

Sonoita-Elgin Celebrates 30 Years as Certified Winegrowing Area

“Entering Wine Country” is a green and white sign found on all highways leading into the Sonoita-Elgin area. Wine has been grown in the area since 1690, when the Jesuits and Franciscans planted Llistan Prieto grapes in the area missions. Arizona had a booming wine grape industry before prohibition, but it died soon afterward.

In the 1970s rancher Blake Brophy found some wild, gnarly Mission grapes abandoned on the Babocamori ranch. These old vines were still producing, even after years without care. In 1973 the first experimental vineyard plot was planted on the Babocamori. The success of this effort prompted Brophy and Dr. Gordon Dutt to begin commercial wine growing in 1979. Dr. Dutt, founder of

Sonoita Vineyards, is a retired soil scientist from the University of Arizona. Sonoita Vineyards opened in 1983 with a first-vintage production of 300 gallons. Dr. Dutt’s granddaughter, Lori Reynolds, now produces nearly 4,000 cases per year.

In 1984 the federal government designated the Sonoita-Elgin wine-growing region as an American Viticulture Area (AVA), thanks to the efforts starting with Dr. Dutt. To qualify, the growing area must have a unique geographical location, climate, and soil characteristics—all true of the Sonoita-Elgin area. The clay soil retains scarce available water. The high altitude and cool air blowing over the mountains are prime for growing great grapes. The

nutrients found in the local grasslands provide excellent nourishment for the vines. The Sonoita-Elgin AVA area is 208,000 square acres.

After having received the AVA certification, the local winemaking industry exploded. First came Sonoita Vineyards, then Callaghan, and now 12 licensed and bonded wineries grow and manufacture wines in the AVA area. Others are soon to follow. Kief Manning of Kief-Joshua Vineyards recently hosted a Southeast Arizona Wine Growers Festival to celebrate the 30th anniversary of the Sonoita AVA. Kief announced that “This year we want to celebrate that on October 26, 1984, the Sonoita-Elgin Wine Growing Region was granted AVA status, making it one of the oldest federal government granted viticulture areas in the United States.” In fact, the Sonoita-Elgin area is the only AVA area in Arizona.



Photo by John Fielding

Foster Drummond, wine salesman for Sonoita Vineyards

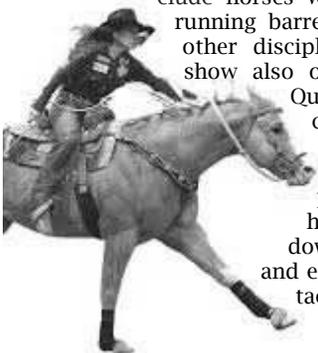
In 2011 the winemaking industry in Arizona generated 140 million dollars in sales and employed 300 workers in 50 wineries. Today the Arizona business has 90 wineries and has produced more than 189,000 gallons of wine from 1,000 acres of planted vines.

All the local wineries are celebrating the success of the 30th anniversary of the AVA with festivals and events throughout the summer season. They invite everyone from near and far to visit the local wineries and know that they are truly “Entering Wine Country.”

76th Annual Sonoita Quarter Horse Show

The 76th annual Sonoita Quarter Horse Show, which runs from Friday, May 9 through Sunday, May 11, is the oldest running Quarter Horse Show in the United States and in the world. Held at the Sonoita Fairgrounds, the show opens at 8 a.m. and there’s no gate fee. Events include horses working cattle, team roping,

running barrels, pole bending and many other disciplines in three arenas. This show also offers classes to Registered Quarter Horses, and a complete complement of All Breed classes. If you are interested in participating in the show, please go to www.sonoita-horseshows.com and download the class schedule and entry form. You can also contact Karen Siefer at 520-425-6393 or Jamie Smith at 305-395-0043.



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