

Grapes sweet on mild winter at Willow Creek Winery

By JACK FICHTER
Cape May Star and Wave

WEST CAPE MAY — The grape vines are sleeping, but you don't have to tiptoe around the winery.

Willow Creek Winery has a number of events scheduled throughout the winter, and so far the vines remain snug in their beds from a mild winter.

"This mild winter has been fantastic thus far," winemaker and farm director Kevin Celli said.

He said the biggest problem with vinifera vines is they can die if the weather gets too cold. Celli said vines can die if the temperature drops from a range of 5 degrees to 5 below zero for 24 hours with no wind.

"We like the mild winters and so do the vines. They sleep comfortably for the winter when the weather is like this," he said.

During winter, the vines withdraw nutrients into the taproots and store carbohydrates through the rest of the plant, Celli said.

"Once the temperature begins to rise and the plants experience four or five days of 60 plus degrees, the plant starts to withdraw those stored carbohydrates and send the nutrients back up through the plant to begin to bud swell and then bud

burst," he said.

Celli said what he would not want to see is five or six days of 60 plus degrees followed by a frost. He said one or two days of frost after the plants have awakened can affect vine growth and can result in 10 percent to 20 percent loss in one or two days.

A dry spring would also be favorable to the vines, said Celli, noting a wet spring can harm bud growth and development for the following spring.

Last summer and fall produced a great growing season, he said.

"It was the best I've ever seen from our field," he said. "I compare it to 2010 for Cape May County, which I feel is the best season on record."

"With the grapes that came in from the previous year, I'm excited to see what wines are going to come of it and I have everything now sitting in barrels and tanks," Celli continued.

The winery is holding two Vintners Valentine Dinners, pairing a variety of dishes with a local flair to their wines. On Saturday, Feb. 11, the dinner features Southern Mansion Master Chef Brian Parker's French duck, Italian lobster and Cape May filet, a demi-infused filet mignon sautéed with pure balsamic vinegar, garlic, red wine,



Jack Fichter/CAPE MAY STAR AND WAVE
Christopher and Brittany Williams, of Asheboro, N.C., stop at Willow Creek Winery for a tasting during their trip to the Cape May area.

fresh thyme, bay leaf and black pepper placed on a bed of garlic mashed red potatoes with a side of grilled asparagus.

On Valentine's Day, the dinner features tomato bisque, scallop Ceviche and Cape May bronze chicken, a boneless chicken breast stuffed with sharp provolone cheese and roasted red peppers topped with a garlic cream sauce.

Celli said Parker paired each course with a Willow Creek wine. The Feb. 11 dinner features five courses and

the Feb. 14 event offers four courses. Celli describes each course as well as the wine and why they were paired to bring out the flavor of each dish.

He said he is pleased with Willow Creek's Malvaisia Bianca this year, best described as a luscious white wine.

"That's an incredible wine that you can't find anywhere else on the East Coast," he said. "The Malvaisia has been a homerun, people are crazy about it."

Celli said Willow Creek is also presenting Bacchus, a

blend of cabernet sauvignon, merlot and Chambourcin.

While the entire West Cape May property is planted in vines, Willow's Creek's Legate's Farm in North Cape May will have 5,000 new vines planted in the spring on the 68-acre property.

"We can't wait for the weather to break to start planting posts. The vines will be here April 15 and we'll have 5,000 new babies in LeGate's," Celli said.

Vines will include merlot, Albarino and sauvignon blanc, he said.

Why did it take Cape May County so long to discover it had great weather and soil for growing wine grapes? Celli said the Wildwoods had an abundance of wild grapes growing historically. He said until about 20 years ago, only one winery per one million residents was permitted in the state.

"For our peninsula, I think there was no one who put two and two together to see the sandy soil, the cross breeze from the ocean and the bay. I don't think people were really paying attention. The mindset was California in the '70s and before that it was France and Italy," Celli said.

As more wineries pop up in the region, Celli said the attitude in the industry "the more the merrier." He cites California's Napa Valley, where more than 400 wineries coexist.

Seven wineries are open on the peninsula within 13 miles of each other, Celli said. Wine lovers are known to go "wine hopping," visiting multiple wineries, he said. Celli said wineries provide a year-round activity and something to do on rainy days in the summer season.

Willow Creek's tasting room is open every day from 11 a.m. Special events at the winery include Fire Pit Fridays and a pasta and wine dinner on Sundays replete with music from Frank Sinatra. A comedy night is held once a month.

For Valentine's Day reservations and directions, see willowcreekwinerycapemay.com.

Beaches

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economics do not make sense at other beaches.

"What I see as the biggest problem is that we don't really have a national plan or vision for where or how federal dollars should be spent, no big-picture vision," he said. "They fund project by project."

Much money is thrown at the coast after a hurricane, Young said. He noted Cape May is receiving beach replenishment as mitigation for the federal government building the Cape May Inlet jetty. He said the Army Corps does not have a national plan or priorities established but Cape May could be a higher priority since it is a mitigation project.

Young said rising sea level increases the need for beach replenishment, and that it is

not necessary to think about a massive rise.

"Just go with the rate sea level is rising right now and that's indisputable, nobody argues about that because sea level is in fact rising now a little over 3 millimeters a year," he said. "What that tells you is that it's only going to be more difficult in the future to hold your beach in place and not less difficult even at today's rate of sea level rise, forget acceleration or impact of massive global warming. You're going to need to do it more frequently and it's going to cost more money."

He said municipalities here would be competing with every other location in Delaware and New Jersey that wants beach replenishment. Young said it is unknown how Trump views funding for beach replenishment.

He said during the George W. Bush and Barack Obama administrations, there was a growing reticence for federal funding of local coastal storm protection projects such as beach nourishment.

On the topic of Cape May's shorebreak in the surf zone that has been blamed for injuries to bathers, Young theorized the Army Corps would not want the city "scraping around all the marine invertebrates that are in the near shore zone." He said the city has probably given the Army Corps a perpetual easement to maintain its projects.

"They are probably not excited about the idea of having somebody else reshape or redesign their nourishment project," Young said.

He said there was no guaranty the drop off in the surf zone would not reform fairly quickly if it were altered.

"You have to understand that these beach nourishment projects are constructing a beach in front of your community that is out of equilibrium with where nature wants that beach to be," Young said. "Nature is trying to move that beach back and you're trying to hold it in place, so it over-steeps the slope, over time the slope

gets steeper in front of the beach."

He said nature is trying to move it back to recreate a natural, gradual shoreline break and that is not being allowed to happen.

"You're going to have a different beach than nature would create. This is now an engineered beach, it's not a natural beach," Young said.

A moving shoreline is a natural process. He said if there were not development along the shoreline, the beach would not disappear, it would simply move landward and be located where buildings now stand.

Young said the shoreline would like to re-establish a natural equilibrium that is further landward than the beach exists today.

"You shouldn't be surprised that you're going to have a beach that's not behaving like a natural beach would behave," he said.

Injuries are not occurring on every nourished beach in the nation, Young noted.

Howard Marlowe, president of Warwick Group Consultants, a Washington, D.C. government affairs firm, has worked as a lobbyist on behalf of beach towns for more than 30 years. He said there has never been enough funding for all the authorized federal shore-protection projects and the situation is not improving.

"The amount of money has been lower in the last three to four years and the need

has increased, the number of projects on the East Coast alone, and the West Coast is starting to knock on the door with authorized projects," Marlowe said.

Coastal resilience, which Cape May falls under, it just about the smallest program in the mission of the Army Corps of Engineers, he said. Marlowe said flooding is occurring along the coast more frequently from "non-newsworthy events" and unnamed storms.

He said the Philadelphia District of the Army Corps is looking at beaches along Delaware Bay in a preliminary manner but there is no direction from Congress.

"The corps can't do anything unless it's requested to by a mayor or state official, and then only if Congress then says so," Marlowe said.

The state Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) has asked the Army Corps for help in planning future beach replenishment due to sea level rise and the increased severity of storms.

Marlowe is recommending towns may want to collaborate for future beach replenishment. He said such cooperation is beginning in the Great Lakes region and New England as a multi-state effort.

Congress banned earmarks, legislators using spending bills to fund specific projects, but the president earmarks the Army Corps' budget, Marlowe said.

"There's pluses and minuses to this but with the Corps of Engineers, you cannot do a bridge to nowhere," he said. "You have to have a study approved by a civil works review panel."

He said the study process can exceed three years in length.

"It's in the hands of middle management in the administration and middle management is career folks who don't like the Corps of Engineers, period," Marlowe said. "They certainly don't like the coastal program. They think you all ought to be paying for it yourselves."

On the topic of shore breaks and surf zone injuries, he noted beaches normally have a larger slope immediately after a replenishment. With Cape May receiving sand every two years, there is a short recovery between replenishments, Marlowe said.

"You can't do adaptive management on an existing authorized project without doing another study," he said.

Marlowe said if the number of injuries on the beach is disproportionate to the standard, adaptive management should be permitted.

"The corps and congress ought to be pressed to allow the corps to look into these things without having to go through three years, \$3 million plus, more review after that, it ought to be done easier than that," he said.

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Pa. woman faces charges in hit-run

ERMA — A Pennsylvania woman was charged with driving under the influence of alcohol/drugs after hitting a parked car and leaving the scene.

Lower Township police were dispatched to Evergreen Avenue in Villas at

about 9:08 p.m. Jan. 31 for a report of a motor vehicle accident involving a parked car.

Witnesses told authorities that they saw the driver of the involved vehicle run southbound through neighboring yards immediately

after the collision. Officers searched the area and were able to locate the fleeing suspect hiding behind a fence a few blocks from the accident scene. The driver was identified as Samantha Nugent, 44, of Coatesville, Pa. Nugent was not injured in the crash.

According to police, Nugent was placed under arrest for operating a motor vehicle while under the influence of alcohol/drugs. Additionally, Nugent received tickets for leaving the scene of an accident, failure to report an accident and reckless driving. She was processed and released from the Lower Township Police Department pending her court date.

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TIDES : February 2017				
DATE	HIGH		LOW	
	A.M.	P.M.	A.M.	P.M.
8	5:36	6:05	11:50	11:49
9	6:30	6:58		12:42
10	7:19	7:46	12:42	1:30
11	8:05	8:32	1:32	2:16
12	8:48	9:16	2:20	2:59
13	9:30	9:59	3:06	3:41
14	10:11	10:42	3:51	4:22
15	10:52	11:25	4:36	5:03

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**John Wick: Chapter 2 R 11:40, 3:10, 7:00, 9:45

Rings PG-13 11:30, 2:10, 4:50, 7:30, 9:55

A Dog's Purpose PG 11:10, 1:30, 4:10, 6:50, 9:20

Split PG-13 11:15, 1:50, 4:30, (7:15, 9:50)

**The Great Wall (Thursday Premiere) PG-13 (7:15, 9:50)

La La Land PG-13 11:50, 3:20, (6:40, 9:30)

**A Cure for Wellness R (8:00)

Sing PG 10:50, 1:20, 4:00, (6:30, 9:10)

**Fist Fight R (7:00, 9:10)

**No Passes (Fri-Wed) [Thursday]