



This family prospecting a different gem from soil

Keith Grove's great-grandfather and family moved to Trinity County around 1900 and worked as gold prospectors.

Keith's father, Mark, was born in Los Angeles, but his grandfather worked as a miner, as did Mark in his youth.

Mark became a forester and moved back to Trinity County in the 1950s. In 1973, he bought his 15-acre property, which was an old ranch founded in 1855.

The property is located in the enthralling mountain terrains near Trinity Lake.

Keith Groves graduated Trinity High School in 1976, unsure of his future plans.

While contemplating his future, he decided to work for his cousin, Richard Delos Reyes, who was in the wine making business in the Fresno area.

Keith's interests became an educational experience and he obtained his degree in winemaking at Fresno State while continuing to work with his cousin.

Keith continued his education, working in the Sonoma and Napa counties for Korbel Champaign and Round Hill Cellars for approximately 13 years.

Mark and Keith's winery is one of the oldest wineries in Trinity County and they make a living out of their winemaking. They are the only winery, to their knowledge, obtaining

power from other than the state's electrical grid and use a hydroelectric system for all their energy needs.

They consider their competition coming from businesses in New York, Washington, and British Columbia, but not many if any from California.

They produce wine from dry whites, sweet whites, rosés, light reds, to heavy reds.

Keith and Mark planted their first grapes in 1981 on Mark's property. The winery started producing its first wine in 1984. The father and son team feels that here in California they have a unique growing area in the mountains that makes them different from other wineries/vineyards. They note the cold nights help hold in the flavors in the grape.

Keith, as a professional winemaker believes the colder climate areas are good for much more of a Northern European taste, which brings different flavors.

This results in the wine producing a different flavor each year.

"It is never the same," he said.

To get the best out of the fruit, the techniques used each year are numerous. The standard time before a grape can be picked and begin the processes of becoming a fine wine is three to four years.

Ideally, Keith says, the grapes do their best at seven to ten years in the ground if they are pruned and cared for properly.

Keith's favorite part of the job is meeting his consumers, about 3,000 people a year.

The least palpable part of the business, he says, is government compliance and government regulation. But he recognizes it is all part of the process.

An Alpen Cellars season consists of harvest time in the fall, which is 10 to 14 hours a day of labor.

Winter consists of pruning and bottling, and in the spring, frost control and getting the vineyards ready for growing season. The summer months consist of sales, working 10-12 hours a day.

Alpen Cellars sell bottles commercially, and has begun distributing their wines to Chicago. They also have another eight acres of grape production.

Keith wants readers to know that if they want to get into the winemaking business, one needs to have a love for it and have large financial backing. On a broad spectrum, the Far Northern California Wineries have come a long ways. "I would like to see more people try wines from this area," and notes that Napa and Sonoma are not the only areas to get a fine wine.

Alpen Cellars is open to the public from Memorial Day through Labor Day, seven days a week, from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., and the rest of the year by appointment.

-Kat Andrews

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Alpen Cellars

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Varieties: White Riesling, Gewurztraminer, Chardonnay, Pinot Noir
(from ranch) other wines are Pinot Gris, Merlot from Trinity County.

Total vines: 11,000