

In the Cellar

LOCAL WINES ARE ONE OF A KIND

“His lips drink water, but his heart drinks wine.”

E.E. CUMMINGS

by Sarah Santiago

The Accidental Wine-Maker

Wayne and Linda never dreamed of making wine, much less buying the historic Big Dry Run school building of Johnson County, originally built in 1947, and turning it into a winery. They were in the furniture business for twenty-five years selling Italian imports. Eleven years ago, a trip to the High Point Market piqued their curiosity in the area. Upon exploring the eastern part of Tennessee, they became spellbound by the beauty of Butler. Its similarities to the Italian countryside were uncanny and the couple could not resist the temptation to buy land the very next day. When they built their Tuscan Villa-style home on the Tennessee mountaintop, they only intended on living comfortably there. The vines were meant to be used merely as landscaping but, as Wayne notes with a huge smile, “somehow it turned into all this!” He is referring to some 4,000 vines that now produce 60,000 pounds of grapes each year. Wayne started making wine only seven years ago, but has already received notable awards for their wines. Doe Mountain Red, their Cabernet, won a Concordance Gold (unanimously voted) award at the Wines of the South competition.

Watauga Lake Winery's vineyard, Villa Nove, is about a mile away from the winery and sits at a 2350 foot elevation. The grapes love the combination of the altitude and weather thus producing well-balanced fruit.

The Tuscan style house that sits at the top of the mountain will make you forget that you are still in the High Country and transport you to Italy.

Watauga Lake's mission is to grow quality fruit, make really good wine, and develop a venue where customers can enjoy “la dolce vita” (the sweet life). They also hold events that raise money for charities such as the Fisher House Foundation which helps veterans and their families. They hold such events as Murder Mystery Dinners, Winemaker's Dinners, and Dining Under the Stars which includes a full traditional Italian meal with live Italian music in the vineyard's pavilion. Membership to their Wine Club has many benefits: Free wine tasting for you and one guest (glass not included), preferential pricing on full case purchases of 12 bottles or more, semi-annual package of 6 bottles of Watauga Lake Wines chosen by the winemaker (substitutions are allowed) with special pricing, invitations to members-only events such as dinners, barrel tastings and vineyard tours, priority given to announcement of all upcoming events, exclusive pricing on wines purchased from Watauga Lake Winery for your private event held at Villa Nove Vineyards or Watauga Lake Winery. Villa Nove has a gorgeous backdrop as a wedding venue and hosts many ceremonies and receptions on the grounds.

Wayne and Linda have kept the schoolhouse as original as



possible, even keeping some of the old chalkboards and the gymnasium in-tact. It houses the wine casks, a tasting room, a catering kitchen and an event venue that can sit about one hundred people. Wayne says one of his goals for next year is to revamp the old school scoreboard so that it can be used for the members to play basketball games. **HCHA**

Open April - December
Thursday through Saturday
11:00-6:00 p.m. and
Sunday 1:00-5:00 p.m.

Watauga Lake Winery
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