

November 13, 2006

The regular attendance of people at meetings is never an assurance of progress. Witness the recent legislative impasses or, more locally, the Dundee Bypass. Too often, organizations lose their way by not rotating in new members who supply new ideas and energy. Without that influx of creativity, the membership eventually becomes polarized and entrenched.

I can say, however, that I have been part of four organizations over the years that have had a profound impact on our community. Those organizations would be: Carlton's Visioning Committee, Carlton's Walk in the Park, Salud and the Yamhill-Carlton American Viticultural Area.

The Carlton Visioning Committee came to be through a state grant that provided a facilitator to help our small community develop a 20-year plan and the road map to get there. If you have driven through Carlton lately, you surely have noticed the dramatic landscape changes that are taking place, particularly the fabulous renovation of the downtown core. We are fortunate that the town is still untainted by the presence of small franchises. Instead, the rich agricultural heritage is still front and center, complete with grain elevators, silos and the rail depot.

Carlton's Walk in the Park began seven years ago when Sarah Crumly, an owner in the local quilt shop, asked me to help develop an outdoor wine / quilt show. Her hope was to attract people to Carlton who would, of course, fall in love with this original agricultural community. Once exposed, people would surely come back again and again to enjoy the area and support the local businesses. Though Sarah needed to move on, the seed she planted has become an event far greater than she anticipated. Walk in the Park is now in its fourth year, and it is without doubt, the finest assemblage of artists, local restaurants, local wineries, music and vintage vehicles in the Willamette Valley. As a non-profit group, Walk in the Park, is able to support the charities and service organizations of the two small communities of Carlton and Yamhill to the tune of \$35,000 annually. For a total population of 2,500, this is an amount that has substantial impact. Almost 10% of the population volunteers to pull off this first-class event that is attended by 5,000 people. Without the participation of the volunteers, this event could not happen. Walk in the Park is a perfect example of the tremendous power of an involved community.

Salud, now in its fifteenth year, is a partnership between the Oregon wine industry and Tuality Hospital in Hillsboro. Many of the seasonal workers who help the wine grape industry with harvest, pruning and thinning are only with us for short periods of time, and they are hired through labor contractors. Once finished with a specific practice for us, they move on to another commodity, whether it be strawberries, cherries or Christmas trees. Their short-term employment prevents our insuring them and the same applies to the other commodities. Salud's mission is to fill this void of medical care. Each year, over the second weekend of November, 42 of the top Pinot noir producers in Oregon auction just five cases of wine from the best barrel in their winery. This wine is available nowhere else. It was my honor to serve as a chair of the mission for the last three years, and though I no longer serve as a chair, I am still on the steering committee and no less committed to the cause. Almost three thousand individuals now receive care through the auspices of Salud. We owe a debt of gratitude to doctors, NW medical teams and the independent physicians and dentists who volunteer their services. When combined with the outstanding preventative care program of lead nurse, Leda Garside, the mission has had a profound impact on the health of the seasonal worker community and vastly reduced the critical care visits to emergency rooms that were so common in the past.

The group of folks that make up our vineyard and winery community are probably as diverse a group as one could find. There are those who barely scratch out a living each year and those that come to the industry with the ability to lose millions and not feel it. We have Microsoft programmers and aging hippies. Despite the vastly separate roads that people have traveled to join our industry, they have always shown a willingness to give their effort and dollars to put Oregon first and their own interests second.

The approval of our six new American Viticultural Areas is testament to this team attitude. It would have been easy to political postures to have torpedoed this process. It would have been expected that drawing lines in the sand would have led to enmity. Instead, the industry coalesced and did what no state has done before – creating, en masse, six new AVA's that define in detail the growing areas of the Willamette Valley. The debate began in 1995 and ended at that time with overriding concerns of lack of knowledge as to the traits of each Viticultural area and a concern that Oregon had been floating as one boat and that demarcating the region could be divisive. The effort was renewed in 2000 with the passing of a few years, the explosion of vineyard-designate wines had helped both consumers and the industry develop a cleaner

picture of specific regional traits. There was also a sense that the area was primed to explode with development and that the time was right, with fewer players involved, to move to agreement on where the liens would be drawn. Given the phenomenal increase in investment that occurred recently, this was prophetic.

The upshot is that the six new AVA's were agreed upon with few disagreements and sent on to the Federal Tax and Trade Bureau for approval. What is the value of these new AVA's? For established wineries, probably not much. The value really resides in the ability of new producers to provide insight to the expected aromas, flavors and textures of the wines they produce. As an example, if a bottling comes from the Yamhill-Carlton AVA, a consumer can expect to see similar qualities in the wine that they have purchased with Shea, WillaKenzie Estate, Renaissance or Savoya. This gives great insight as to what one would expect when you open that bottle.

All of the above attest to the value of community involvement. Great things happen when people come together, commit to a goal, stay focused when issues surface and stay the course until the goal is reached. The wine community has evolved from simply throwing dollars at causes to being personally involved with improving the plight of all who live here. The wagon train families are beginning to trust our motives and they should.

2006 was an amazing vintage. Following a less than perfect Spring and early Summer, we had 2 ½ months of drought and high temperatures. The effect of Global Warming, who knows? What we do know is that these are wines that will deliver lots of pleasure and isn't that the simple purpose of wine?

We hope to see each and every one of you over the Thanksgiving weekend. Our hours are 10am-4pm on Friday and Saturday.

Our best to you and your families this Holiday season!