



Gilmenton Winery & Vineyard, located on property that once belonged to Grace Metalious, offers tastings Thursday through Sunday, a brunch on Sunday and storyteller dinners on Fridays.

Wining Through the Lakes Region

Finding a taste of the state on back roads

By Susan Laughlin

Sometimes the journey is the best part of life. Sure, you could just go to the local wine shop or State Liquor Store to grab a bottle of vino, but now that New Hampshire has 23 active wineries open with tasting rooms, you may want to make a road trip out of it and savor the scenery along the way. You'll travel country byways to find the liquid treasure being fermented in cellars and garages across the state.

It's not realistic to get to visit more than a few wineries in one outing, so I set out to explore Lakes Region offerings. Here is a cluster of five wineries and/or vineyards that have opened retail operations in just the past several years. Grapes may have been planted earlier, but it takes time for budding enthusiasts to decode government labeling regulations, conform to commercial winery specs and develop sufficient supply of product. Why all the sudden interest in wine making in a state not known for its accommodating climate? Again, the answer here varies, but at the root is one word from whence all hope springs eternal — passion. Here are a few of their stories.

Gilmanton Winery

I headed up to Gilmanton to visit Gilmanton Winery and Vineyard located in the former hometown of Grace Metalious. Not many locals have traded on her fame or notoriety, in fact most



Top: Front vineyard at Gilmanton Winery & Vineyards. Above: Coffin Cellars in Webster. Right: Bob Manley of Hermit Woods Winery in Sanbornton.

have avoided it — until now. The year 2006 was the 50th anniversary of the publication of "Peyton Place" and in November of that year Marshall and Sunny Bishop closed the deal. They now owned the small white Cape that Metalious had purchased and expanded with her "Peyton Place" earnings almost 50 years ago.

The three-car garage for Metalious' Rolls Royces is now a winery and

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Second Annual N.H. Wine Festival, with music by Beatlejuice, is being held Saturday, August 6, 2011 from 12 to 5 p.m. at the Rochester Fairgrounds. Tickets are only available through Zorvino Vineyards, www.zorvino.com. \$20 ticket, includes an engraved festival wine glass, 10 tasting tickets and a N.H. Wine Passport that can be redeemed to enter a special drawing. Additional tasting tickets can be purchased at the festival.

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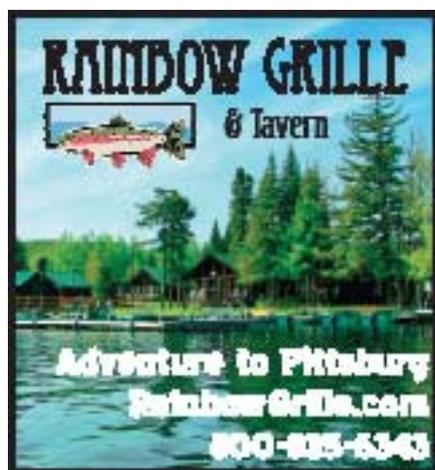
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showroom for the Bishops. A pasture and even the front yard have been planted with several varieties of grapes. And on a sunny knoll Marshall built a new barn for Sunny's alpacas.

It all came together rather quickly. Sunny is a flight attendant for American Airlines, and after 9-11, realizing she could have been on one of those doomed flights, the couple made the decision to not put off what they really wanted to do, and they did it.

Marshall, a retired Marine, planted more than 800 vines in all, including Aurora, Seyval, Marachel Foch, Marquette and Reliant — vines that are known to grow well in New England. He also designed and built a southern-style porch around the side and front of the white clapboard Cape. What was once an austere New England home with a haunting past is now a welcoming site. The porch seats 75 in good weather and is a fine place to sip wine or enjoy a Sunday brunch.

Marshall hired local caterer Ellie Murphy to provide meals for visitors. They began with a Sunday brunch and recently added a Storyteller Dinner on Friday evenings similar to the Corner House Inn events in Center Sandwich.

I sat on the porch one perfect day in June and enjoyed a four-course meal artfully prepared by Ellie. Marshall served up his signature wine, Graces, a blend of his Seyval grapes with a touch of his Concord grapes. It was soft and a bit sweet, perfect for sipping. The grapes planted in 2007 are now mature and will be harvested in the fall for a full range of wines developed totally on the property. In the meantime Marshall offers about seven wines and plans on continuing serving meals in a cozy fireplaced room through the fall.

Hermit Woods Winery

Heading north through Belmont and into the back roads of Sanbornton you'll find Hermit Woods Winery — just follow the nicely designed orange snail signs. Again, the journey is part of the experience as you skirt Opechee Lake and head for the hills. Hermit Woods, named after a nearby state park, is on property owned by Bob Manley and his wife, Jerilyn. It is the home they purchased in 2005, which at the time they thought too big. Now with a tasting room in an ell and a winery beneath, they are sharing

their lovely setting with the public in just the right-sized space.

Hermit Woods Winery is a cooperative effort by three good friends with a well-balanced collective background. They have gotten the winery off the ground and onto the public's tastebuds in short order. Manley is a marketing professional, Ken Hardcastle comes with years of wine and beer making experience. In fact, on his nearby property are some of the first grape vines ever grown in New Hampshire. This well before Jewell Towne was conceived. And the third partner, Chuck Lawrence, adds his sophisticated palate.

The wine portfolio of Hermit Woods is quite varied. In fact, it's downright amazing. With a young vineyard they have purchased Napa grapes for Malbecs and Chilean grapes for a Merlot. But their zeal for experiment and fermentation has brought them closer to home. Ken is also an avid beekeeper and the trio has developed a local mead with just the right taste of honey. Local fruits are also ripe for the bottle. A particularly fecund crabapple tree on the property has been bottled into an interesting crabapple wine with just a hint of sweetness for the perfect apéritif. Their apple wine is made from local apples and is off-sweet with no cloying overt apple taste. The blueberry, also, is refreshing and not too sweet. At the moment their Red Scare is the most interesting, with a blend of blueberry, blackberry, elderberry and honey wines in a nice balance; it behaves like a grape wine and holds up well to a variety of foods. And that's just the start. The prolific trio currently have about 20 wines, all in small quantities for now, but are just starting to see where local availability and their talents take them. One road less taken is their Kiwi wine fermented from a local variety of kiwi quite different than the Australian variety. They finish it somewhat dry to resemble a Sauvignon Blanc. With a surprising grapefruit peel finish it's almost there. With the happy feedback from this bottling the men are planning on making more and even planting a series of kiwi bushes along the walkway to the winery. As it may become their signature wine, they are currently looking for people willing to grow it for them. It's a hardy plant that can be grown without sprays.

Bob, who enjoys a nice complex red wine in the French style, says, "We are making wines we enjoy. We want them to be complex and layered. But still, the fruit wines will go where they want to go, they are the 'decider.' We can nudge them a bit in the right direction, though. They don't have to be overtly sweet."

Coffin Cellars

Traveling west of I-93 in Webster, Peter Austin is making fruit wines under the label Coffin Cellars. Austin doesn't consider the name a marketing boondoggle, it just happens to be his middle name and a name with historic roots back to Nantucket in the 1700s. Austin has been making wines since the 1970s, when Euell Gibbons had everybody stalking wild asparagus. Foraging near his home, Austin found lots of red and black raspberries. Today, with the help of his sons Jamie and Timothy, he is producing apple, raspberry, blackberry, cranberry pomegranate (the only one not locally sourced), elderberry and cherry wines. Along the way he has planted 600 bushes to help fill the bottles. I tried the raspberry, which Austin claims is the driest. Indeed it was, and packed with fruit flavor, too. The alcohol content was on the high end. It may have been nice with lamb chops, but I never got past sipping it along with nibbles of a dark Lindt chocolate. That was simply divine.

Gilmanton Winery & Vineyard
528 Meadow Pond Rd., Gilmanton
(603) 267-8251, www.gilmantonwinery.com
Tastings Thursday through Saturday, 11 a.m. to 5 p.m., Sunday 1 p.m. to 5 p.m.
Sunday Brunch 9:30 to 1:30 p.m., \$15.75
Friday night Storyteller Dinners by candlelight \$27.95 for a 5-course dinner, plus wine
Reservations suggested.

Hermit Woods Winery
56 Taylor Rd., Sanbornton
(603) 253-7968, www.hermitwoods.com
Open Wednesday to Friday from 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. and weekends from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Coffin Cellars
1224 Battle St. (Rte. 27), Webster
(603) 731-4563
Email: coffincellarswinery@gmail.com
Open Sundays, 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. year-round
Find bottles at the Concord Co-op and the Cracker Barrel in Hopkinton.

OTHER LAKES REGION WINERIES
Sap House Meadery, Center Ossipee
www.saphousemeadery.com
Stonegate Vineyard, Guilford
www.stonegatevineyard.com

Haunting Whisper Vineyards, Danbury
www.hauntingwhisper.net

FIELD Notes Frozen Finds

Can prepared frozen foods be good for you, taste good and be good for the local food economy, too? Chef Michael Webb, a New Hampshire chef turned entrepreneur,



has recently turned those skills into growing a frozen food company that does just that.

He originally joined a small start-up food company called Village Foods to help expand their retail product line. Today Village Foods produces 23 frozen family-size, "ready to bake" meal entrées shipped to 40 stores across six states. (Available at Harvest Markets across New Hampshire.)

As a one-time chef-delegate representing Slow Food Monadnock, Michael believes it is important for cooks, producers, farmers and consumers to come together to protect agricultural heritage as well as for all to benefit from the localization of food production and consumption. He explains, "I see food prices constantly going up. Rising fuel prices add into that. So buying food locally minus the fuel markup is a huge plus for the economy."

Michael is collaborating with the Cornucopia Project, which teaches sustainable living to children by connecting them to the land through organic gardening. This year they are growing butternut squash for him, which he will label "Cornucopia Project Butternut Squash Soup," enabling the project to earn money to continue their educational endeavor. One by one, he will be adding local farms so that eventually his entire frozen food business will support local producers. As he grows, they will grow and prosper.

"I knew there had to be a way to do the right thing and at the same time get a great product at an affordable price to the consumer. That is my goal. That is the big picture. Supporting the local economy by supporting sustainable farming while growing a profitable business. I see that as a good balance and leading a good life."

— Hillary Davis

Michael Webb, Village Foods
74 Main St., Franconia, (603) 547-6861
www.franconiafoodstore.com
Monday through Saturday, 6 a.m. to 7 p.m.
Sunday, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Hillary Davis lives in Peterborough. She is a food writer and has a weekly food blog at www.marchedimanche.typepad.com.