

Support 'pours in' for regional non-profits

Since their inception the wineries of Northern Michigan have played a major philanthropic role in the region. In the tune of more than a quarter of million dollars in cash and fundraising support area wineries and wine trail associations are playing a lead role in the "partners in promotions," concept of combining several community entities to further each entities interest. "The days of a non-profit calling and asking for direct donations are coming to an end," according to Rick Coates, spokesperson for the Leelanau Vintners. "With the amount requests for donations on the rise business and corporations are looking at the promotional aspect of their donation. While the mission of the organization making the request is a factor it is no longer enough, those making contributions are assessing the promotional return. As an association of wineries we get literally hundreds of requests each year as do most of our wineries to contribute to worthy causes. We prioritize our contributions based on our ability to be involved and see a promotional return."

Coates said the Leelanau Vintners took another step in the process and that was to narrow the scope of their support to areas that are closely connected to their industry. "Don Coe of Black Star Farms came from the international corporate world and brought the concept of the Leelanau Vintners identifying four

areas that we would focus in on when approached for contributions," said Coates. "As a group we identified organizations that are involved in land preservation and conservation efforts, agriculture, performing and visual arts and the culinary arts. Each of these four areas is directly connected to us because wine consumers are found among these groups."

This doesn't mean that the Vintners don't consider other requests, Coates points to their willingness to look at any fundraising opportunity that might benefit all involved.

"We are in an experience economy and our success as local vintners is dependent on our ability to get the consumer to taste (experience) our wines," said Coates. "The March of Dimes came to us last year and while they are an important cause they didn't fit our scope. However their Star Chef's event did because it incorporated culinary arts and an opportunity for us to partner in the process. They raised a lot of money and we raised a lot of awareness about our local wine region."

Currently the Leelanau Vintners is involved in two special label programs, one for the Dennon Museum Center and another with the Leelanau Conservancy. The latter has raised over \$10,000 to date.

"Four years ago Larry Mawby introduced 'Conservancy' a sparkling wine where \$2.00 from the sale of each bot-

tle would go back to The Leelanau Conservancy," said Coates. "He was followed by Bel Lago and last year by Black Star Farms. This year the peninsula's newest winery Cherry Republic in Glen Arbor will introduce a Cherry Wine to benefit The Conservancy."

Coates said the group has supported fundraising events with several area cultural and conservancy groups including the Michigan Land Use Institute, The City Opera House, The Traverse City Heritage Center, Traverse City Arts Council and The Great Lakes Culinary Institute to name a few. Currently the Vintners are involved with assisting in the underwriting of "The Wit & Wine Exhibition," at the Dennon Museum Center.

"The area wineries have been active in supporting our post concert receptions and opening night gallery reception," said Gene Jenneman, Executive Director of the Dennon Museum Center. "They have been wonderful to work with so it seemed to be natural to bring in an exhibition that would promote both the Museum and the wineries."

Part of the promotion has included developing 5 special labeled exhibition wines with a portion of the proceeds going to help underwrite the exhibition. The 5 wines from the Leelanau Peninsula will be available at Black Star Farms, Bel Lago, Chateau De Leelanau, L. Mawby and Leelanau



This collection of wines from the Leelanau Peninsula will benefit the Dennon Museum Center.

Wine Cellars as well as at several area wine shops.

"We expect this promotion to raise \$5,000 plus to help underwrite this Exhibition," said Coates. "We just received a big boost with the Chrysler Corporation purchasing over 300 bottles to use for a promotion while their Executives and Administrators visit our area later this month. This is a great example of how the partnering in promotion works. Each of the 300 guests will get a gift bag with various items from the area and will learn about the museum and wine industry here in the process."

The Wit & Wine Exhibition will actually be four exhibitions in one and all will be at the Dennon Museum Center from March 21 – September 5 at the Dennon Museum Center:

For more information on the Museum go to www.dennosmuseum.org or call 231-995-1055. The Dennon Museum Center is located at 1701 East Front Street, Traverse City, MI 49686.

For further information on how your organization or business might partner with the local wine region contact Rick Coates with the Leelanau Vintners at (231) 938-1811.



Winetasting has become increasingly popular with both the locals and tourists in northern Lower Michigan.