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Oak Knoll Winery celebrates 40th year in Willamette Valley

Today, May 18, Oak Knoll Winery in Hillsboro marks its 40th Anniversary of winemaking in Willamette Valley.

The Oak Knoll Winery began in 1970, when Ronald and Marjorie Vuylsteke became early pioneers of Oregon winemaking by founding the first winery in Washington County. At that time there were only a few vineyards and a handful of wineries in all of Oregon.

Ron Vuylsteke's grandfather, Leonard, a native of Belgium, was a winemaker in the St. Emilion region of Bordeaux in the early 1900s. He immigrated to the United States with his family on one of the last ships able to safely make the passage from Europe, just before World War I. Arriving at Ellis Island in New York, the family traveled across the country by train to join relatives who had settled in the farmlands of the northern Willamette Valley. This is where the family has remained since those early pioneering days.

In 1983, wine judge Andre Tchelistcheff phoned Ron Vuylsteke to inform him that Oak Knoll Winery won Best of Show and the Governor's Trophy for its 1980 Vintage Select Pinot Noir in wine competition at the Oregon State Fair. Tchelistcheff said to Ron, "I have spent the past 50 years of my life searching for the world's finest Pinot Noirs, and yours is among the greatest I have tasted."

By March 2005, Oak Knoll Winery had its second generation of family members in place to continue with Ron Vuylsteke's passionate commitment, while slowly transitioning into the 21st century. Stepson Greg Lint is president of Oak Knoll, while nephew Jeff Herinckx is winemaker, having made wine at Oak Knoll for the last 27 years.

In 2006, during the Oregon Wine Industry Symposium, Oak Knoll family pioneers Marj and Ron Vuylsteke were awarded the Symposium's prestigious Founders Award. Each year the Founders Award is given to a person (in this case the family) whose long time work in and for the industry has laid the groundwork for the direction and accomplishments of the industry, and whose efforts have helped foster cooperation among growers and winemakers.

According to President Greg Lint, "Everyday, we work very hard, while we continue to enjoy our place in Oregon's winemaking history a winemaking history which isn't much older than the winery itself. It's not a position that we take lightly. The Vuylstekes are an important Oregon couple who saw the potential of Willamette Valley long before so many others. It was their foresight and hard work that blazed the trail for future generations of all Oregon winemakers."

To commemorate its 40th Anniversary, from now until May 31, Oak Knoll will offer Pinot Gris and Pinot Noir wines at a 40 percent discount from retail prices at the winery and on the its Web site.

All other Oak Knoll wines are offered at a 30 percent discount from their retail prices at the winery during a weekend celebration on May 22-23.

Events are being planned, with the Web site being the best resource during the month for information related to all activities.