

Award-winning wines hard to find at LCBO

BY PATRICK MANGION
Staff Writer

Vaughan is once again home to some of Ontario's best wines.

But as home-grown winemakers gathered to celebrate their success at last weekend's annual Cuveé awards, conversation centred on the ongoing dispute over shelf space with the Liquor Control Board of Ontario.

Last Saturday's event, considered the Oscars of Ontario winemaking, added three more awards to a long list of accomplishments for Magnotta, the province's third largest wine producer.

Cilento Wines, also in Vaughan, took top honours for one of its chardonnays at last weekend's awards.

"We're always looking for an opportunity to showcase our wines, so I'm happy," said Rossana Magnotta, who opened the winery with husband Gabe 16 years ago.

While the company boasts 180 varieties of wine, two are carried in LCBO stores provincewide and another five are featured on specific occasions, Ms Magnotta said.

With seven retail locations and an online store, Magnotta has made headway in the highly competitive industry.

However, the Magnottas still feel they aren't getting a fair shake from a cash-rich LCBO, which favours imported wines from Australia and France for prime shelf space, rather than taking care of its own, Ms Magnotta said.

"There's no way to get equal placing. It's very expensive real estate (on LCBO shelves)," Ms Magnotta said.

However, LCBO officials have repeatedly said they have a responsibility to taxpayers to ensure the government-run corporation remains successful.

To do that, they must meet consumer demand by carrying the most popular products, many of which are imported.

Approval of a proposal to open boutique outlets with wines not carried by the LCBO would help domestic wineries that need it most, Ms Magnotta said.


The LCBO does monthly promotions for Ontario wines and there is a program designed to give small wineries more time to meet quotas.

CONVOY PROTEST



STAFF PHOTO/STEVE SOMERVILLE

A convoy of tractors crawl south on Hwy. 404 near Hwy. 407 on the way to a Queen's Park rally yesterday. Ontario farmers are protesting "excessive regulations and over-legislation".



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