

Wine Industry Organizations Benefit the Central Coast (Part II)

by Mary Silveira

During the past 20 years, as wine grape production rose from sixth to first on the top-20 crops list in San Luis Obispo County, a variety of organizations evolved to meet the needs of the wine industry. The January issue of *Farmer & Rancher Magazine* highlighted Paso Robles Wine Country Alliance, Central Coast Vineyard Team and Independent Grape Growers Paso Robles Association.

Two additional organizations take the spotlight this month.

SLO Vintners Association

Becky Gray has been Executive Director of the SLO Vintners Association since February 2006. Gray provides the organization's interior duties as well as the marketing efforts, which include annual events.

"We promote two major events annually and some smaller additional ones," Gray says. She produces a SLO Wine Country Guide/Map, signposts, and website and, of course, the "Taste" location, a collaborative tasting room in downtown San Luis Obispo—all owned and operated by SLO Vintners Association.

"Currently we have 20 members of our association," she says. "We have quarterly meetings, and I send out a monthly e-newsletter informing members of what's going on. We solicit story ideas for press and work closely with the San Luis Obispo County Visitors & Conference Bureau, San Luis Obispo Chamber of Commerce and the Pismo Beach Conference & Visitors Bureau.

"Our 'Taste' staff promotes wine tasting in our region by keeping in direct communication with local

hotels. They also host a variety of events, including winery release parties and Winemaker Wednesdays, during which representatives or winemakers are in the store to answer questions or talk about the wines.

"We want to attract visitors in SLO County who might not realize that our wine country region is just five minutes from downtown and five minutes from the coastal communities, too. With our region so small, you'd be amazed at how many people miss it.

"Along with promoting the award-winning wines that come from our region, we are also big in promoting the 'SLO Lifestyle' and the people behind the wines, more of a relational look at our region. We took on this approach just after I came on board, almost three years ago. Our region is so small and consists mostly of family owned and run vineyards and wineries—from

the grape to the bottle—so we really wanted to depict that."

Gray encourages you to read "Welcome to the SLO Life" at the beginning of their map and on the home page of their website. "You also see these same branding efforts flow over into our black-and-white photos that hang in 'Taste,' that are in our guide and that are used in promotional material for our events."

SLO Vintners Events highlighted throughout the year:

- **Harvest Celebration**—November dinners, tastings, auctions and Open Houses at wineries.
- **Roll Out the Barrels Weekend**—In SLO downtown Mission Plaza and winemaker dinners throughout South SLO County.
- **Passport to Wine Country**—Two-day event features impeccable food and wine pairings and entertainment.



SLO Vintners Association puts on the annual "Roll Out the Barrels Weekend."

At left, Taste's exclusive Enomatic Wine Pouring System lets you sample up to 72 different wines from producers in San Luis Obispo's Edna Valley, Arroyo Grande, Avila Beach and Nipomo regions.

SLO Vintners Association website photos.

- **Holiday in the Vineyards—**
Open house-style day and evening where tasting rooms stay open late and offer appetizers, live music and discounts for holiday shoppers.

The website, www.slowine.com, has a complete map of all member winery locations and shows how easy it is to visit the region in a few days. According to the website, this region is “comprised of three pristine viticulture areas: the Edna Valley, Arroyo Grande Valley and Avila Valley. Our small, mostly family-owned wineries are well known for their hand-crafted bottlings of Pinot Noir, Chardonnay, Syrah, Grenache, Voignier, Zinfandel and more.”

Central Coast Wine Growers' Association (CCWGA)

Located in Santa Maria, the non-profit Central Coast Wine Growers' Association (CCWGA) represents more than 200 members from wineries, vineyards and industry-related businesses in San Luis Obispo and Santa Barbara counties.

With the mission to “advance the wine and grape-growing industry through research and education,” CCWGA raises money to fund viticulture research and supports technical winemaking and grape-growing seminars in the area.

CCWGA has been in existence since 1974 and partners with governmental, environmental and community entities on issues that specifically include the protection of natural resources and local wine growers' right to farm. Their outreach efforts also serve to educate the public about the economic and cultural benefits of the Central Coast Wine industry.

According to their website, at www.ccwga.org, the association works to “promote an open dialogue between the wine-grape community,



CCWGA website photos.

local government representatives, environmental groups and the general public...[they] bring these groups together to discuss such important issues as sustainable farming, enforcing the Clean Water Act, pesticide use in vineyards and the Endangered Species Act.”

Their website lists activities as

- Land use planning & permitting
- San Luis Obispo Ag Task Force
- Santa Barbara & San Luis Obispo Counties Agricultural Watershed Coalition
- APCD Task Force
- Santa Barbara County Ag Advisory Committee
- Santa Barbara County Wine Industry Task Force
- On going dialogue with state and federal agencies to address environmental concerns

The current Central Coast Wine Growers' Association Board representing the industry includes the following members:

- Jean-Pierre Wolff, Wolff Vineyards
- Brian Wallingford, Mesa Vineyard Management, Inc.
- John Burke, Foxen Winery
- John Salisbury, Salisbury Vineyards & Winery
- Grant Cremers, CCWGA Director at Large
- Kendall Jackson Wine Estates
- Steve Tillman, CCWGA Director at Large
- Plantra, Inc.
- Dan Rodrigues, CCWGA Director at Large
- California Ag Quest
- Lino Bozanno, CCWGA Central Area Director
- Laetitia Wineries
- Eric Davidian, CCWGA Southern Area Director
- Greg Phelan, CCWGA Southern Area Director
- Solomon Hills Vineyards
- Simon Graves, CCWGA Immediate Past President.

Benefits of Membership include

- CCWGA newsletter
- Invitation to the annual “Hear It Through the Grapevines” Tour
- Membership rates to highly anticipated annual events
- Access to Growers' Network
- Updates and notices concerning changes in regulatory policies and environmental practices.