



# New owner, original name: The Blue Goat returns to Traverse City

For years, the white-stucco Blue Goat, a wine shop at a fork in the road, served as a landmark for locals and tourists. "People would give directions based on the Blue Goat," said new

owner Ron White. The Blue Goat is back. This spring, White restored the locally famous name to the wine shop at the intersection of Peninsula Drive and Front Street in Traverse City.

*Former owner Roger Watson, a Traverse City attorney, and his wife were vacationing in the 1980s when they came across a painting titled "The Blue Goat." Lo and behold, a local landmark was born.*

ability at the other location if a wine isn't in stock. The system also can track a customer's previous purchases.

"Six months later, people come in and say, 'Hey, remember back last spring that great red wine I bought?'" he said. "Most of us don't jot down every bottle of wine. With this, we can look up the bottle."

Staffs at the two stores include trained chefs who can help customers pair wines with meals.

"That's really what it's all about: Helping people to enjoy the wine, and the food and fellowship that goes with that," said White.

## Women winemakers

For years, Traverse City cardiologist Roberta Kurtz sold the grapes on her Leelanau County farm to area vintners, who produced award-winning wines from her harvests.

One day it occurred to her: Why not make wine myself? Enter Chateau de Leelanau, one of the only female-owned and operated wineries this side of the Mississippi. Kurtz partnered with Joanne Smart, who owned a medical billing and consulting service, and in 1999 the winery produced its first vintage.

"Their first competition was the Michigan State Fair and the winemaker wasn't real comfortable about showing the wines," said tasting room manager Bonnie Supina, who previously managed doctor's offices and worked in the medical field with Kurtz and Smart.

"They Scotch-taped the labels on the bottles and sent them down to competition anyway. Out of four wines, they took four medals. They kind of took that as an omen."

The 30-acre winery, located on Hilltop Road and M-22 about seven miles north of Traverse City, now bottles a Pinot Gris, Cabernet Franc, two Chardonnays, four Reislings, an ice wine and a Bianca, a little-grown grape.

Kurtz, a doctor who now practices part-time so she can devote more hours to winemaking, teamed up with Smart after earlier pairing together for other business ventures. They contacted Supina — whom they had befriended while working in the medical field — to see if she'd be interested in working with them, managing the tasting room.

"I said, 'Wow, I don't know anything about wines,' and they said, 'Neither do we, but we're learning,'" Supina said. "That's just kind of the way it went."

Supina expects to see more and more women in Michigan's wine business, as the local industry grows, in spite of the obstacles.

"Agriculture is just a real tough market," she said. "Who would want to have to rely on the weather for their livelihood?"

"People were excited to think it would go back to the original name," said White, 54, a former downstate business owner. "The reaction was really very good."

The wine store's name has no connection to champagne and Chardonnay. Former owner Roger Watson, a Traverse City attorney, and his wife were vacationing in the 1980s when they came across a painting titled "The Blue Goat." Lo and behold, a local landmark was born.

"It's just a name that was used and it stuck to that location even when it wasn't used," said White.

Later, the site became The Village Wine Shop and when White bought the store earlier this year, he decided to go retro.

"The Blue Goat — that's what everybody calls it," he said. "That's what I remember it as."

White, who owned a Battle Creek-based staffing firm, also purchased Traverse City's other wine-only shop, Wine Country Market, on Front Street, in October. Other in-town stores, including Folgarelli's Deli and Jack's Market, also carry extensive wine inventories, but don't peddle exclusively in wine.

White made the move from providing temporary workers and outsourcing employees to selling Merlot and Chablis after moving north two years ago.

"I needed something to do and

invest in, and as somebody who enjoyed wine, had a bit of passion for it. When the opportunity for Wine Country Market opened up, we decided to do that," he said.

A few months later, the former Blue Goat became available as well.

"Really the two stores are very complementary," said White.

"Wine Country Market focused on the new-world wines — especially California, New Zealand, Australia, Oregon and Washington — and the other store focused on the old world like France, Spain and Italy. There was some overlap but their main focuses were very different.

"They both really looked to bring in wine you couldn't necessarily find everywhere, good-value wine as well as high-end wine," he said. "We're continuing that differentiation between stores."

People are becoming increasingly sophisticated in their tastes for wine, and area residents year-round and summer as well as tourists are providing enough demand to keep two specialty shops, located three minutes apart, in business, White said.

Wine shops are somewhat like bookstores and art galleries, he said, in that people visit again and again, browse and buy, tell their friends, and make an event of the visit.

"And wine has become a more

popular drink over the years in this country," he said. "People have become more knowledgeable and are able to more enjoy wine. They open a bottle when they have friends over for dinner."

White said he isn't planning any radical changes at the shops. He is, however, installing a computer system that ties inventory at the two stores so staff can check for avail-

## Harvest Stompede a runaway hit

It came out of the gate (no pun intended) last year as a freshman event, but something clearly clicked. The Harvest Stompede ended up being declared "Best New Race of 2001" by Michigan Runner magazine and the Detroit News declaring it as "a must do for 2002."

The acclaim is gratifying say event organizers, including Race Director Nate Rouffe, a runner himself as well as an employee of Ciccone Vineyard & Winery, where the race takes place. Located just five miles south of Suttons Bay on Hilltop Road at one of the highest points of elevation in Leelanau County, this 5K and 10K run or walk through three local vineyards, including Black Star Farms and L. Mawby, with panoramic views, not to mention the ability to dine and sip when the racing stops.

Held this year on September 14 at 10 a.m., one week before the annual Winery Harvest Weekend, the Stompede is hoping for 300 participants, a 100 percent increase over last year. In addition to the race, there will be special wine tasting and sales opportunities throughout the weekend.

"It's a marvelous chance to take in the sights of Leelanau County in a way you might not normally, as well as meet people from all over the state who enjoy the region and our local wines," said Rouffe. "You don't even have to compete if you don't want to, but can stroll right through the vineyards on a fine fall day."

Registration before August 31 is \$25 for the walk, run and wine event, and \$32.50 after September 1. To participate in just the race or walk is \$15 before Aug. 31, and \$20 afterwards. To download a registration form, visit the TC Track Club website at [www.tctrackclub.com](http://www.tctrackclub.com). For more information, contact Rouffe at 933-6373, or Rick Coates at 938-3247.

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