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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, 52, gaze over the immaculate, 40-acre Bethany Vineyard and Winery in Ridgefield with the knowledge of men who follow 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 Teal Red Table Wine bottled under its Ridgefield label, named after a duck 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. I was the managing partner and took the lead in most technical areas, but all of the other partners pitched in as needed. We all learned to plant grapes, install irrigation systems and prune as we went along."

John and Bob currently hold down steady jobs, John as a management consultant and Bob, as the director of Senator Maria Cantwell'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 *Catch the Crush*: winemaking for fun 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 6:30-8:30 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.

Most importantly, the course will stress the importance of patience. "Patience is definitely a virtue in the winemaking industry," he explains, and stresses the importance of having the right acreage 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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Winemakers...

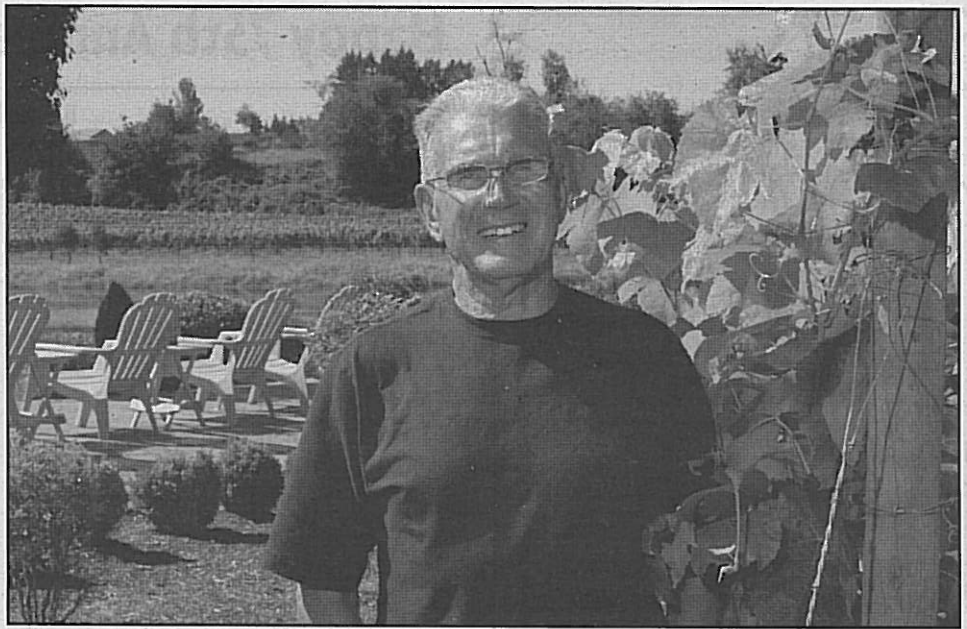
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challenges include potential damage caused by insects, disease, frost and bad weather, and especially mildew. "Mildew is the biggest problem in the wine industry."

The Dingethals point to winemaker Walt Houser, 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 hobbyists and food enthusiasts. 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 rangers and interpretive guides at national parks. Chaffey Community College, located in



Walt Houser's Bethany Vineyard and Winery in Ridgefield produces wines with distinct Southwest Washington flavor and character.

Cucamonga, Calif., will start a new program for baby boomer volunteers to mentor and tutor under-prepared students and help them be successful in college.

Tracy Reilly-Kelly, Plus 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 seasoned, seasonal workers for the diverse park programs and concessions—people age 50 and above who 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/re-training programs; and/or volunteer, civic, service activities.

The initiative is funded by a \$3.2 million grant to AACC 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 3 years) to 10 demonstration colleges.

Plus 50 Initiative will serve baby boomers throughout the Vancouver-Portland area.