

MAKING WINE TASTING FUN & BETTER

BRYAN OTIS, DIRECTOR OF IDEAS
ARTICLE TIM KUKES | PHOTOGRAPHY PROVIDED

“We make things better, and then we have fun,” Bryan Otis says. A second later he modestly amends it to, “We try to make things better, but we definitely have fun.”

That’s a theme that has run deep in the Otis family endeavors. They have roots in Bellevue going back to Bryan’s grandparents, Jack and Mary Jane Powell. Jack moved to Bellevue in the 1950s after serving in the Philippines during WWII. His daughter, Diane, went to school at Enatai Elementary and Bellevue High School, and then attended the University of Washington where she met Cliff Otis. Bryan, their oldest son, was born at Overlake Hospital in Bellevue.

Bryan and the Otis family have been involved in several businesses including Tandem and Matthews Winery. Bryan is CEO of Tandem, a tech company that provides calendar and scheduling support to approximately 1,800 schools. His role at Matthews Winery is a little different.

“I tend to be the guy who has a lot of ideas,” Bryan says. “But at this point, I know that I tend to sputter out after the ideas are finished and need somebody to pick up the ball and run with those crazy ideas.”

One such idea came about in the early 2000s as Bryan was working for John Howie’s Seastar Restaurant in downtown Bellevue as a sommelier. According to his father, Cliff, he wanted to fill out his experience as a sommelier, so he started volunteering at wineries throughout the Woodinville area.

“I still worked for Microsoft, and he [Bryan] came home and said, ‘Hey, would you like to do a little investment in the wine business?’” Cliff says. “Don’t do it for me,” he said, “but if you’re interested in finding out what is going on in Woodinville, and wine, this might become a fun way to invest in it.”

CONTINUED >

Locally Owned (CONTINUED)



ago planting a crop on our property. Then we started doing the farm-to-table dinners. This is our third year, and we have a fun farm-to-table program now that we're growing."

The Otis' don't pull any punches when creating an exquisite experience, either. The chef-in-residence for this year's farm-to-table dinners is Micah Mowrey, who worked at Gramercy Tavern in New York City from 2009 to 2013. And, of course, the ingredients for the meals are locally sourced, either direct from the Matthews farm or sourced from local vendors no more than 20 miles from the property.

"We're just a small little business—one of the smaller local businesses in King County," Cliff says. "It's really fun to feature other local small businesses in the things that we do. We really like that."

And don't forget the wine. Matthews' 2013 claret was named No. 27 on *Wine Spectator's* Top 100 Wines. They have two brands, Matthews and Tenor, and they are exquisite, Bob Silver, a local PR consultant and writer of the WA, Wine, PR blog, says. But when talking about what sets Matthews Winery apart, he comes back to the experience and setting.

"They created something unique, certainly in the Woodinville wine community, if not in the entire state, with the farm and commitment to creating a unique and special tasting experience for their guests," Silver says.

According to the Bellevue Chamber of Commerce, the population of downtown Bellevue is projected to increase from 5,500 to 14,000 by the year 2020. King County itself saw an increase in growth of 1.5 million inhabitants in 1990 to 2 million inhabitants in 2015, a 36 percent growth increase. Places like Matthews Winery are getting more precious as urban areas encroach upon them.

"I think people are so immersed in their tech," Bryan says. "Getting out to some place that doesn't have a lot of technology is relaxing. Walking around the farm, having a glass of wine, a really good sandwich, and being able to sit out in the sun—those things are starting to matter even more and that's what we're seeing." *The Matthews Tasting Room + Farm, 16116 140th Place NE, Woodinville, WA 98072, is open from noon to 6 p.m. daily for wine tastings. For more information, call 425.487.9810 or visit MatthewsWinery.com.*

Matthews Winery has been in businesses since 1992, and was one of the original premier wineries in Washington, according to Bryan, but in the early 2000s, it needed recapitalization. The Otis family invested in Matthews Winery in 2003. Since then, they moved from casual investors to sole proprietors of the winery in 2008.

"When we heard about the winery, and that it needed to get sorted, it was in the wheelhouse of what our family likes to do," Bryan says. "As we got deeper and deeper involved into it, it blossomed into all these wonderful things that we could do, as well, too."

Matthews used to make their wines on-site at the Woodinville property, but the grapes were grown in the Columbia Valley. Trucking the grapes from the east side of the Cascade Mountains to the west risked Matthews premium crop and also wasn't cost effective.

The family decided to start producing their wines in Walla Walla.

"We were left with a kind of a conundrum," Bryan says. "We have this 8-acre beautiful piece of property that had a very nice winemaking setup, but when we moved most of it over to Walla Walla, we were like, 'What do we do with this?' As it turns out, even before the wine industry started in Woodinville, it was farm country."

In 2014, the Otis family converted the property into a full working farm. Once the farm came, it opened the door to whole range of experiences for would-be wine tasters, from a simple pleasant indoor and outdoor setting to relax in while enjoying one of Matthews signature vintages to farm-to-table dinners.

"The farm-to-table program was birthed by Bryan," Cliff says. "He networked with a local farmer who came in and started three years

