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Catch the Crush
Winemakers focus on second careers in Clark College's 50-Plus Initiative

Professional winemakers John, 60, and Bob Dingethal, 62, gaze over the immaculate, 40-acre Bethany Vineyard and Winery in Ridgefield with the knowledge of men who know their true passion in life. The Dingethals recently sold their successful 40-acre Sandhill Winery and Red Mountain Vineyards near Richland, Wash. The winery sold more 120,000 bottles over the past 16 years. It specializes in Cabernet, Sauvignon, Merlot and Pinot Gris. The winery also produces a Cinnamon Tea Red Table Wine bottled under its Ridgefield label, named after a buck found on Clark County's Ridgefield National Wildlife Refuge. "Bob and his wife Dona were partners in the winery, along with myself and two of our other sisters," says John Dingethal. "None of us had any experience when we started the vineyard and winery, but we learned a lot about grape, install irrigation systems and prune as we went along." John and Bob currently hold down steady jobs. John is a management consultant and Bob, as the director of Semiahmoo-Marina's Southwest Washington office. Together, they possess over 20 years of experience in every aspect of the wine business, from growing to producing, to sales and marketing. The two viticulturists are ideally suited to instruct a wine business ownership class as part of a national Plus-50 Initiative now pioneering at Clark College. The class, entitled Crush 'n the Grape, will offer 15 hours of credits for 'firm and profit, explores the ancient origin and history of the wine grape and how to propagate and grow them in the climate of western Washington. The class also looks at grape varieties and why certain grapes grow in the various regions around the world. The six-hour class includes three two-hour sessions from 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. Mondays starting on Oct. 6. The course will feature a well-rounded approach on "what it takes to be in business and be successful," John says. Topics will include general business skills, cash-flow forecasting and basics of creating and executing a solid business plan. More importantly, the course will stress the importance of patience. "Patience is definitely a virtue in the winemaking industry," he explains, and it includes the importance of having the right aperage for successful. "Winemaking can be successful on five or less acres or on more than 20 acres," John says. Small wineries can still manage farms with limited equipment on farms up to five acres, with heavy equipment required for larger acreage. "You really need 20 acres or more to get a return on the equipment investment," John said. According to John, growing grapes is easy, however, "growing good grapes is hard." Some of the daunting
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challenges include potential damage caused by insects, disease, frost and bad weather, and especially mildew. "Mildew is the biggest problem in the wine industry."

The Dingethals point to winemaker Walt House, 68, and his Bethany Vineyard and Winery in Ridgefield as a prime example of how people in their 50s, 60s, 70s and beyond are contributing to Washington’s wine reputation. Bethany, one of four Clark County wineries, produces wines with distinct Southwest Washington flavor and character. Grown in small blocks, the hand-picked grapes are carefully selected. Visitors are encouraged to bring a picnic lunch, stroll through the lakeside vineyard and visit the winery and tasting room. The winery also features summer concerts and offers a venue for weddings, receptions and special events.

Clark College is one of just five mentor colleges chosen nationally to participate in the 50-Plus Initiative program. As such, the college will redesign its small business development curriculum to offer second careers through business ownership, at a wine and cooking school for wine enthusiasts and food lovers. In addition, a joint program with the Area Agency on Aging will train in-home caregivers.

Clark College will also mentor two demonstration colleges. Western Dakota Technical Institute, located in Rapid City, S. Dak., will develop and pilot a national training model for baby boomers who want to become seasonal ranchers and interpretative guides at national parks. Chaffey Community College, located in Cucamonga, Calif., will start a new program for baby boomers to mentor and tutor under-prepared students and help them be successful in college.

Tracy Reilly-Kelly, Pipe 50 Initiative director at Clark College, notes that "Rapid City is home to Ellsworth Air Force Base and many ex-military retirees. In addition, the areas hosts scenic wonders including Mount Rushmore, the Crazy Horse monument, the Badlands and the Black Hills."

Western Dakota Technical Institute is creating a training program for the National Park Service to attract seasonal, seasonal workers for the diverse park programs and concessions—people age 50 and above who are looking for the kind of part-time second career that will be the hallmark of the plus 50 Baby Boomer generation in years to come."

The American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) Plus 50 Initiative is a three and one-half year effort to identify a pilot group of two-year institutions that will create or expand campus programs to engage the 50-plus population in learning, training/retraining programs; and/or volunteer, civic, service activities. The initiative is funded by a $12.2 million grant from the Atlantic Philanthropies. AACC provided sub-grants to member colleges selected through a competitive grant process. This comprises grants of up to $70,000 (total over three years) to five mentor colleges and grants of up to $40,000 (total over three years) to 10 demonstration colleges. Plus 50 Initiative will serve baby boomers throughout the Vancouver-Portland area.

Clark College kicks off year-long Diamond Jubilee

Clark College will celebrate its 75th anniversary and launch a year-long Diamond Jubilee with events occurring over 75 hours, starting at 9 a.m. on Wednesday, Oct. 1, through noon, Saturday Oct. 4.

Founded by a group of educators and businesspeople during the darkest times of the Great Depression, Clark College (originally called Vancouver Junior College) opened its doors in 1933. The college struggled through the early years and faced declining enrollments during World War II. However, the postwar years triggered a boom that continued this day. With an enrollment of nearly 13,000 students each quarter, Clark is now Washington’s second largest community and technical college.

Clark College President Robert K. Knight said that he looks forward to welcoming students, faculty, staff, supporters, and alumni to the celebration, as well as members of the greater community to events that include the lighting of the Clark College Chime Tower, a “Rock the Vote” rally, two dedication ceremonies and a Pankish Oktoberfest with food and fun for the community as well as alumni hospitality suites. Knight noted, “If you’ve ever worked at Clark or taken a class here, you are a Clark alumnus and we hope you’ll join our celebration.”

Information about the college’s 75th anniversary celebration and history is available on the college website: www.clark.edu/50plus. Clark College is located at 1933 Fort Vancouver Way, Vancouver.

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