

Profiles  
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**GIVING**

# Viva la viticulture

Local enthusiasm for the study of wine and food bottled up until now

BY MEGAN PATRICK | VBJ Staff Reporter

Camas foodies Dan Foster and Sanford Jones were sharing a meal at the Restaurant at the Historic Reserve in Vancouver not too long ago, when Jones began bemoaning his increasing income taxes. His wife had threatened to cut off his wine budget to reduce the damage.

The enterprising friends had often discussed potential business and nonprofit ventures, and Foster — a financial planner — had an idea that could not only reduce Jones' taxes but keep them in their accustomed fine food and wines.

The solution? A nonprofit organization dedicated to supporting local culinary education and viticulture research through grants and scholarships.

The Food and Wine Society of Clark County was founded in April of 2006 and achieved nonprofit status this spring.

The society's monthly events have thus far included a wine blending class, food-and-wine pairing courses, visits to wineries and restaurants, and the

group is looking forward to an "Oktoberfest" German cooking course and a fall grape crush event.

Members also got to judge wines served at the Camas Wine, Arts and Music Festival.

Proceeds from the events go to fund grants and scholarships to train future culinary and viticulture leaders.

A wine auction in April raised \$12,000 for the scholarship fund, and the next auction is tentatively scheduled for spring at the Pearson Air Museum. Foster expects the annual auction to be the Food and Wine Society's key fundraiser.

The nonprofit was established so that it can only give money to other nonprofits, and so far, it has granted \$2,000 to Clark College's Culinary Arts program.

Part of the award went to Clark College baking instructor and chocolatier Ian Titterton, who is currently conducting a research tour of the Belizean cacao plantations in South America.

Upon his return, Titterton will treat society members to a private chocolate tasting, likely around Valentine's Day.

"And what just happens to go quite nicely with chocolate?" Foster asked, smiling. "Wine."

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The Wine and Food Society raises money for future culinary and viticulture leaders.



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# SOCIETY: Establishing the nonprofit took nine months

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The society has proven to be a social network and educational tool for its 70 members and those who attend the events, but Foster cautions that it's not only a "let's put something good in our mouths" group.

The goal is to connect people with the value, creativity and craftsmanship inherent in culinary and viticulture arts – all of which gives back to the community through quality of life, Foster said.

"It raises the minds and pallets of the community to understand how wine and food are made," he said.

Higher quality culinary students coming out of culinary schools raises the tenor of local restaurants, which feeds right back into the community and the local economy. As it stands, Foster said, most of the robust restaurants in the area are found in Portland.

Society Treasurer Barbara Gagnier, a Re/Max real estate agent, said the wine and food caught her attention, but the possibility of meeting new people with a shared passion drew her in. "Obviously most people like to eat and a lot like to drink wine," she said. "It's something everybody likes to talk about."

Plus, the Food and Wine Society is something different.

"Most (foundations) are for cancer or heart disease research, but this is getting people together in the community and exploring something new," Gagnier said.

And although the society isn't likely going to cure cancer, red wine does boost the immune system and is good for your heart, she said with a laugh.

Foster and Jones, a property manager, modeled the group after similar groups across the country. Establishing the society as a nonprofit took nine

months and loads of hard work.

"It's easy to have a club," Foster said. "It's not so easy to have a public charity, but it's been a huge marketing tool for us. We're giving back."

Foster called it the perfect storm – a lot of work, but a lot of fun.

"Once we had the idea, we knew we were going to do it," he said. "It was a spur-of-the-moment thing, but life's like that – it's the little decisions that change your life. The timing was right and the passion is certainly there."

Gagnier said serving on the board enhances her professional career by providing chances to network.

Membership fees are \$130 per year for a couple and \$75 per year for singles.

The society is always looking to expand its scholarship program, and the board of directors has been in contact with local wineries, culinary schools and the Washington State University viticulture program.

Foster said the research of WSU

Assistant Professor Carolyn Ross, who combines sensory analysis with analytical chemistry to examine changes in flavor and odor profiles of food and wine and how that affects taste.

"That is the perfect type of thing we'd look to fund," Foster said.

Foster is the president of the board of directors, Jones is vice president, Gagnier is treasurer, Carol Ewing is secretary and Doreen Bright is the monthly events coordinator.

Washougal School District Superintendent Teresa Baldwin is the grants committee chair and Carmen Gunn is chair of the membership committee.

"We figured if we didn't start it soon, somebody else would," Foster said.



Submitted photo

Dan Foster, left, president of the Wine and Food Society, and Barbara Gagnier, treasurer, right, granted Ian Titterton, chocolatier for Clark College, \$2,000 to help conduct research on the Bellanuca plantations in South America.

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