How Big of a Deal Is It Anyway, To Be Celebrating 40 Years?

Today’s the day that Oak Knoll Winery is celebrating 40 years of continuous winemaking in historic Willamette Valley. You might think that 40 years of winemaking in one location – within the big picture of winemaking history worldwide – seems like just a start. Consider the Europeans, and how many generations of families have worked at Chateau Latour, for instance; but, Oregon’s roots don’t run anywhere near as deeply as those roots. The entire Oregon wine industry as a whole is only slightly more than 40 years old. This is the most significant point here. Oak Knoll Winery plays a major role in Oregon’s wine history.

The Oak Knoll Winery story 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 other 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, Andre Tchelistcheff learned that Oak Knoll Winery won Best of Show and the Governor’s Trophy at the Oregon State Fair Wine Competition, for its 1980 Vintage Select Pinot Noir. Tchelistcheff, a wine judge for that fair, phoned Ron Vuylsteke. 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 Twenty First Century.
* Stepson Greg Lint is president of Oak Knoll, having successfully proven himself in management in the food industry.
* 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, either. The Vuylstekees 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.”

DURING THE ENTIRE MONTH OF MAY
~ Commemorating our 40th Anniversary, from now until May 31st:

* 2007 Pinot Gris and 2006 Pinot Noir wines are being offered at a 40 percent discount from their retail prices at the winery and on the winery’s Website. [Considering the pricing of these wines, this is a very attractive offer.]
* All other Oak Knoll wines are offered at a 30 percent discounted from their retail prices at the winery during this coming weekend celebration, May 22 and May 23.

Events are being planned during the rest of this month, with the Oak Knoll Website being the best resource during the month for information related to all activities.