

2005 may bring major harvest for the County's winegrowers

BILL HUNT
SPECIAL TO THE COUNTY

Prince Edward County's burgeoning wine industry has been making a lot of inroads during recent years, but Richard Johnston thinks this season could be the breakthrough year.

Johnston, past president of the Prince Edward County Winegrowers Association, said mistakes have been learned from and changes made that could see harvests rise from 70 tons of grapes in 2004 to between 400 and 600 tons this year, although it will probably be closer to 400 "because there are so many things that could go wrong." For example, Johnston and his wife, Vida Zalnieriunas owners of By Chadsey's Cairns Winery and Vineyard in Hillier, expected 24 to 25 tons last year and ended up producing 13 tons of grapes.

The association includes several vintners from Lennox & Addington County. The larger harvest should occur this season because the county's winters are colder than those in the Niagara region and wine growers here — in most cases, for the first time — completely covered their vines with dirt, rather than just the graft. Temperatures below -20 C kill the top of the vines and it's not uncommon for the county to reach such lows. Johnston and a couple other vintners have been burying their vines for several years, thanks to advice from Martin Gremmich, who sold Johnston some vines in 1999 and 2000. But most local vintners didn't follow suit until last year, with the exceptions of himself and Long Dog Winery.

"This is the first year that the bulk of people have tried to lay down their canes and cover (them) with dirt," said Johnston. "On the whole, I'd say this is a good test year. We've now got two thirds of (our) vines off the ground."

Johnston noted vintners will lose some of their crop to rot because burying them isn't natural, and others don't cover them enough.

Johnston was president of the PECWA for the previous three years and when he followed Gremmich's advice, many local wine growers thought burying the entire vine unnecessary. That belief was accentuated by the fact the winter of 2000-2001 was unusually mild, therefore less damage was done here than should have been expected.

With most or all area wine growers now covering their vines, Johnston said the harvest should be significantly higher, although not 100 per cent of its potential, because last summer's high rainfall likely increased diseases. To prevent frost from affecting the vines, last fall he filled oil drums — cut in half — with wood and lit them throughout his vineyard at night to keep the air moving and prevent the frost from settling.

"We should know by the end of May what we call primary bud survival," he said.

Growers in Prince Edward County "only produced 70 tons of grapes last year. So let's say we only produced two tons per acre. I would say we should be up in the hundreds of tons of grapes this year." He'll have a more accurate idea of the amount of grapes produced in June, when the vines yield their clusters.

In 1999, there were about three wine

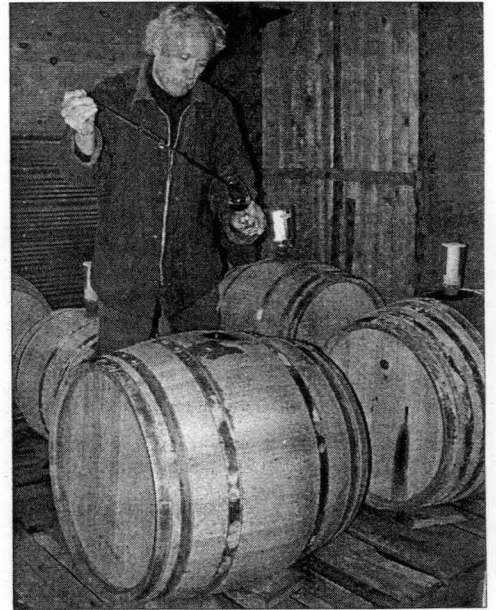
growers in the county. The region now has between 35 and 40 vineyards on approximately 600 acres, said Johnston. Those 600 acres have 15 different soil types, compared to four or five in the Niagara region. Also, the county is based on limestone, which helps produce better quality wines because water sits on top of the stone and feeds the vines.

Johnston expects his Chadsey's Cairns Winery to produce 15 different wines for sale this year, including Reisling from past years, and 12 of them will have been made completely with county grapes (he still buys some grapes from Gremmich). Other growers are also using fewer grapes from other regions.

"So we're making the transition (for our wines) to be mostly from the county," he said. "They're all aiming in that direction and there'll be some local product from everybody."

The association is trying to get more transparency with regard to where the grapes used in county wines originate. The PECWA has labels stating "100 per cent County Grown" but not all vintners in Prince Edward are members of the association, although they market their wines as coming from the county. The association's goal however, is to have the region's wines known for their unique and varied tastes.

"It will be the distinctiveness of our wines



Johnston says it will be the distinctiveness of County wines that people will come looking for. Bill Hunt photo

that people come (for)," he said. "Because we have all these different soils we grow from, I think it will be a wonderful variety of tastes that come out of the county."

Another vineyard is being opened in Hillier this year by Norm Hardy, making for about seven in that ward alone, and Johnston expects the businesses to produce "a wonderful Pinot Noir because of the similar soils to those in France."

As for county residents worried about the region losing its rural quaintness, Johnston doesn't worry about that.

"The fact that it is island-like guarantees it's not going to be over-developed," he said. Because the businesses are still agricultural, "we're not really changing the nature of the style of life." 05-13-05

Grange earns Ontario Wine Medal

JUDY FRASER
SPECIAL TO THE COUNTY

The Grange of Prince Edward Estate Winery's 2003 Trumpour's Mill Gamay Noir has been awarded the Niagara Grape & Wine Festival Gamay Award bronze medal at the 10th annual Ontario Wine Awards.

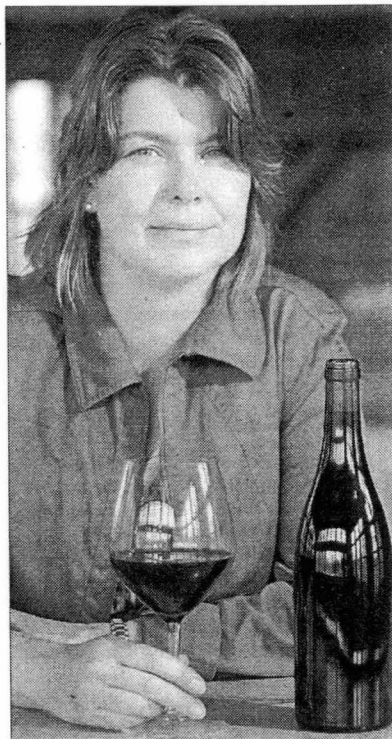
The Ontario Wines Awards is an annual event, founded and hosted by notable Canadian wine writer Tony Aspler. This year's competition drew a record-breaking 443 entries in 27 categories. The Grange award represents the first of its kind to a Prince Edward County winery.

Caroline Granger, President and CEO of The Grange of Prince Edward Estate Winery, was on hand to receive the award last Friday evening in Niagara-on-the-Lake.

"This is a tremendous honour for The Grange wines and a significant milestone for all wineries in Prince Edward County," Granger said. "We are absolutely delighted to have participated in an award process that celebrates Ontario VQA wines. The 2003 Gamay Noir was our first vintage, and it has developed very well. This is encouraging and bodes well for the future of our other vintages."

Granger was passionate in her praise of Grange winemaker Jeff Innes.

"Jeff has really done an outstanding job in bringing our wines to this point so early. The Grange is a small boutique winery compared to the large commercial operations of some of the Niagara wineries," Granger said. "This award is a testament to Jeff's talents and commitment to the highest standards of winemaking."



Caroline Granger

The Grange of Prince Edward Estate Winery is dedicated to producing delicious quality wines. As a company The Grange respects local heritage, its history of agriculture and its Loyalist legacy. They have committed themselves to maintaining historical authenticity and winemaking following traditional Burgundian techniques. 05-13-05

FARMER'S FACE OF THE WEEK



Walter and Val Miller
Our Own Dairy Farm

1606 Danforth Road
Hillier
613-399-5649
PELTON GAZETTE
05/13/05

Walter Miller is proud to be the first generation on his Hillier farm. He worked on his uncle George Emlaw's South Marysburgh farm before going off to university but wasn't sure he would actually be a farmer.

In 1982, he and Val began raising a few beef cattle on rented land. "We moved eight times in 12 years," says Walter laughing. They went from freezer beef to heifers to dairy cows and bought the Hillier farm in 1997. "It had a good barn. I don't think I even looked at the house." Now they have 130 cows, with 60 milking animals and grow 180 acres of corn and alfalfa to feed them.

Despite the challenges of border closing and bizarre weather, Walter is tough and optimistic. Walter and several other County dairy farmers are directors and shareholders in the Black River Cheese Factory. He believes in the future of "artisan" cheese, the factory's favourite old cheddars and new products being developed, and he loves this County. He gestures across his land and asks, "Where else could you want to be?"