

## Wine is coming of age in Nevada County

**By Rod Byers**  
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Nevada County's grape and wine industry is becoming an increasingly significant force. By my count, there are now 18 wineries in the county.

Currently 14 are members of the Nevada County Winery Association, a nonprofit group dedicated to promoting awareness of the wines of our region.

Last year, the Association applied for and received a Community Partners Grant from the Board of Supervisors. It is an agricultural grant for the marketing of products recognized as originating in Nevada County as well as for promoting a strong and sustainable local agricultural economy. They decided to use part of the money to hire an executive director. After an intensive search, the Association hired Kim Crevoiserat.

Crevoiserat moved to Nevada County in 2003. She was born in Livermore and later lived in Pleasanton. I asked her about her wine background, "I have never actually worked in wine industry, but I am a real wine enthusiast."

In a way she grew up with wine. Her mother owned an art gallery in Livermore. "My mother was very involved in the art and wine movement there. It seemed like there was always some kind of wine tasting happening."



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Kim Crevoiserat

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Crevoiserat was an active member of the Pleasanton Mother's Gourmet Cooking Club and started a wine tasting club that is still meeting today.

But none of that is why the Association hired her. Crevoiserat was hired for her extensive business marketing experience.

For years she worked for Wells Fargo Bank doing project management, marketing, advertising and event planning. She understands the pitfalls and complexities of strategic planning, promotion, and advertising.

I wondered what she saw as the most important issues in her new job? "My primary focus is to bring the Association together on a strategic level." She explained that getting members to focus on common goals is a major priority. Equally important will be to promote Nevada County as a wine tasting destination. There is still a disconnect between the word Nevada and wine. "A lot of people don't know that Nevada County is in California. They too easily assume it's in the state of Nevada and that there's no wine industry there."

Recently, for that very reason, the Association changed its name from The Nevada County Winery Association to The Northern Sierra Wine Country. Crevoiserat explained, "We want to be recognized as part of California's Sierra Foothills wine community. Many people already know what a great area this is. We want them to know it's a great area for wine as well."

Part of her job will be to spearhead several events that the Association hosts every year. The next one coming up will be the Winter Wine and Food Celebration in March. The Association sponsors a lavish dinner at the Fairgrounds and then partners with Music In The Mountains and The Grass Valley Downtown Association for a walk around wine tasting event in downtown Grass Valley.

Jacques Mercier, Rod Byers and Mark Foster do a double blind tasting of local wines.  
**Submitted photo**

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The two other major events Kim will be working on are A Grape Affair - A Day In The Vineyard, in June and The Gold Harvest Wine Trail in October. Kim has quickly realized she can't just focus on the big events. "There are always a dozen little things that pop up unexpectedly," she told me, "We were just asked to pour at The Grape And Wine Symposium that's held in Sacramento every January."

Crevoiserat was excited about the possibility of being able to put the Association's name out there but the sticky wicket is that the Association can only pour four wines. So which four?

One of the first things Crevoiserat did when she started her new job was to assemble a profile of the member wineries. It is remarkably diverse. Combined, the 14 members produce over 40,000 cases of wine. There are 48 different varieties planted in the county.

The varieties range from Aglianico to Zinfandel. Most people are familiar with Cabernet Sauvignon, Sangiovese or Chardonnay but some of the more obscure varieties include Cunoise (Naggiar), Tannat (Solune), Mourvedre (Pilot Peak), Aglianico (Montoliva) and Rkatsiteli (Avanguardia). Not all 48 varieties are made into individual wines, some go into blends but still, there are a lot of different wines produced. How to choose?

## Computer Troubles?

After a good bit of back and forth Kim and Phil Starr, who was the president of the Association at the time decided to do it with a blind tasting. Each member winery could put one red and one white in the tasting. Eight wineries decided to participate (not all the wineries have wines available for sale right now).

Heather Nenow from Lucchesi Winery, Steve Burch from Burch Hall Winery, Mark Foster from Nevada City Winery, Jacques Mercier from Solune Winegrowers and I were selected to be the judges. The other four are all the winemakers for their respective wineries. Most consumers don't get a chance to do much winetasting with winemakers. It's quite an experience but that will have to wait for another story.

To be completely fair and unbiased we decided that the tasting should be double blind, not only would we not know who made each wine, we wouldn't even know what varieties they were. We were simply asked to select the best wines from the group in front of us.

Because we were concerned that we all might pick different wines we decided that everyone should pick six wines and then we would narrow it to the final four. There was no requirement that two be red and two be white. We were looking for the four best wines on the table.

When we were all done four of us had selected the same three wines so they were automatically in. Three of us had agreed on another four. We decided to have a taste off between those four wines to select one for the final placement. When the dust settled, the four wines selected were Double Oak 2004 Chardonnay, Nevada City Winery 2004 Chardonnay, Naggiar 2004 Cabernet Franc and Burch Hall 2004 Reserve Syrah. Those are the four wines that will represent Nevada County at The Wine And Grape Symposium.

Other wines of note, either because they were in the taste-off for the final placement or because they caught my eye were Lucchesi 2003 Cabernet Sauvignon, Solune 2004 Tempranillo, Nevada City Winery 2004 Syrah, Double Oak 2003 Cabernet Sauvignon and Solune 2004 Syrah.

It's a big world out there. There are a lot of wines and a lot of wine regions clamoring for attention. Broadcasting Nevada County's wine news will be a challenging job. Kim was clear to point out to me that this is a case of the glass being half full. "There is so much potential here. We have great wines being produced with more and more on the way." She reminded me that a healthy wine business promotes healthy vineyards, which promotes healthy agriculture and sustainable open space helping to preserve Nevada County's rural quality. That is something that is healthy for all of us.

One final note: For more information about the Association and its member wineries and a map go to

<http://www.northensierrawinecountry.com> or call 866-355 WINE (9463).

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Rod Byers is director of marketing at Nevada City Winery, is a CSW certified wine educator, teaches wine classes at Sierra College and is a California State Certified Wine Judge. He can be reached by e-mail at [wineonpine@sbcglobal.net](mailto:wineonpine@sbcglobal.net) or by phone at 530-913-3703.

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