

Working Girl Wines “You Go Girl—Working Girl Wines the Product of Real Working Women” *Washington State Boutique Winery Offers Value Wines that Contribute to Charities Helping Families* By Christina Kelly Avalon Editor/Writer

The wine industry, like many other markets, has seen the light of “girl power” and released a few wines produced and marketed to women—the soccer moms, the security moms, the women who are working, supporting a family and “doing it all.”

Most are marketing packages with funky labels, such as Mad Housewife with the kitschy, retro, cat-eyed bespeckled woman of the 1950s, or the new low-calorie wine by Beringer Blass Wine Estates called “White Lie,” touting such white lies as, “It’s my natural (hair) color,” or “I’ll be home by 7 pm.” Seduction, from O’Brien Cellars in Napa, is supposed to be an eye-catching name and label marketed to women like it was a perfume fragrance.

It’s all done with a grin and a wink, hoping to find a niche market and take advantage of the purchasing power of women.

What is different about the **Working Girl Wine** series, produced by Olympic Cellars in a tiny Northwest corner of Washington state, is the wine is produced by working women who give back some of the profits from the wine to **charities that support working women and their families**. The original idea was not to market to women but to reflect the three women who pretty much took over **Olympic Cellars**, located between Sequim and Port Angeles, Wash., after the winery fell on hard times.

“The idea bore out of who we are, and what we wanted to say,” said Kathy Charlton, 55, one of the owners of the winery. Along with Charlton, the winery was originally operated by Molly Rivard and Sara Gagnon. Sara, who was the winemaker for the Working Girls wine series, was involved in a small plane crash two years ago, is no longer involved in the daily operations, but several women have since joined the winery.

“We wanted these wines to support the physical and emotional well being of

women through a very special network,” said Charlton. “Our first thought was to making a living, then support our local charities of choice and provide a place for women, and yes, men, to gather at our winery and kick back after a long work day.”

There are a couple of “roosters” in the old barn that was converted into a winery. When Sara could no longer handle the physical demands of the winery from a plane crash, Benoit Murat, an intern from France, took over the winemaking duties. The women also hired several handymen to help out with some of the winery chores, and offer a Handyman Red in tribute to those men who fill in the gaps of wine production.

A Winery Re-Invented

Charlton, who took an early retirement in 2001 from Texas Instruments as a finance and human resource manager, owned investment property on the Olympic Peninsula, along with her husband Ralph and another couple. The original Olympic Cellars wanted to move into the historic barn that was located on Charlton’s investment property. But, even after the move of the winery, and extensive renovation, the owners were unable to make a profit and the winery was offered to the investment owners.

“I knew from the beginning that I had to find a niche market—it is a small, boutique winery located on the Olympic Peninsula—I had to figure out a way for us to survive,” said Charlton. “We had this wonderful historic structure; we had three working women who gave everything to make it work; we were located in a beautiful part of the state, but a part of the state that received high volume during the summer months. We had to figure out how to make this work 365 days of the year.”

As Molly Rivard remembers, it was a life-changing moment when she met Charlton. Rivard spent 15 years running the kitchen of the Sequim School District, raising her children and being a supportive spouse. She wanted more for herself, but life on the Olympic Peninsula offered few jobs that could help support a family.

After taking a business course at Peninsula College in Port Angeles, Rivard quit

the school district and developed a business plan to start her own cooking classes, with organically farmed produce from the Sequim. One of her first enrollees was Kathy Charlton.

“I think it was fate,” said Rivard. “Kathy offered me the position of managing the retail shop and tasting room, and the rest fell into place. We talked about offering wines, created by women, for women in support of women. I realized this was more than working girls—it was a celebration of our lives.”

The women knew they had to offer more than wine to attract attention. They had to offer themselves up as an example of women who had raised families, held full-time jobs, kept households running and still took time out for themselves. They also needed to support a community that was economically depressed and always lacked the funds to support women and families with little means. Donation requests for wine came in daily, said Charlton. A few bottles of wine here and there didn't seem enough to help the needy causes of under-funded charitable organizations.

The Network of Support

There is a trade-off to living in the remote areas of the Olympic Peninsula—the beauty and recreational offerings are often confronted by the harsh reality that employment and social services can be scarce. The **“Olympic Women of Wine,”** as Charlton and her crew were dubbed after they opened, faced the reality that the winery was constantly asked to help under-funded organizations.

“When you live here, you feel and see the need daily,” said Charlton. “We would donate wine, but I always felt that we should do more. We were so small and fairly new to our organization. We wanted to come up with a way to help, and still make a living.”

In order to walk the walk, and talk the talk, Olympic Cellars decided to pick one charity of choice—one that was family-centric and involved gynecological care for low-income women.

In addition to their yearly charity of choice, the winery holds a series of concerts to raise money. They created a Working Girl Concert on Labor Day, referred to as

the “No Labor Day,” to support women taking the day off. They also hold a series of “Wine for the Soul Days,” that reenacts the classic grape stomping episode of the “I Love Lucy,” including costumes of Lucy, Ricky, Fred and Ethel and host a romantic man and woman contest for Valentine’s Day.

The women of the winery fund a campaign called 2X Success, which establishes a formal relationship between Olympic Cellars and one or more 501 © organizations centered on sustainable community partnerships. In return for a committed number of volunteer hours, provided by the non-profits’ organization, that non-profit receives wine which can be auctioned later to raise funds. Olympic Cellars also began bottling its wine this year in clear, recyclable glass. The winery is also using a synthetic cork that contains no petroleum, and a recyclable capsule.

“We are doing everything we can to sustain ourselves, our community and be environmental stewards,” said Charlton. “The next step is to take the label national in 2006 and encourage others to adopt our sustained giving program.”

Olympic Cellar wines are not crafted for the kind of wine snobbery depicted in the movie, “Sideways,” with all the sniffing, swirling and palate descriptions that overwhelm the new wine enthusiasts, said Charlton and Rivard.

“None of us are experts in wine—I learn something new everyday,” said Rivard. “That’s the beauty of what we are doing. We are learning, and passing it on. And, we have a lot of fun along the way.”

Working Girl Wines

These are everyday wines that match with a quick pasta and tomato sauce toss, to burgers on the grill and a nice shrimp and vegetable stir fry.

Working Girl White: A blend of Chardonnay and Riesling that is full-bodied and crisp, with aromas of apples, pear and honey. The winery staff says this will ease the crankiness of stress and a hot day in pantyhose and pumps.

Go Girl Red: A blend of Merlot that evokes black cherries and spice, soft tannins with a smooth finish. It is perfect as a barbeque wine with chicken or a clam sauce or pizza.

Rosé the Riveter: This is a semi-dry wine that works well with most food and perfect for a picnic. When the summer heat up, this is the cooler than is satisfying with food.

Handyman Red: As the women of Olympic Cellars say, this is the only rooster in the house. It is dedicated to all the men who have bailed them out of challenges, such as broken-down equipment, and all the men who come to the winery with their women friends who have asked for a Working Girl “guy” wine. It is a Bordeaux-style wine that pairs nicely with grilled meats.

Usual national statistics show that about 60 percent of the wine drinkers in the U.S. are women. However, only 15 to 20 percent of the population in this country drinks wine on a regular basis. The women of Olympic Cellars are out to capture the large majority of people who want an everyday wine with dinner, without having to spend hard-earned money for expensive varietals.

“I know the statistics, so it is not surprising that corporate America latches on and tries to develop wine for women,” said Charlton. “What bothers me is the marketing—a dumb-down version of wine that tells women this is what they want.

“Excuse me, but if you haven’t noticed, women are smart and sophisticated ... we don’t want to be pandered to and we are knowledgeable... at the end of the day, we want a good glass of wine.”