



PHOTO/ANDREW PALAMARCHUK

Brothers Dave, Mike and Frank Whittamore expanded their berry farm business to include wine making

Whittamores create toast of the town

BY PATRICK CASEY
Staff Writer

A chance meeting between Dave Whittamore and Brian Moreau has created a new business alliance that's quickly satisfying the palate of York Region wine lovers.

Along with his brothers Frank and Mike, Whittamore operates Whittamore's Farm in Markham, a 120-hectare property that's been in the family's name since 1802. It has grown over the last 40 years to become Ontario's largest pick-your-own country farm market.

Moreau, meanwhile, is a former Canadian National employee who dabbled with his first wine-making kit as a kid and then left his job seven years ago to dedicate himself to creating wine on a full-time basis.

Together, the pair have opened Whittamore's Farm Winery, and Moreau will use the farm's 32 hectares of strawberries, raspberries, gooseberries and currants to create a new line of fruit wines.

"I met Brian during an Ontario berry growers' conference and we just seemed to hit it off," Whittamore explained during a recent tour of the farm and winery, where Moreau has more than \$50,000 in manufacturing equipment on site.

"There has been quite a bit of growth surrounding fruit wine during the last few years and we had been shipping our fruit to various wineries. This is another draw for people to come to our farm market and we already are getting people in here that really like what we have. We're just always trying to do a little bit more."

Retailing between \$7 and \$25 a bottle, Moreau has been busy bottling the likes of a red Baco Noir, a house blend, a dry cherry blossom and a sweet white Ice '98 blend that's 9.5 per cent alcohol.

And with the help of his wife Dawn and father-in-law Vaughn Madill, they expect to produce more than 30,000 bottles before the spring thaw.

"As soon as you mention fruit wine to people, they believe it's sweet. However, I make mine dry, and if there is a demand,

then I'll sweeten it up," pointed out Moreau, a Bradford resident, who moved his facility to Markham from the Holland Marsh. "It tastes just like a chardonnay."

"In Europe, fruit wine is a close second to grape wine and it has really caught on in the United States. But you're lucky to find one or two brands in Canadian liquor stores. We always seem to be a little bit behind in terms of accepting new things, including fruit wines."

But acceptance is definitely in the wind, considering there were just two fruit wineries in Ontario five years ago, compared to 22 today.

"The Whittamores are good at many things, but they had no experience making wines," added Moreau, who was overseeing the bottling of a peach wine. "They tried my wines and appreciated their certain qualities. It really is a perfect marriage."

"We're doing a little bit of recipe development and we'll have 14 different types of fruit wine on the shelf by the end of the season. I'll put my grape wine up against anybody in the Niagara region, but fruit wine is a nice alternative."

To satisfy the Liquor Control Board of Ontario, Whittamore spent nearly \$30,000 in renovations before receiving his fruit wine licence, including constructing Moreau's production facility and erecting a small wine store within his farm market.

The licence also allows the business to sell 20 per cent of its products as traditional grape wine.

Whittamore admits the business has come a long way from the days of his ancestors, who originally purchased the property in 1804 before it was turned into a small strawberry patch in the early 1950s.

"People want to try something new and one of the reasons why fruit wines are becoming popular is because there are no artificial flavours. Certain wines appeal to different palates and people soon get their favourites," he said.

"It's like anything else: if you produce a good product, people will like it and people will come back. If you are coming in to pick up some fruit or a pie, people will often pick up a bottle of wine, especially if they can't find it in the liquor store."

Farce tackled with style and energy

BY ISOBEL THOMPSON
Correspondent

Energy there was aplenty at Markham's theatre last week with Markham Little Theatre's production of Michael Frayne's farce *Noises Off*.

The actors needed every ounce of energy they possessed to cope with Frayne's clever farce about a group of actors and the show in which they were involved.

The first act showed the exhausted actors at the technical rehearsal where everything goes wrong. This is followed by the same act being performed before an audience a month later, only this time from backstage, and if that wasn't enough for the stage crew to manage, the set was turned back to the audience side to show the same performance after a three-month run.

Farce comedy requires a tremendous amount of rushing about and dashing through doors. This set had four or five doors upstairs and I think more than that downstairs.

Director Gloria Thomas had to keep the action going and timed to the second. This she managed splendidly.

On opening night, the actors took a little time to get into gear because they were concentrating on their English accents, but once they got going they did a great job and managed all sorts of escapades, such as falling down stairs, breaking windows and avoiding axes with amazing timing and, no doubt, a lot of practice.

Michelle Browne played the housekeeper, Mrs. Clackett, and was a delight to watch. Her walk, her facial expressions and her sheer exuberance were the centre from which all the actors got their energy.

John Grammatikos and Susan Stanford as Garry Lejeune and Brooke Ashton had some very funny moments, and Grammatikos jumping up the stairs with legs entangled in telephone wire brought the house down.

Adrian Falconer as the earnest actor who insisted on an explanation for all his lines and moves was very good, and was well-matched by Linda Muir playing Belinda.

Kristine Browne as Poppy Ashton the put-upon assistant stage manager gave a nice performance and her scenes in the second act were particularly well done.

Alan White played Lloyd Dallas the director and he was good; but in the first act I would have liked to have seen him better lit and raised on a dais where he would have been more in control of the rehearsal.

Terry Browne as the alcoholic actor and Mike Gimera as the hard pressed stage manager both did good jobs.

This production depended on a very skilled backstage crew, so I would particularly like to recognize them: the director, producer, lighting set, sound and costume designers, the stage manager and assistants, properties and all the stage hands. They had a big job to do and they did it very smoothly and professionally.

'Group of Six' exhibits work

After exhibiting their art in solo show over the past 20 year, six artists joined together to become the Cottage Country Artists.

The artists — also dubbed the Group of Six — will stage their third show at the Kathleen Gormley McKay Art Centre in Unionville until Nov. 28.

Stouffville's Victor Sanders and Kent Taylor, along with four artists from outside York Region, will be joined by a seventh guest artist.

Sanders began his career as a professional artist in 1989, working in oil and covering a broad range of subject matter, from landscapes to florals and the human form.

Taylor works mainly in pen and ink, sometimes making use of coloured inks in addition to black.

Adding to the collected works of the Cottage Country Artists — they all have summer homes in Muskoka — are watercolours, soft pastels, acrylics and sculptures.

The gallery is closed Mondays and Tuesdays. For hours of operation or more information, call 477-9511, ext. 222.

Randall celebrates milestone

If you're part of the Randall Public School community, mark Dec. 16 on your calendar.

The school is celebrating its 10th anniversary, and all former students, parents and staff members are invited to help mark the occasion.

Relive the memories and see what's new at the Markham school. Photos of the school taken during the past decade will be on display, along with students' art. Guests and current students are urged to drop by to record their favourite memories on the memory wall.

The open house will be Thursday, Dec. 16, 4:30 to 6 p.m.

There's a new car on the block

Kia, with one outlet in Markham, has opened a second shop in Newmarket

BY ROY GREEN
Staff Writer

The new guy in town, automotive-wise, is facing a tough challenge in a very competitive market.

Kia of Newmarket has opened for business in a former auto repair shop on Leslie Street, bringing two more car models to an already bustling market.

"This is the second Kia outlet in York Region," said Brad Valentini, sales manager of Kia of Newmarket. "There's one in Markham and soon there will be another in Richmond Hill."

"We've only been open a few days and people have been calling about the cars, saying they knew them in Europe and they are very interested in them."

Kia, a Korean automaker, enters the Canadian market with two compact cars aimed at the lower end of the market — the Sephia sedan and the Sportage sport utility vehicle.

The Sephia ranges from \$12,995 to \$16,995, and the

Sportage, a true off-road vehicle, goes from \$20,995 to \$26,995, Valentini said. "They're good cars at the compact end with excellent warranties."

That competition, said Valentini, includes the Toyota Corolla and the Honda Civic. "That's the market they're targeting and, option for option, they're up to \$5,000 cheaper."

But John Chapman, co-owner of Aurora Toyota, isn't worried about price comparisons.

"Honda and Toyota have established a benchmark. Why would I buy a no-name brand for just a little bit less?" Chapman said. "If it's half price, OK, but just a little less, I think I'd prefer the real thing."

Kia, which began as a bicycle parts manufacturer in 1945, is well-established in Europe. The company arrived in the US last year, selling more than 100,000 vehicles. Majority ownership in the company was acquired by another Korean automaker, Hyundai, earlier this year.