

Running on Wine

At the sixth annual Oregon Wine Country Half Marathon, Aug. 8, runners from across the country — 55 percent from out of state — competed in a scenic course through the heart of Yamhill County.

Festivities began Aug. 6 at Ken Wright Cellars in Carlton, with a welcome reception led by sports announcer Whit Raymond. The next day, the pre-race dinner was held at The Allison Inn & Spa in Newberg. Filmmaker and 2016 Olympics hopeful Alexi Pappas discussed the power of running and the point when the mind overcomes the body.

Saturday morning, 1,500 athletes departed Stoller Family Vineyard in Dayton to start their 13.1-mile journey through the Dundee Hills, Yamhill-Carlton,

Chehalem Mountains and Ribbon Ridge AVAs with breathtaking views as the morning unfolded.

Two runners finished first: Greg Mitchell, of McMinnville, secured the men's best time with 1 hour, 10 minutes and 52 seconds; Lyndy Davis, of Portland, won the women's category with a running time of 1 hour 19 minutes and 17 seconds.

The race concluded in Carlton where 20 wineries from around the valley poured their wines for runners and their friends and family. Vendors and live music added to the festive atmosphere. Later in the afternoon, a reception was held at Gran Moraine, where athletes celebrated their victory with light bites and wine.



TOP: Friends celebrate the conclusion of the Oregon Wine Country Half Marathon in downtown Carlton on Aug. 8. **ABOVE:** Runners stay hydrated during the 13.1-mile run through rolling hills.



PHOTO BY FRANK MILLER

LEFT: Stephen Cary, Yamhill Valley Vineyards.

The IWC selected 25 judges from the New York and New Jersey area who were Burgundy experts, including sommeliers, distributors, retailers and writers. The judges were presented with 17 glasses of wine and given two tasks: 1) identify the origin of each glass; and 2) choose a top three. Cary's hope was that Oregon would place somewhere in the middle and be identified as a good value, given that the average price for a bottle of Oregon Pinot Noir was less than half that of the Burgundies. "If we come in 10th, we'll be in good shape," he remembers thinking.

Instead, the results far surpassed anything the most optimistic Oregon winemaker could have hoped. Oregon wines won the top three spots and five of the top seven. Yamhill Valley Vineyards was named the favorite wine, followed by Sokol Blosser Winery and Adelsheim Vineyards. The Eyrle Vineyards tied for fourth and Knudsen-Erath Vineyards tied for fifth. Identifying the origin of the wine proved a

The Game Changer

LOOKING BACK 30 YEARS TO THE BURGUNDY CHALLENGE

RACHAEL CRISTINE WOODY
AND RICH SCHMIDT

The year 2015 is known in the Oregon wine industry as the 50th anniversary of the initial plantings of Pinot Noir in the Willamette Valley. The year has been filled with celebrations and remembrances of the industry's early days, but fewer people know it is also the 30th anniversary of an event that would change the course of the industry and place Oregon permanently in the international wine scene.

The event has passed into legend as the "Burgundy Challenge." Staff at the Oregon Wine History Archive at Linfield College recently met with Stephen Cary — one of the driving forces behind the event — for his recollections. Cary, now the winemaker at Yamhill Valley Vineyards, was at the time the owner of Cary Oregon Wines, focusing on the marketing and distribution of Oregon wines.

Cary recalls how the event came about. He was in New York at the International Wine Center (IWC), speaking to its president, Al Hotchkim. Cary was "showing [Hotchkim] some Oregon wines and [Al] said, 'These are pretty good. These are like good Beaujolais.'"

The comment miffed Cary: "I had been hearing this same sort of thing for some years, and I had a bellyful of it. So I said, 'These are a lot better than Beaujolais, and if we tasted these blind with Burgundy, you'd see

that.' And he said, 'You don't want to go there.' And I think Myron [Redford] may have been standing over my left shoulder, and I just looked him in the eye and said, 'Yeah, we do.'"

Cary emphasized that Burgundy had been kind to the fledgling Oregon wine industry and that the intent of the event was not to go head to head, "but this was one shot

"I had been hearing this same sort of thing for some years, and I had a bellyful of it. So I said, 'These are a lot better than Beaujolais, and if we tasted these blind with Burgundy, you'd see that.'" STEPHEN CARY

at organizing a tasting of Oregon and Burgundy to let the snobs know that, in fact, Oregon was making really fine Pinot Noir."

Once the idea was born, Cary suggested that this could be an Oregon-wide endeavor, and the Oregon Wine Advisory Board (OWAB) — now the Oregon Wine Board — stepped in to handle the logistics. Working with the International Wine Center, the format was agreed upon and the date set for Sept. 12, 1985. Seventeen Pinot Noir producers would be represented with a 1983 vintage, including 10 from Oregon and seven from Burgundy. All wineries in Oregon were invited to participate, and the OWAB convened a panel to choose which wineries would represent the state while the IWC chose seven from Burgundy based on reputation.

challenge, as well; no judge could differentiate between Oregon Pinot Noir and Burgundy in 50 percent of the glasses.

"It was a startling result, to say the least, and it had a huge impact," Cary says.

News of the results traveled quickly, with coverage from *The New York Times* and *Wine Spectator*. Cary notes that the *Wine Spectator*, based in California, was "slow to give Oregon much respect." Their headline — "Burgundies fizzle again in New York" — focused on the shortcomings of the French wines instead of the success of Oregon. In spite of the headline, though, the story gave credit to Oregon, and the impact of the Burgundy Challenge would soon be felt by the industry.

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DAVID HILL

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Since taking ownership and becoming stewards of not only the land but also the legacy at David Hill, the Stoyanovs have assembled a cohesive team, including winemaker Jason Bull and General Manager/Vineyard Manager Mike Kuenz, who has a love of history and of working with old vines.

"Time gives a different lens, a perspective of hindsight," Kuenz said. "One can look at these vines and appreciate Coury's vision."

The David Hill team continues to improve and plan for the future. Vineyard and winery enhancements will be followed by a focus on stewardship — not just of land but employees and community, too. The winery aspires to pursue B Corporation certification and supports ¡Salud! in helping raise funds for vineyard workers' health benefits. Upcoming projects include a new winery facility and outdoor event space with a kitchen.

The spirit of Charles Coury lives on.

For more information, visit www.davidhillwinery.com.

PANTHER CREEK

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Noirs from the Kalita and Schindler vineyards reinforced Panther's continuing ability to secure high-quality fruit from top vineyards. Sam Bronfman, Bacchus co-founder and managing partner, was also on hand to affirm his company's commitment to Panther Creek's growth and longevity. Presently producing 7,000 cases, the winery plans to limit production to 10,000 cases and maintain that level as a premier boutique producer of fine Oregon wines.

"We have something powerful here, and we should embrace it," said Rynders, who will continue to craft the winery's line of Pinot Noir, Chardonnay and Pinot Gris, including several single-vineyard designates.

GUEST COLUMN

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The industry here was started from scratch by people who had a vision to produce something special straight out of the gate. They had to catch up quickly and make do with what they had. Resourcefulness and the will to succeed are what the wine industry here is founded on. In Europe, the tendency is to look back to the past. In Oregon, we should all be very excited about the future.

BURGUNDY CHALLENGE

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Before the tasting, 1983 had been proclaimed a great Burgundy vintage. However, after the results, New York wine writer and MC for the event Terry Robard and Hotchkiss claimed that the Burgundies were too young, and, in time, the results would be different. In 1987, a second tasting of the same 1983 bottles was arranged as the IWC was preparing to relocate. Instead of the Burgundies showing stronger, the Oregon wines continued to dominate, this time taking six of the top seven spots, led by The Eyrie Vineyards and Knudsen-Erath Vineyards tying for first.

The 1985 results had a tremendous impact on the Oregon wine industry, with one notable example being at Sokol Blosser Winery. Years later, as Cary was reflecting on the event and connecting with some of the winemakers who had participated, Susan Sokol Blosser told him that "in the spring of '85, (Sokol Blosser) had so much inventory that they didn't know if they were going to make wine in '85. They had a warehouse full of Pinot Noir. After the event, they sold out in a matter of two or three months and ended up making an '85 vintage that they desperately ended up needing." It was the Burgundy Challenge that Susan Sokol Blosser credits with helping keep her winery in business during that challenging time.

Knowing how difficult it was for early Oregon winemakers to sell their product in 1985, it is worth noting the rapid increase in Pinot Noir plantings following the Burgundy Challenge. Oregon Wine Board surveys show that in 1984, there were 584 planted acres of Pinot Noir in the state. Two years after the Challenge, in 1987, that number increased to 1,277. While this may not be solely because of the Burgundy Challenge, the numbers prove there was now a large enough consumer market to warrant a more than 100-percent increase in Pinot Noir plantings.

When asked if many of Oregon's wineries today give credit to the Burgundy Challenge, Cary laments, "A lot of Oregonian winemakers today don't know the story. I'm not sure why... just an event that happened a long time ago, I guess. I was surprised to tell this story at [the Steamboat Conference] last year and most of the room didn't know about it... Youngsters — somebody under 45 — had not heard about it. So, a seminal event but still not well remembered."