



# ASEV 2010 Merit Award

Presented at the 61st National Conference • Seattle, WA

**ELLEN BUTZ**

## *Life among the Grand Crus*



As I look over the list of previous Merit Award winners for the society, I am struck by the extent of their diverse talents, intense careers, productive lives, and contributions to improving winemaking and grapegrowing in the United States and worldwide. And I am awestruck to be included with such a group. It is gratifying to be recognized for 25 years of voluntary service—sustaining an organization that has supported the careers of the wine world's shakers and bakers. And I am sure Professor Yokotsuka, who shares this award for his work with the Japan Chapter, would agree that the memories are mostly wonderful.

I'm not a researcher, unless you allow my one publication on killing off Michigan seagulls with type E botulinum toxin or developing the first American commercial freeze-dried malolactic culture; I'm not a professor, unless I can count assisting with wine appreciation classes for 22 years and 5,000 students at Mississippi State and Purdue and a nauseatingly long list of workshops and winemaking talks throughout the east; I'm not a winemaker, unless you'll accept 30 years of making batches of test wines for researchers; I'm not a wine sensory specialist, unless I can claim running the INDY International Wine Competition for 15 years. I suppose what I am is an enabler. And, I have been extremely lucky to meet people who gave me the opportunity to shine: doing the organizational business I loved to do. And, for the most part, those connections were made through ASEV—Eastern Section. So, I'd like to use this time with you to pay tribute to the section and share some of the stories—at least the part that's fit to print!

### *Wine both West and East*

Not all of us were born with silver wine goblets in our hands—in fact, in the East, for people of my modestly

ancient age, wine at the dinner table was as rare as caviar, and much more suspect. Efforts to produce wine in this country started on the West Coast and East Coast at nearly the same time. Thanks to the efforts of Thomas Jefferson in the East and the Catholic missions in the West, the late 1700s were years of enthusiastic but usually frustrating efforts to produce grape wines on this continent by people who had enjoyed them in Europe. We all know the story, from phylloxera to prohibition, it seemed that wine would never become a basic food item in this country. But it's coming, and thanks to two important American iconic groups—baby boomers and wine scientists, both of which I am proud to belong to.

You West Coast folks with your nearly perfect climate and fertile valleys and liberal dispositions (hey, I grew up thinking of the University of California more as a radical hippie breeding ground than a wine research center) unfettered by grape juice communions, had all the advantages when it came to developing wine industries. For the rest of the country, it took us baby boomers, who have reached retirement healthy and eager to do work that is independent, artistic, close to nature and food, to pick up the reins of the scattered local industries and begin the small-town wine revolution. And for that to happen, someone had to figure out how to grow the grapes in unfriendly environments, develop new varieties, and produce quality wine from grapes that were chemically unbalanced according to classic standards.

Enter, during the 1970s (200 years after the continental beginnings), the state wine organizations: groups of 5 to 10 wineries who were struggling with stifling state regulations, difficult winegrowing environments, and lack of consumer acceptance or even recognition of local wine products. Those organizations, like the Indiana Wine Growers Guild, demanded support from state university extension agents who, in turn, required training and support from their agriculture departments, and the fledgling state wine programs began to develop: Ohio State University, Penn State University, Cornell, Michigan State, University of Arkansas, Mississippi State, Virginia Tech, University of Kentucky, Indiana, Illinois and Iowa and Nebraska and Wisconsin and Michigan and Minnesota, and Missouri, and North Carolina, and even Alabama! They established

---

ASEV is not responsible for statements or opinions printed herein; they represent the views of the author and are not binding on the ASEV as a whole.

Copyright © 2010 by American Society for Enology and Viticulture. All rights reserved.

“research” vineyards, some did grape-breeding programs, others worked on wine chemistry issues, isolated local yeast and malolactic organisms—most worked in a relative vacuum, depending on training a graduate student or an assistant to accomplish the programs. Most importantly, they held workshops to pass on the information.

There was a huge need for experienced researchers, both in viticulture and enology, and the gene pool was pretty small at that time. (Seems like most of the California graduates lacked the guts to dive into this murky vat.) The small group of professor-types who made up my grand cru of teachers and researchers running those programs in the 1970s and early 1980s included Jim Gallander at Ohio State, Bob Beelman at Penn State, Justin Morris at U of Arkansas, Stan Howell at Michigan State, Bruce Zoecklein at Missouri, Nelson Shaulis and Bob Pool and Terry Acree at Cornell, Richard Vine at Mississippi State, my boss for 20 years, and many others I did not have the pleasure of knowing personally. Most did not have formal educations in enology or viticulture at that time. They were food scientists and pomologists, and agriculture economists and biochemists, and soil scientists, who used their own subject knowledge to develop expertise in the world of grapes and wine. They shared a passion and enthusiasm for their subject that was infectious, and they shared a sense of humor that could be, in some cases, quite surprising/shocking/hilarious. Perhaps Nelson Shaulis was better known for humbling his colleagues than amusing them, but no meeting was ever boring with this group.

Another group of scientists were working on viticulture and enology problems within their companies. Huge corporations like Taylor Wine and Welch’s, Brights Winery and Andres in Canada, and Meiers Winery in Ohio were doing significant research and collaborating with professors in their regions, but most of the information was not available to the public.

By 1974 it became obvious that the problems of their regions were often similar and that much could be gained from gathering together and forming a forum to network; universities, industries, independent growers and winemakers, gathering to present technical papers on subjects that were often not of interest to western conferences, such as acid reduction and winter injury.

### ASE–Eastern Section

The American Society of Enologists had been meeting regularly for 25 years—many easterners were members and often presenters at the national conferences, but the travel distance minimized attendance by those who would benefit most from the information. During this time, members of the eastern industry petitioned the national society to amend the bylaws of the ASE to allow formation of chapters where interest and membership was sufficient. This was accomplished in 1974, and in 1975 over 100 professionals in winemaking and related industries witnessed the first step in the formation of an Eastern Section of the American Society of Enologists.

This occurred during the annual New York Wine Research Meeting at the Cornell Geneva Experiment Station. Dr. Andrew Rice, research director of Taylor Wine Company, spearheaded the effort and was elected the first president of ASE-Eastern Section. During that New York meeting a slate of officers was elected and bylaws drawn up to present to the national society at their November 1975 board meeting.

Of interest to me is how carefully that first board of directors was assembled. The officers represented four university “types” and four industry “types.” Chair-elect Willard Robinson and Secretary Robert Pool were from the Experiment Station at Cornell, Jim Gallander was a food scientist at Ohio State, as was Bob Beelman at Penn State. Then the big four eastern wine/juice producers were represented: Bertram Silk, Vice President, Canandaigua Wine Company; Edwin R. Haynes, Andres Wine Company, Canada; Solomon Specter, Mogan David Wine Co., Chicago Operation; and the first chairman, Andy Rice, Taylor Wines. The last director, Nathan G. Stackhouse, Jr. was listed as a Michigan wine consultant.

The first official conference of the ASE-Eastern Section was held in August 1976. Fifty-one people met on the campus of Behrend College in northwest Pennsylvania to hear 11 technical papers: six of which dealt with some aspect of flavor modification of Concord grapes. Minutes of the business meeting state that 160 memberships at the staggering price of \$5 had been received. Headquarters of the section were set at Geneva, which was, and still is, the largest and most stable of the eastern wine/grape programs. For the next 6 to 7 years, the conferences were held in July at the Behrend campus, with dorm rooms, shared corridor bathrooms, and no air conditioning. Formal technical meetings were held in a very informal environment which suited the mostly youthful membership just fine. I attended my first meeting in 1981 and found the traditions of late-night sidewalk wine tastings and impromptu sporting events, such as skinny dipping in the campus pool, were treasured activities. Fortunately for all, camera phones were not invented yet. In a year or two, the board decided that heat, rain, and limited space for vendors called for a better meeting location. Since then, conferences have been held in hotels, more comfortable, but with much less spirited camaraderie.

The Eastern Section’s mission has always been to include as many of the states as possible as meeting sites. We had hoped to increase membership by a more visible presence as we moved out of Geneva and also to expose the members whose work was focused on native varieties to the great range of new hybrids and even muscadines that were beginning to fuel imaginations and fermenters in other regions. Networking and presentations at conferences demonstrated the characteristics of newly released varieties as they were planted in far-ranging environments. A great example of this is the Geneva hybrid, ChardoneL.

The variety did not do particularly well in New York and no plans were made to name or propagate it for commercial

plantings until research vineyards in Missouri, Illinois, Indiana, and Michigan demanded it for their growers. Chardonal was producing better-quality dry white table wines than we had been able to make with older white hybrids, such as Seyval. Research samples were brought to ASEV–Eastern Section meetings, climates and techniques discussed, and decisions facilitated at these meetings. The struggle to produce quality *vinifera* from Arkansas to Connecticut can be followed through the research papers, vineyard tours, and wine-tasting sessions during the conferences.

Despite the growing eastern industry (for the first time there are more winery licenses outside California than inside—I know, you still produce 90% of all the wine), membership in the Eastern Section has remained fairly steady, 100 to 160 members, full members, and affiliates. Since the huge majority of eastern commercial winemakers have no formal enology or viticulture training, the general perception is that ASEV–ES is way too technical for them, they wouldn't understand the papers. They feel we are a society of researchers who should have our technical meeting and bring the information back to the state meetings to be explained in layman's terms. The addition of a "symposium" to the conference each year has helped encourage a few more producers to attend. The symposiums are half-day or full-day sessions with invited experts, who address a focused topic such as mechanical harvesting or sensory evaluation or red *vinifera* wine production. Every year the scope of the research and the presentations gets better. More students participate, many for the first time in a formal conference. We have elegant food and wine paired banquets and professionally guided regional winery and vineyard tours—no matter! With symposiums or without, the meeting attendance hovers close to 120 every year—frustrating!!! Perhaps we should go back to skinny dipping!

The one aspect that has grown and flourished is our students. For many years a small trade show at the conferences funded the scholarship program: actually, Mark Bassel and APM were the main impetus, running a casino night event during the conferences. Finally, at the request of the vendors, the last trade show was held at the 2005 conference, leaving us grasping for scholarship funding.

In 2006 Rob Merletti of Vineyard & Winery Management approached us with a proposal to hold a scholarship fundraiser auction during Wineries Unlimited. This has been a very successful partnership and has provided about \$50,000 in the past three years to fund the scholarship program. Students bring enthusiasm, good gossip about their

professors, and new ideas. The student paper competition is always the most popular part of the conference.

### *Moving Forward*

I have been on the board of directors for the section continuously for the past 22 years, serving as director, chair, treasurer, and finally administrative assistant. I've watched and assisted as the section has developed and changed but not grown. For associations to stay significant, leadership must change. It is always easier to do things the way we always have. Professors and wine business executives are stretched so thin they hardly have time to be productive members of boards of directors, even though it is an honor to be chosen. So we give up real live board meetings where ideas are born and developed and rely on phone conferences where only details are assigned. We settle for the same pattern each year because it's easier than daring to try new things. And those of us who have held up the corners for years and years begin to lose our initial enthusiasm and get careless. I will finish my tenure with the Eastern Section this year, and, although I realize it will dump a large load of detail work back on the board, I really believe it will force the initiation of some serious discussions on how to modernize and rejuvenate this valuable association.

These 22 years have been filled with friendship and fun. I have grown and thrived by working with so many Grand Cru people—and by serving the Eastern Section so many different ways. My hope is that the leaders will value the benefits of having a viable section by taking the time to do a full evaluation of where we are now and where we should be going and how to get it done. Without the trade shows, we have lost the input of a very important sector of the total wine industry. We should approach these companies and encourage their membership and involvement. We should do a better job of following our graduates and encouraging them to participate early. Bringing in new members is the single most important responsibility for any organization. Advice is cheap, right?

And now, you have given me this wonderful award. Thank you for valuing the work of people like me. I thank all of you out there who have endured my endless requests for your time, and wines, and knowledge for so many different events. Thanks to many supportive friends who have retired; I miss you. Thanks to my husband, Mahlon, who shares my passion for the lovely life of winegrowing.

*Cheers, Dears!* ■