

# Veteran winemaker tracks winery's evolution



## UNCORKED

James Nokes

Todd Graff has gone from simple to sublime – all the while making delicious wines.

In his 20 harvests at Frank Family, Graff has witnessed the evolution of all aspects of the winery. Upgrades in the vineyard sites, the cellar and hospitality have been raised to world-class standards.

“The marketing and hospitality at the beginning was simple, you just sat on a case of wine, there were no chairs, we were just some country boys that made wine,” Graff said. “I used to joke that when I first got here I had names for the barrels. Now, we have so many, I’m not even sure where they are all stored. We used to make a few thousand cases. Now we make quite a bit more.

“But, we still make the wine the same way, and that’s the fun part,” he said. “Sure, we’ve added people, space and equipment, but in my mind, we still make a small amount of wine even though we have better vineyard sourcing and major facility upgrades. Our excellent hospitality makes guests feel like they’re in a park-like setting.”

When reached by phone Wednesday, Graff eagerly awaited Friday, the scheduled end of harvest. “The light is on at the end of the tunnel,” he joked about a year that was benign compared to recent vintages.

“Any year without fire is chill now; that’s the new real,” Graff said. “It’s pretty simple when we can all sleep in our own beds, and go into the winery every day. It’s gorgeous right now. We had a big heat wave that threw us for a loop, and adjusted things pretty well. But we were able to get everything in the barn with just a little rain that didn’t do anything, in particular, to hurt the vintage. It might help reduce the fire danger a little if anything.”

While quantity will be down slightly, there’s considerably more fruit available than in 2021, which came in very light compared to the year-after-year averages. The heat



Photo provided by Frank Family Vineyards

Frank Family Vineyards General Manager and winemaker Todd Graff is celebrating his 20th harvest with the winery.

wave presented a challenge, and they went “fast and furious” to bring in grapes that were ready for harvest.

It was a reminder to every winemaker that despite their best efforts, they still answer to the whims of the weather. Which keeps Graff on his toes, as there’s no way to write up a recipe and follow it every August, September and October. Each year presents a new challenge.

“Mother Nature does that for us,” Graff said. “We can’t just play the greatest hits at the county fair every year.”

If there were a greatest hits collection of easy-to-drink wines, the **Frank Family Napa Valley Cabernet Sauvignon 2019 (\$60)** would have to be in the discussion.

There are flavors of plum, blackberries, red currant and concentrated licorice. It’s a big, bold and hedonistic wine with a sprinkling of baking spice notes on the finish that is easy to fall in love with for its all-encompassing fruit and flavor profile.

“For me, it’s all about balance,” Graff said. “You’ve got the good fruit in there. A mix of red and black fruits. We are a French oak house, and 33% of what we used is new, so it’s not a dominant component; we use it to add structure and to the balance. We aren’t looking for too many green notes, maybe just some dried herb flavors. In the vineyard, I’m not trying to pick raisins. I don’t want the fruit to be overripe, because we

want fresh energy and length.”

Sourced from their several sites throughout Napa Valley, Graff has a giant canvas on which to coax out the best flavors in the wine. Frank Family’s estate vineyards, Benjamin Vineyard and S&J Vineyard, are prominently featured in the final blend.

Benjamin Vineyard is in the heart of Rutherford; its neighbors are Quintessa, Frog’s Leap and Round Pond. Cabernet sauvignon is the neighborhood’s showcase varietal due to the stunning wines turned out. The blend also has fruit from Quarry and Round Pond vineyards, which further expand the winemaker’s tool kit.

But, Frank Family’s S&J Vine-

yard is in the Capell Valley, on the eastern flank of Napa on the eastern side of Atlas Peak. Delouise and Shooting Star vineyards are in Napa Valley, and round out the blend.

Even with an expanded collection of sites, Graff often finds the Napa Valley cabernet a challenging one.

“It’s not always the easiest wine to make,” he said. “With our single-vineyard wines, sometimes you just leave it alone because that’s what it needs. This is a blend, and probably the most challenging to make, but rewarding when you stick it.”

• *James Nokes has been tasting, touring and collecting in the wine world for several years. Email him at jamesnokes25@yahoo.com.*

## BRIEFS

### Somonauk library group fall book sale begins Oct. 20

**SOMONAUK** – The Friends of the Somonauk Library will host a fall book and bake sale from 4 to 7 p.m. Thursday, Oct. 20, 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Friday, Oct. 21, and 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. Saturday, Oct. 22, at the Somonauk Library, 700 E. LaSalle St.

Proceeds from the sale will go toward funding special programs at the library.

Gently used hardback and paperback books, CDs, DVDs, puzzles and magazines will be available to buy.

Prices include hardback books for 50 cents; paperback books for 25 cents; DVDs, CDs and puzzles for \$1; and magazines will be free. Baked goods are priced separately. There is buy a bag for a money donation of any amount.

For information, visit [somonauklibrary.org](http://somonauklibrary.org).

### NIU to present ‘1619: The Journey of a People’ Oct. 20

**DeKALB** – Northern Illinois University plans a performance of the musical “1619: The Journey of a People” at 6 p.m. Thursday, Oct. 20, at DeKalb’s Egyptian Theatre, 135 N. Second St.

The multi-disciplinary theater experience is free and open to the public.

“1619: The Journey of a People,” created by actor and author Ted Williams III, traces the African-American journey toward freedom and equality from the beginning of American slavery to Reconstruction, the Great Migration, the civil rights era and modern movements for justice. The journey is expressed through three modern characters in a series of performance pieces that will leave audiences both inspired and challenged about the progress of America’s African sons and daughters, according to the NIU website.

There will be a 30-minute talk-back segment following the production, in

which audience members can ask questions of the cast. Moderating the segment is NIU Executive Director for Equity and Inclusion and Associate Professor Joseph E. Flynn.

A needs drive is being held in conjunction with the performance. Attendees are welcome to bring items to donate.

For information, visit [calendar.niu.edu/event/1619\\_the\\_journey\\_of\\_a\\_people](http://calendar.niu.edu/event/1619_the_journey_of_a_people).

### Apply to audition for CSA Sinfonia Concerto Competition

**DeKALB** – The Community School of the Arts at Northern Illinois University invites musicians 18 years old and younger to audition in the annual CSA Sinfonia Concerto Competition.

Applications must be received by Oct. 28. Auditions are scheduled to begin at 11 a.m. Saturday, Nov. 12, in the Recital Hall of the Northern Illinois University Music Building, 550 Lucinda Ave.

The winner will receive a \$200 cash prize and perform the winning concerto with the youth orchestra as a special guest at the Sinfonia concert on May 10.

Musicians who want to compete must live within a 75-mile radius of DeKalb. Each musician will perform one movement of a standard solo concerto or an appropriate one-movement composition from memory. Auditions are limited to eight minutes, and musicians are expected to bring their own accompanist.

The NIU Community School of the Arts is a nonprofit arts organization sponsored by the College of Visual and Performing Arts at NIU. More than 60 teachers conduct music ensembles, classes and private lessons, providing opportunities for community members to study and enjoy music and art.

For information, visit [csa.niu.edu](http://csa.niu.edu) or call 815-753-1450.



Photo provided by Fox Valley Community Services

Fox Valley Community Services, 1406 Suydam Road in Sandwich, will celebrate its 50th anniversary with a gala at 6 p.m. Saturday, Nov. 5. Pictured are three generations of gala attendees.

### FCVS to celebrate 50th anniversary with Nov. 5 gala

**SANDWICH** – Fox Valley Community Services, 1406 Suydam Road, will celebrate its 50th anniversary with a gala at 6 p.m. Saturday, Nov. 5.

The celebration will feature a gourmet dinner by My Chef Catering, entertainment, live and silent auctions, and a cash bar. Tickets cost \$60. Tables of 10 can be reserved for \$550. Donations are being accepted for those who cannot attend the event.

All proceeds from the gala will support DeKalb, Kane, Kendall and LaSalle County seniors through the services and programs at the Fox Valley Community Center, Adult Day Service and Home Services.

For information, call 815-570-2531 or 815-786-9404.

– *Shaw Local News Network*

### Kishwaukee Concert Band opens 21st season Oct. 23

**DeKALB** – The Kishwaukee Concert Band will open its 21st season with a concert at 3 p.m. Sunday, Oct. 23, at the Boutell Memorial Concert Hall in the Northern Illinois University Music Building, 550 Lucinda Ave.

The free concert will be conducted by Dave Lehman and Deb Shofner, and is sponsored by band member Michele LaBaw.

Featured music on the program includes “Reflections” by James Swearingen; “El Camino Real” by Alfred Reed; Glenn Osser’s “Beguine Festival,” a combination of “For Sentimental Reasons” and “I’ll Remember You” in a Latin theme; “Prairie Dances” by David R. Holsinger; and “Dynamarch” by John Cacaos.

The band also will perform “A Leroy Anderson Portrait” arranged by James Barnes, “Symphonic Gershwin” arranged by Warren Barker, “Precious Lord, Take

My Hand” arranged by Robert W. Smith, and John Philip Sousa’s march “Daughters of Texas.”

The Music Building is accessible to all. Parking is allowed in Lots 3, 4 and 14 near the building.

The Kishwaukee Concert Band is a tax-exempt charitable organization, and any contributions to the band are tax-deductible. Rehearsals are held from 7:15 to 9:15 p.m. Wednesdays at Huntley Middle School.

The band is supported by the DeKalb County Community Foundation and the Mary E. Stevens Concert and Lecture Fund.

For information, visit [www.kishconcertband.org](http://www.kishconcertband.org).

### DeKalb church hosting a chamber concert Oct. 23

**DeKALB** – DeKalb’s Westminster Presbyterian Church, 830 N. Annie Glidden Road, will host a chamber concert at 3 p.m. Sunday, Oct. 23.

Admission to the concert is free. Free-will offerings will be accepted.

John Sharp, principal cellist of the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, will present chamber music along with violinist Liba Shacht and pianist Brian Gaona. Featured music includes Boccherini, Schumann, Haydn and Vivaldi. Sunday’s orchestra also includes graduate students of the NIU School of Music and members of the Kishwaukee Symphony.

Shacht and Sharp have made an effort to bring live chamber music to audiences around the Midwest during the past year. Their most recent performances included Baylor University, St. Olaf College and the Schubert Club Chamber Music Series in St. Paul, Minnesota. The pair also has performed at the Ars Viva festivals in La Turbie, France, and Malaga, Spain.

For information, call 815-756-2905.

– *Shaw Local News Network*

## • NEWMAN

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half-Jewish Newman, a response no doubt to a cold, thwarted, alcoholic father and an emotionally voracious mother who, when she wasn’t battling, was drawing her pretty younger son into her death grip.

By those standards, the blended Newman-Woodward household was a step or two up, though not always more. Newman’s alcohol consump-

tion teetered between functional and not. (He was the owner of Kenyon’s beer-chugalug record, and beer would be a lifelong companion.) Woodward, whom Newman credits with an ego equal to his own, bridled at being relegated to earth mother, and the general mood, writes daughter Melissa in her frank foreword, was “stormy one minute, joyous the next.”

It is the thesis of this memoir, and one might say the entire Newman rehabilitation campaign, that it got

better. A broken man, at the prodding of family and his own better nature, became a better husband and father – and even a better actor, according to conventional wisdom and self-serving directors.

George Roy Hill, for instance, contends that, with “Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid,” Newman “finally learned to relax.” Sidney Lumet contends that, with “The Verdict,” Newman (despite being one of the earliest members of the Actors Studio) finally grasped the

value of “self-revelation.” Neither director must have spent much time with “The Hustler” or “Hud” or “Cool Hand Luke” or Newman’s never-to-be-surpassed Brick. That cool cat was sitting on top of his own hot tin roof and was no less revealing for pretending it didn’t hurt. In the words of Kazan: “There’s something in him that’s masked but underneath it, there’s a soul that wants to do many things.”

And can’t do them. Can’t do anything about the sheer messiness of

being an object of desire or, to quote the man himself, “the imponderable of being a human being.” It was perhaps this same principle that drove Newman to commit all those hundreds of hours of tape-recorded testimony to the flames. Perhaps he just concluded that an actor’s life is – or at least should remain – no more knowable than his art.

• *Louis Bayard is a novelist and reviewer whose most recent book is “Courting Mr. Lincoln.”*