

FROM THE FIELD TO THE TABLE

By Alicia Lionberger & Dena Trinity

The idea of making our own barrel of wine started on the crush pad during the 2002 harvest. The excitement was awesome – an organized chaos of trucks and forklifts, unloading and dumping heaping bins



Alicia, Dena, and the other Foris Wine Goddess Deni.

of grapes into the crusher, hoses running everywhere, voices shouting directions, and the aromatic smell of glorious juice. It was a sight to behold.

For the better part of two decades, we've worked together – in the fields, the cellar, and now the office. We've hand-labeled with

Elmer's Glue, dropped fruit wearing short-shorts and halter tops, and poured wine at countless festivals and functions. But nowadays, we spend most of our time administering, marketing, and pouring.

The excitement of the crush brought us out of the office. As we watched, we reminisced about the good old days. One of us remarked that it would be fun to re-live those times. We fantasized about making our own wine – pruning, dropping fruit, hauling our bounty to the winery – the whole nine yards. The fantasy engulfed us, so much so that we didn't realize Vinnie Coterie stood behind us and had overheard every word.

"Why don't you just do it?" Vinnie suggested. But how? Where would we find the time? Vinnie talked

to Ted. They agreed we could take time from our regular responsibilities and make a barrel of wine from beginning to end. And so we did.

We began on a cold, foggy Friday morning the following January. Geese honked overhead. Gloves and jackets warmed us. Baseball caps protected our faces from cane whip. Ted had assigned each of us 99 wild-looking Pinot Noir plants in the Big Field at Maple Ranch, a short walk from where we live. Doyne sharpened our loppers and teasingly called us "newbies." Bill gave us a refresher course on pruning, and we set to work taming the vines.

First we selected the main cane on each plant, the one which would eventually support the fruiting canes. Then we tied each one to the trellis wire. With Bill's help and Jeff's oversight, it still took three hours to finish the job. In February we pulled brush, starting at dawn, the sun rising behind the mountain and illuminating the valley below. And it was

besiege the devil — not the most inviting aroma to greet either the public or the inspectors from the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality.

Ted put on his thinking cap. About 150 yards away, up toward the heavily forested hill that fringes the southern edge of the property, an open field perpetually followed by a thick stratum of serpentine rock invited exploitation. Notoriously infertile, almost nothing grows on serpentine. Ted reasoned that if he piled on enough pressings and allowed them to compost, he'd eventually add a few fertile acres to his holdings. And so he tracted one bin of pressings after another to the barren field.

An enormous pile resulted. The pile began to compost. The grape matter heated up. It got unbelievably hot, so hot that to stick a bare hand into it risked first-degree if not second-degree burns. It also attracted fruit flies. Somehow impervious to the intense heat, the fruit flies proliferated. They became a Malthusian

nightmare with the inevitable disastrous results.

The fruit flies grew thick like black clouds of smoke. It became impossible to breathe in their vicinity. The cloud swelled, expanded, and upon reaching critical mass, a goodly portion of it migrated to the winery. Enormous problems of both the aesthetic and sanitary variety ensued. After a long and arduous struggle, Ted won the "Battle of the Winery," but in order to win the war, he had to do something about the massive mountain of steamy hot pressings looming behind the winery.

He elected to spread the pressings as a mulch over two acres of vineyards far enough from the winery to avoid future fruit fly problems. He spread it thick – too thick. It minimized the fruit fly infestation and appeared to be a final solution, but he hadn't counted on what happened next. For a year, the pressings acted like an herbicide. Nothing grew through the impenetrable mulch. But in the second year, a tidal wave of clover

and grasses appeared almost as if overnight. Like hopeful monsters, they grew massively. It seemed as if the sorcerer's apprentice had been at work transmigrating souls of fruit flies into blades of grass and clubs of clover.

Finally, he hit upon the idea of putting the pressings into a manure spreader. Fruit flies require a moist composted environment for their eggs to survive. The machine shredded the pressings and shot out a shallow layer into the vineyard, thin enough to eliminate the fruit flies. At the same time, it fertilized the soil.

In retrospect, Ted wondered about his cognitive abilities. In an effort to recycle waste, he created even more of a problem and then spent unnecessary amounts of time, energy, and money managing it before finally hitting on a solution that worked. "Think before you leap," he told me, and then as an afterthought added, "But sometimes there's just too much exhilaration in the leap, isn't there?"