



## Suisun's Vintage

By Danny Bernardini

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Right around the time Ron Lanza was graduating high school, his father came to him and bragged about how Suisun Valley wine had been given its own appellation. At the time, he didn't think much of it, but his dad left him with some words that he still remembers 25 years later. The younger Lanza is now vice-president of the Suisun Valley Grape Growers Association (SVGGA) and helps run his family's Wooden Valley Winery in Suisun Valley.

"At the time I said 'big deal,'" Lanza said. "He said, 'Someday, it will be important.'"

That day has arrived. Now Lanza, along with the 20 other labels that proudly display the appellation designating that their wine is from Suisun Valley, are preparing to celebrate the growers association's 25th birthday. Lanza hopes the event can work as a springboard to more recognition among connoisseurs.

"This an opportunity to boast our existence," Lanza said. "We're very proud and we have a lot of work to do."

Although plans are still being completed, Lanza said a winemakers' dinner and organized events among the tasting rooms in the area are planned for December and January.

It was December 1982 when the growers of the



*Douglas Sparks, owner of Sunset Cellars, displays some of the wines available for tasting at the Suisun Valley Wine Co-op. (Rick Roach/The Reporter)*

Western Solano County Grape Growers Association successfully applied for their own appellation just months after Napa Valley did so.

The 15,000-acre Suisun Valley American Viticulture Area was then included in the 1983 formation of the North Coast AVA, combining Napa, Sonoma, Mendocino counties, together with Suisun Valley and Green Valley into one growing region, now recognized worldwide.

Roger King, SVGGA president and grower at LedgeWood Winery, said the valley must jump on the anniversary as a way to promote itself.

"If we let it pass, we'd be morons," King said while taking a break from pressing grapes. "The 25th anniversary is a chance to reset it

## SUISUN VALLEY GRAPE GROWERS ASSOCIATION<sup>™</sup>



all. We're living by minute, if not the second, nowadays. You step back and realize the longevity."

Spearheaded by King, the SVGGA has formulated a strategic plan to promote the valley and has been active in the county's citizens meetings in which the future of the Solano County General Plan update is being shaped.

Because Solano County still uses a general plan formulated decades ago, it is attempting to update that plan to accommodate farmers in the valley. Currently there are several restrictions within that plan that prevent growers from sharing grapes and holding any entertainment events at tasting rooms without permits.

As the update process continues, which is expected to be completed by summer 2008, the SVGGA isn't just sitting around. The Suisun Valley Wine Cooperative, designed to showcase up to eight different labels, is now open to the public. There are currently only two labels offered as other winemakers wait for licensing paperwork to be completed.



*The newly opened Suisun Valley Wine Co-op located at 4495 Suisun Valley Road is open noon to 5 p.m. Friday to Sunday. (Rick Roach/The Reporter)*

Doug Sparks, owner of Sunset Cellars, works at the cooperative and makes wine on-site, said the business is a good way for folks to familiarize themselves with the valley.

"They will come in and say, 'Gee, I didn't know you guys were here,'" Sparks said. "They're always interested to see we have so much local wine."

Sparks said the 25th anniversary is the perfect way to show off exactly how much is going on in the valley.

"That's critical for all of us. It will spur recognition," Sparks said. "That's one of the reasons we approached this as a multi-wine tasting room. It's a stronger draw with better recognition."

Another way the valley is working on "branding" a name for itself is to place uniform SVGGA signs in front of the members' properties, alerting visitors of the different entities.

King said he knows the next 25 years will bring new opportunity and believes the time is right for Suisun Valley to step up and be recognized.

"There's a ring to grab," King said. "There's a huge reward out there for those who want it."