

AFFILIATES CORNER

JIM SHERMAN

*Vice President, Turf & Industrial Equipment Co.
Affiliate Board Member GCSANC*

When I was asked to write this article, like most people, I was very uncomfortable writing about myself. However when told the subject was affiliate board members and their hobbies, I quickly warmed up to the idea. My hobby you see, is wine making. About seven years ago, while in Sonoma with friends, the subject of making wine came up, how hard could it be? We have all made beer or know someone that has, and it doesn't take much to make a decent beer. I was wrong.

The journey started the spring of 2003 with the purchase of a few books and taking a basic wine making class at UC Davis. It wasn't long before I figured out this whole wine making thing was mostly chemistry and marketing. To my surprise, I loved it. Acidity, pH, sulfites, buffers, enzymes...A half dozen books later I felt I was ready for the challenge. On October 1, 2004 with some basic tools, a handful of containers and the kids in tow, we headed to the vineyard for harvest. Fortunately, being John Deere dealer for over 40 years, I've made several very good friends in the vineyard business, which makes it easier to source my fruit. We typically pick a day or two before the commercial pickers, which gives us the whole vineyard to ourselves. I have friends who make wine that just show up and get their bins filled but I have found picking your own grapes to be extremely rewarding. In the vineyard as the sun comes up, picking grapes with your kids, knowing the fruits of your hard labor won't be ready to drink for years to come. It is manual labor but it is one of those life experiences that truly stick.

After all the grapes are in the truck, we rush the cool fruit home to start the crush. This full day event begins with sorting. The fruit starts at one end of a long table where family and friends on either side remove rotten berries, leaves, and bugs until the fruit reaches the other end where it goes into the crusher/destemmer. As the name implies, the crusher/destemmer removes all the stems and gently pops the berries. With the addition of a specific yeast culture, these popped berries go into a large container to begin fermentation. There are a few sayings that summarize this process. The first is "It takes a lot of beer to make a fine wine" and the other is "wine, woman and song." To say the least, it's a party that will inevitably last late into the night.

The next morning the garage is bursting with the smell of fermentation. The yeast consumes the grape sugar and turns it into alcohol. Carbon dioxide is produced during this stage, which forces the grape skins to the top of the container and forms a solid cap. Three to four times a day, with help from neighbors and friends, this cap is punched down and mixed with the liquid below to keep the skins from drying out and always in contact with the juice. Throughout this whole process, multiple chemical tests are taken to make sure the wine stays within certain parameters, which has turned my garage into quite a chemistry lab. If you didn't know better you would think I was up to no good, with a room full of beakers, meters, titrators, hydrometers, and refractometers. For a while there, my wife had thought I had really lost it. The grape mixture ferments for about a week and is then pressed and pumped down to our basement where it will stay cool for the next 9-10 months in barrels before its bottled.

We had established one rule at the very beginning of this process, if you help make the wine; you have to take your share when it's done, good or bad. Unfortunately, the first two years, I must admit, it was bad, bad, bad. Having put so much work into something I

enjoyed doing only to have it come out poorly challenged me even more. Over the next four years and 120 cases, the wine has become much better. My wife came up with a name for the 2008 chardonnay "Finally Drinkable..." Being that every drop is gone, I think everyone agreed! I have friends and neighbors contact me months in advance now to reserve their space on the picking crew to ensure their well-earned cases. I can honestly say this is one hobby I will never master but will always enjoy, somewhat like golf.

