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From the Phoenix Business Journal:

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How Arizona wineries are creating a buzz

🔑 **SUBSCRIBER CONTENT:** Aug 12, 2016, 12:00am MST

While Arizona is known for copper and cotton, the state also has been cultivating a growing wine industry.

In 2005, there were only nine bonded wineries registered to make wine in Arizona, according to Arizona Wine Growers Association President Rod Keeling, owner of Keeling Schaefer Vineyards in Willcox. Now there are 74 throughout the state, Keeling said.

To spread the word about Arizona-produced wines, owners are using festivals, social media and tourism to attract attention.

Barbara Predmore, owner of Alcantara Vineyards in Cottonwood, said her family business gets a lot of buzz from festivals.

Her business has been featured at the Tempe Festival of the Arts for seven years, with tastings at the wine garden. She said her company is able to sell single glasses of wine alongside bottles.

"When we go to the festivals, it lets people find their taste," Predmore said.

In addition to her festival and competition circuit, Predmore said her business' location is central to tourism, allowing tastings to those who are on their way to the Grand Canyon or Sedona.

"We try to make a day of tasting into a two or three days of tourism," she said.

For those who find it hard to attract tourists, Jim Graham of Golden Rule Vineyards in Cochise, said festivals are one of the best ways to highlight his wines.



Wines from Carlson Creek Vineyard in Willcox

“Being located in rural Arizona is a marketing challenge. It’s difficult to encourage customers to travel a long distance to visit our site. We participate in festivals that are located in different areas to showcase our wines, including the spring and fall Willcox Wine Festivals, and offer a tasting room on-site at the farm with tours of the vineyard available,” said Graham.

Another way the wine business is able to thrive is through sommeliers promoting a growers’ wine.

Predmore said her sommelier is able to visit with restaurants, especially local Arizona locations, and distribute Alcantara’s wine that way.

For Carlson Creek Vineyard in Willcox, owner Robert Carlson said many of his customers still learn about his business through word of mouth.

“It’s evangelism,” Carlson said.

With the vineyard’s new tasting room launched in Scottsdale last month, Carlson said word of mouth via social media has brought unexpected traffic to his business.

“We had an education series in Scottsdale, and it sold out on social media,” Carlson said. In fact, the vineyard owner said he oversold the event, only scraping by with space because of a cancellation.

Additionally, Carlson said social media has been key to keeping his customers informed about any new wine releases, harvest updates and new events.

“It allows us enough time to tell our story,” Carlson said.

The immersive experiences Carlson’s tasting room and vineyard offer allow him to connect with his customers, he said.

In addition to festivals and social media posts, the most effective marketing tool may still be hearing about wine through the grapevine.

Keeling said the boom in wine business came after the *Granholm v. Heald* Supreme Court case in 2005.

The 5-4 decision found states that allowed in-state wineries to ship directly to customers but did not allow direct shipping for out-of-state wineries were unconstitutional. This required states to create laws that did not violate the ruling and treated in-state and out-of-state wineries equally.

The vineyard business may only grow with the passing of Senate Bill 1381 in March, which eliminates the requirement that people visit a vineyard before ordering any wine to be directly shipped to them and allows for out-of-state direct shipments.

Signed into law by Gov. Doug Ducey, the bill allows wineries to purchase a license from the state to ship limited amounts of wine to Arizona consumers, regardless of the production size of the winery.

Licenses are expected to be issued by the beginning of January 2017, allowing wineries to ship six cases of wine in 2017, nine cases in 2018 and up to 12 cases of wine by 2019 and every year after.

With less restrictions, Arizona now is part of 41 other states who will allow direct shipment from out-of-state wineries.

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