



GRAPE TALK

Let's grow grapes— how hard can it be?

BY DEBBIE TOLLEFSON

If you are living in the Applegate Valley, you probably know someone who is growing grapes. Whether they have one vine or acres of grapes, our valley is the perfect microclimate for many varietals, and the explosion of the grape industry is evident on every road. A great showing by many southern Oregon wines at the 2016 *San Francisco Chronicle* Wine Competition (see sidebar for some southern Oregon winners), coupled with the naming of southern Oregon as one of the top 10 wine destinations in the world for 2016 by *Wine Enthusiast* magazine, has been a huge boost for local wineries. But will this boost trickle down to individual growers and increase the profit margin for grape growers big and small in the Applegate?

As a realtor, I know that grapes on a piece of land for sale attracts the baby boomers looking for their retirement

Grape growers Dan and Patti Buren of Buren Vineyard.



dream home. Those grapes and the potential of making one's own wine is very appealing, but what is the reality of growing grapes?

Dan and Patti Buren, owners of Buren Vineyard on North Applegate Road, moved to the valley in the 1990s and, with a partner, bought the Applegate Store and Café, managing it through the early 2000s. They first developed their property on North Applegate by planting an acre of cabernet sauvignon vines. Initially they did all the work themselves, and still do a great deal of it, including spraying, bird netting, canopy development, and pruning. Later they planted merlot and syrah vines. A few years ago they hired professionals to graft viognier onto merlot and syrah vines and now have around three acres each of cabernet and viognier.

The Burens hire one vineyard worker when needed. They work with other grape-growing friends, including Annette Parsons and Jim Clover, and Bob and Barb Finley, and pick for each other in trade of chili or a brisket lunch. They also try to hire experienced pickers if they are available, but those workers are spread thin during harvest season.

When asked about the economics of grape growing, Dan stressed that contract negotiation is very important. It is great if you can negotiate top dollar for your crop and a single winery will take all of your tonnage. But having to deliver tonnage to multiple locations adds to your costs. Dan said the price range for cabernet and viognier grapes has fluctuated from \$1,600 to \$2,000 per ton depending on the quality and on the supply and demand—some years there are too many



Ron and Laurie Burley, owners of Steelhead Run Vineyard.

good grapes of a certain varietal and other years not enough. A few years ago a number of vineyards grafted some of their root stock to pinot noir because of the high demand and increased price per ton for that varietal.

Like the Burens, Ron and Laurie Burley, owners of Steelhead Run Vineyard on Highway 238 in Applegate, started out doing most of the work themselves. Today most of their vineyard management is done by Herb Quady's company, Applegate Vineyard Management (AVM).

In 1989 the Burleys left their jobs in the semiconductor industry and moved to their home on the Applegate River. In 1993 they planted two acres of grapevines and became the ninth vineyard in the Applegate Valley.

Until 2007, the Burleys worked tirelessly on their growing vineyard, hiring and training one inexperienced worker. That worker had friends and relatives who were also trained and added to the Burley's vineyard team. Ron kept his operational costs down that way, then increased his costs by hiring AVM to manage the operations.

Ron still negotiates his contracts and currently provides grapes to 12 different wineries. Steelhead Run now has 20 acres planted with seven varietals, including chardonnay, riesling, viognier, pinot gris, merlot, syrah, and tempranillo. The vineyard's high-potassium terroir makes for some lovely wines, evidenced

Southern Oregon medal-winning wines at the 2016 San Francisco Chronicle Wine Competition

- Red Lily Vineyards 2012 Tempranillo—Double Gold
- Schmidt Family Vineyards 2012 Merlot—Gold
- Quady North 2012 Cabernet Franc, 2012 Steelhead Run Syrah, 2013 Syrah, and 2014 Pistoleta—Silvers
- Schmidt Family Vineyards 2012 Cabernet Sauvignon, 2012 Malbec, 2012 Pinot Noir, 2012 Syrah, and 2014 Riesling—Silvers
- Valley View 2012 Syrah—Silver
- Quady North 2014 Grenache Blanc and 2011 GSM—Bronzes
- Red Lily Vineyards 2013 Life of Riley Pinot Noir, 2012 Red Blanket, and 2013 Night School—Bronzes
- Schmidt Family Vineyards 2014 Albarino and 2013 Tempranillo—Bronzes
- Troon Vineyard 2014 Druid's Fluid, 2014 Longue Carabine, and 2013 Zinfandel—Bronzes

There were a number of other winners in southern Oregon, including Pebblestone Cellars taking Best of Class for its 2014 Ellis Vineyard Viognier.

by the silver medal awarded to Quady North's 2012 Steelhead Run Syrah at the 2016 *San Francisco Chronicle* Wine Competition.

Ron said that his biggest challenge in the early years was avoiding a divorce and added that there are better and easier ways to make money. He believes that anything less than 50 acres should be done for fun, not for financial gain. We will have to wait and see if this labor-intensive grape-growing, still a "hobby" for many Applegaters, becomes a more lucrative occupation.

Debbie Tollefson
debbie.avrealty@gmail.com

Ramsay Realty
541-899-1184
Cell 541-973-9105

Jayda Wood
Licensed in Oregon • Principal Broker

7604 Hwy 238 • Jacksonville, OR 97530
Fax: (541) 899-1772 • E-Mail: jayda@ramsayrealty.com
Web Site: <http://www.ramsayrealty.com>

KT Reich Cleaning
Free estimates and \$25.00 off your second cleaning.

ENJOY LIFE Leave the cleaning to us

Office (541) 899-4497 sales@ktreich.com nomorecleaning.com PO Box 292 Jacksonville, OR 97530

STIHL • CARHARTT
CRATER CHAIN SAW CO.
541-772-7538

1321 N. Riverside Medford, OR 97501 **50 Years** 1965 - 2015

Pioneer Bridge at Applegate, Oregon

Applegate River Lodge & Restaurant

Restaurant open 5 - 9 pm
Wednesday - Sunday
Lodge open 7 days a week
Wednesday Night Live Music

Lodge 541-846-6690
Restaurant 541-846-6082
Wedding/Special Events 541-660-0244
www.applegateriverlodge.com

The APWC Seasonal LECTURE SERIES 2016-2017

SPRING LECTURE (April or May 2016): Date TBD
Native Species Recovery in the Applegate Watershed, ODFW/APWC
3rd Annual Summer Outdoor Film (8/10/16 @ Red Lily): TBA
Fall Lecture: Establishing Healthy Riparian Areas & Native Plant Workshop, APWC
Winter Lecture (Jan. 2017): TBD

www.apwc.info/news-events

Jakob Shockey, Riparian Program Manager 541-890-9989
Janelle Dunlevy, APWC Coordinator 541-899-9982

"promoting ecological, economic and community well-being in the Applegate watershed through on-the-ground projects and strategic collaborations."

12800 WILLIAMS HWY—APPLEGATE VALLEY—238 HWY BETWEEN PROVOLT STORE & WATER GAP RD

Whistling Duck Farm Store
PROVOLT OREGON

541-761-6772 | whistlingduckfarm.com | OPEN ALL YEAR | M-F:10-7 | S-S:11-5

Natural foods & goods · Farmstead Ferments · Oregon Coast fish · Locally produced fine foods · Organic produce

CONSIDER IT DONE!

APPLEGATE EXCAVATE & FENCE

ROAD & PAD DEVELOPMENT
LAND CLEARING
DRAINAGE SOLUTIONS
ALL TYPES 8' FENCE
FALLOUT SHELTERS
DEMOLITION

541-890-5553

CCB# 201660