wine grapes tend to flex their independence.

"It varies according to the variety, the climate and the individual tastes of the winemaker," said Mike Pearce of Oak Creek Vineyards in Page Springs.

Pearce said that his crop was about three weeks earlier than expected this year. He attributes his early harvest to the hot days and the more than expected monsoon rain.

"My tastes run to higher alcohol and a bit chewier," said Pearce, "When the brix level hits 25, I start picking."

Vintners use a traditional handheld devise called a refractometer to help them determine when it's time. The device allows the winemaker to measure the sugar content in the grape, also known as the brix level.

The varieties being grown in the Verde Valley are also as varied as the crop is abundant.

Merlot, Zinfandel, Chardonnay, Syrah, Cabernet Pfeffer, Grenache, Mourverde, Pinot Grigio, Petite Verdot, Tempranillo, and Sauvignon Blanc are among the successful vines gracing the valley floor (some of its walls).

As varied as the vines are and the individual tastes of the Verde Valley winemakers, they all have one thing in common -- a commitment to quality.

"We are different. That's for sure," said Barbara Predmore, "But we are all committed to quality -- not just something that is acceptable, we want to excel. We want to put the Verde Valley on the map when it comes to great wines."

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