

MARKET MUSINGS

By Jan Freedman

The last two weekends at the Aurora Farmers' Market have been absolutely bustling with energy and people, due in part by the beautiful weather, and by the growing amount of produce at the farmers' booths.

The earliest strawberries were available last Saturday and our farmers are expecting to have a full complement of strawberries for next Saturday. Each week we'll see more produce available as the early fruits and vegetables are ready to harvest.

Many of you will know that the Provincial Government has decided to allow VQA (Vintner's Quality Alliance) wineries to participate at Farmers' Markets for the first time this year. We are very excited that we will be hosting three different wineries at various times throughout this season.

Harwood Estates Winery will be coming on June 14 and Sept. 27. Stanners Vineyard will be with us on June 21 and August 30.

Pillitteri Estates Winery will be joining us from June 21 until the end of the season.

Pillitteri Estates Winery proudly continues a family tradition of viticulture and winemaking excellence. For Gary Pillitteri, the opening of the winery in June, 1993 was the culmination of a lifelong dream. Since arriving in Canada from Sicily in 1948, he was able to achieve his dream of opening a winery using his many years of experience as a grape grower in Niagara and as an amateur winemaker.

The dream in Niagara started in the early 1970s when Gary and his wife Lena opened their Fruit Stand on Niagara Stone Road. Selling peaches, cherries, plums and other tender fruit, this market is still open on site and continues to sell the property's bounty. Eventually, the facility expanded from a roadside cart to a larger building.

The turning point came in 1988 when Gary won a gold medal for his icewine in Niagara's amateur wine competition. He knew that he could build a professional and high quality winery only with the full commitment and expertise of his family. Therefore, Pillitteri Estates Winery is a family affair. His three children and a son-in-law are all involved in the enterprise.

The grapes are harvested primarily from the family's 100 acres of vineyards, planted with *Vitis vinifera* and French Hybrid grape varieties. Following the standards of the VQA, production has increased to roughly 90,000 cases. However, production is carefully controlled to ensure that the family's high quality standards are maintained.

The family's winemaking philosophy is simple: "to produce the finest wines possible from the highest quality Niagara Peninsula grapes". The strategy is more complex. Each vineyard and wine is treated individually since each has its own personality that must be expressed. "Our goal is to produce consistent, quality wine for our consumers: rich, full-bodied reds, fragrant, lively whites, and luscious icewines, all in a variety of styles to suit every palate".

This approach has earned Pillitteri Estates Winery a reputation for excellence. In the past 20 years, the winery has been honoured with over 700 medals at both domestic and international competitions. They are too numerous to list here, however, the Exclamation Reserve wines won gold at Challenge International du Vin, International Wine Challenge, International Wine and Spirit Competition and Red Wine of the Year in 2013 at the Ontario Wine Awards.

Pillitteri icewine is exported to over 30 countries worldwide. The family's commitment to producing VQA wines of exceptional quality and character is demonstrated in each bottle bearing the Pillitteri name. Please visit them at the Market and welcome them to our Market family.

Our next special event is our Strawberry Festival on June 21. The Aurora Community Band will be playing two sets " at 10 a.m. and again at 11.30 a.m. In between, at 11 a.m., we will be having an exciting butterfly release.

There will be free local strawberries to sample as well as freshly baked strawberry treats baked by our talented bakers, free crafts for the children and a raffle prize. Be sure to plan to attend.

See you at the Market!