

# Winemaking Tradition Lives On In Edenton

EDENTON — Almost 400 years after Sir Walter Raleigh's colonists saw the first wild muscadine grapes, a small winery on the shores of Albemarle Sound is making native grape wine in a tradition that is older than North Carolina itself.

In a converted stable five miles south of here, Deerfield Vineyards Native Grape Table Wine is hand bottled four at a time, hand corked and hand labeled.

It is the only winery in North Carolina.

Sir Walter Raleigh's colonists reported: "In 1584, we departed from England with two boats and found Roanoke Island on the fourth of July and the smell was as sweet as if we had been in the midst of some delicate garden, and grapes grew abundantly. "Every shrub was covered, climbing towards the tops of high cedars and we think the like is not to be found."

There are several varieties of muscadines, which is the generic name for native North American grapes. One of these is the scuppernon, from the Algonquin Indian name, "ascopo," meaning sweet-bay tree. Eighteenth century maps of North Carolina show a village and a river, both named Scuppernon. As early as 1809, the "white grape" was commercially planted around Lake Phelps, which was known then as Lake Scuppernon. A census made in 1810 showed that there were 1,368 gallons of wine being made in Washington County.

Visitors are bid welcome by a sign in front of the red barn in which Wine Cellars, Inc. is housed. The people who stop in to taste, look and buy are local curiosity

seeker and tourists who are "on the wrong road" or have relatives nearby, according to winemaker Rick Ervin.

Many of them are amateur wine makers themselves. They discuss their home operations and seek Ervin's advice on problems they may be having with the sometimes tricky fermentation process. Recently the winery has been getting 12 to 25 visitors daily, which indicates unusually high interest considering its off-the-beaten-track location.

"It took us a long time," Ervin says, "to get the laws changed to permit tasting and selling on the same premises." In little plastic cups, he offers tastes of the two wines the winery is currently producing. Both are Deerfield Vineyards Native Grape Table Wine. One is dry scuppernon, the other is a demi sec, a sweet scuppernon wine that outsells the dry two to one. The cost is \$2 per bottle.

The company has plans to market a rose soon and Ervin has developed a new formula for the demi sec to make it more mellow, less acidic, and lighter in body and aroma.

Ervin, 24, is originally from Morehead City.

He worked in Goldsboro as a hairdresser and began working at the winery last year as a utility worker with a job in Edenton didn't pan out. The former winemaker, now a cooper with another winery out-of-state, taught him the fundamentals of making wine and he has read intensely on the subject. A chemist helped him with the fine points.

Frank Williams is vice president of Wine Cellar Inc. and manager of the winery.

A former shrimper and farmer, Williams helped produce a grape harvester for DARF, a farm implement manufacturing company of which he is a corporate officer. DARF planted grapes for the harvester, and that led to plans for the winery.

Originally, the wine was made in Arkansas and bottled in North Carolina. Deerfield Vineyards Wine has been made in North Carolina since December of 1975.

The winery's present annual capacity is 14,500 gallons. Williams said they hope to grow to 100,000 gallons per year. If they do, they will still be among the smallest wineries in the nation.

"We never intend to get big," Williams said, "you lose that personal touch. "We want to proceed slowly, let the wine age naturally."

Visitors escorted through the winery may see the wine fermenting or aging in two large wooden tanks. They were bought for \$48 each from a Virginia winery that went out of business. Later they were dismantled and reassembled in the North Carolina winery's barn. The redwood stables are caulked with cattails and flax seeds and the tanks are sealed with tallow and mop heads.

Deerfield Vineyards Wine is sold only in North Carolina between Elizabeth City and Morehead City and east to Greenville. It also may be bought in Raleigh and Chapel Hill.

The grapes from which the wine is made are grown near Columbia, N.C. on the company's 80-acre vineyard. Presently there are about 3,000 acres of grapes grown commercially in North Carolina.

Edenton is on the northern edge of scuppernon country, Williams said. "It grows from here south to Florida and west to Mississippi. "So it is a southern grape, and our customers are mostly southerners. "It suits a southern taste."

Williams said that Deerfield Vineyard wines are not



WINE LEVEL — Rick Ervin checks the wine level in one of the vats at Deerfield Vineyards in Edenton as two visitors observe. (Photo courtesy of The Chowan Herald)

blended as much as some other scuppernon wines. "We try to hold the scuppernon aroma and taste."

No other winery makes a dry scuppernon wine, according to Williams. "Others are sweeter and have a higher alcoholic content," he said. "This is more of a table wine."

North Carolina's early settlers found a wealth of grapes growing wild and soon wine making was an important part of colonial life in the eastern part of the state. At Edenton, Deerfield Vineyards Native Grape Table Wine continues that tradition.

# Promotions Are Announced

Norfolk Carolina Telephone Company Board of Directors at its November 10 meeting announced several promotions. Chas. Camden Blades moved from Vice-President to Senior Vice-President. W. C. Meekins, Jr., moved to Vice-President, retaining his titles of Secretary, Treasurer, and Commercial Manager. T.F. Daniels also moved to Vice-President, retaining his titles of Assistant Secretary, Assistant

Treasurer, and Marketing Manager. R.M. Byrum moved from Chief Accountant to Vice-President-Comptroller; and D.G. Steele from Assistant Chief Accountant to Assistant Comptroller. S.T. Barrow, a management trainee, became Assistant Commercial Manager.

Blades began his career with the company in 1919, and has held various positions since that time. He has been a director since

1919. He serves as Chairman of the Executive Committee.

Meekins began in 1954 as Commercial Representative. He has been a director since 1973, and is on the Executive Committee.

Daniels began in 1968 as General Staff Assistant. He also served as Assistant Commercial Manager. He is on the Executive Committee.

Byrum began in 1965 as an Accountant.



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Salem Construction Company, Inc. announces the commencement of construction of Nursing Facilities located in Yadkinville, Elizabeth City and Morehead City, North Carolina. These facilities total 300 beds.

Architect for the project is Ray Troxell Associates, Inc. of Winston-Salem, North Carolina.

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