

THE WINE INDUSTRY

Business as usual: 'Nibbling at the margins'

BY DANA GEORGE
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No one could blame area vintners if they were to lift a line from Charles Dickens' classic novel "A Tale of Two Cities": It was the best of times, it was the worst of times. Even as local wineries celebrated surging sales earli-

er this year, Mother Nature had a trick up her sleeve.

"It warmed toward the end of February and a lot of the snow melted," said Bryan Ulbrich, manager of Peninsula Cellars in Traverse City. "The vines started pushing, the fluid got moving, then the temperature dropped from 10 to 20 degrees below zero. The vines didn't

die, but they lost their primary buds, which is where their fruit is."

While some vineyards fared better than others — depending upon how much snow they retained, the types of grapes they grow and how the plants were shielded — this year's harvest is likely to be greatly

diminished.

"The rapid (temperature) drop meant that buds were not able to withstand the cold above the snow line. Below the snow line the buds did survive, but there aren't many down that low," said Larry Mawby, owner of Mawby Vineyards in Suttons Bay.

Mawby estimates that some vineyards will harvest only 10 to 15 percent of their crop this fall. Vineyards with a hardier variety of grapes will likely see better results.

In spite of the dismal harvest forecast, area winemakers

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Larry Mawby in the vineyard at Leelanau County's Mawby Orchards. This year's grape crop suffered significant weather-related damage.

