



# AWOnews



**Produced by The Amateur Winemakers of Ontario**

**A forum for the exchange of news and opinions on home**

**winemaking in Ontario**

**February 1998 Newsletter No. 8**

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**The 1998 Late winter edition**

***"Better be joined with the fruitful Grape, than sadden after none, or bitter Fruit."***

*-Edward Fitzgerald ("Omar Khayyám")*

## IN THIS ISSUE:

by Paul Dunseath



**AWO Festival 1998 is now only a pleasant memory, and in this issue you will find a review of the activities as well as a complete An update on AWO 1998, now only four months away; the Eastern Ontario Amateur Wine Competition enters its 13th year as an open competition; should AWO be restructured, and if so how? Peter Pigeon brings us up to date on the Master Judges Program; AWO enters the World Wide Web with its own website; employment opportunity for a Chief Steward (low pay, long hours, but plenty of fame and glory); AWC comes to Ontario, and much more!**

## AWO RESTRUCTURING

**Throughout the summer and fall months three members of AWO, Don Eastman, John Harris and Gord Barnes, have been wrestling with the issue of a possible restructuring of AWO, based on a survey conducted by Don and published here in March of last year. The survey was intended to determine what was important to the membership, and then to see if what we are doing as an organization reflects those priorities. A secondary role was to find some means of reaching the large number of amateur winemakers who are not members of AWO, either by conscious choice or because they are not aware that the organization exists. A number of proposed changes were mooted, and these were also published in AWOnews last November.**

**Club reps will by now have received a mailing with, rather than a single report and recommendations, three somewhat divergent ones, with a suggestion that this be discussed at the AGM in Peterborough in June. Perhaps the only fully consistent view is that there is no major groundswell for change; proponents of significant structural change see this as apathy on the part of the members, while opponents see it as an indication of "if it ain't broke, don't fix it", i.e. satisfaction with the status quo. Please discuss it in your club meetings in order to ensure that AWO reflects (or continues to reflect) what you wish it to be.**

## **THE AWC COMES TO TOWN**

**This year Ontario will be the host province for the Amateur Winemakers of Canada (AWC) Dominion competition, with the judging encompassing 10 wine classes, three brews, and cider. Your executive is currently planning on having the competition in early September and to make it an educational opportunity in cooperation with Brock University. This is an innovative and, frankly, quite exciting concept which could move the judging out from relative obscurity and into the domain of wine writers and students of Énology. If you are planning to enter in competition this year, please reserve two bottles in case your entry is selected to go on to AWC, so that it can be included in this wider outreach.**

## **AWO FESTIVAL '97 WRAP-UP**

**The organizers of the highly enjoyable Festival '97 have now concluded their accounting, and report that it was a profitable weekend. After repayment of a**

**\$500 advance, and deduction of some expenses borne by AWO, the share to AWO became \$327.25. Host clubs each received a slightly larger amount, based on the cost (and risk) sharing formula with AWO. Congratulations to everyone involved, on a job well done!**

## **SURFING THE WEB**

**By the time you read this, the AWO website should be up and running at [www.makewine.com](http://www.makewine.com). This will not replace current means of communication with members (such as AWOnews) since many members do not have access to the Internet. It is, however, another means of making our organization, and activities, more visible to the larger community. Rowan Shirkie joins the Executive as Director, Special Projects with responsibility for enhancing our electronic outreach through the Web. Welcome aboard, Rowan!**

## **SHARING EXPERIENCES**

**Gord Barnes raises an intriguing idea. Many, in fact virtually all, of our clubs have had interesting, worthwhile programs that club members have gone out of their way to produce. These range all the way from structured tastings to detailed, thoroughly-researched presentations on specific wines, grape varieties, or wine-producing areas. Wouldn't it be a great idea to share some of these memorable program evenings with other clubs? The next time your club organizes such a program, would you consider video taping the presentation and making it available to other clubs? If enough clubs agree to do so, we could maintain a small library of videos - in the range, probably, of ½ hour to 1 hour - and provide these on request to other clubs in the province. We know that the talent and expertise are there; why not share it with other clubs?**

## **WE NEED A CHIEF STEWARD**

**The Wine Judges' Commission is still in need of a Chief Steward as a result of Gary Maldaver's resignation due to work pressures. Gary would probably be the first to agree that, while the position takes time especially at the annual judging,**

**there are many willing hands to help and the rewards are considerable. If you would like to get involved more directly with the activities of AWO, and as well have a direct part to play in the annual competition (getting a chance to sample the best wines in Ontario at supper is a distinct perk!), please let Chief Judge Peter Pigeon know of your interest. Specific knowledge of the wines themselves, or ability to judge, are NOT factors, but well-developed organizational and administrative skills, and the ability to devote time to the function at the judging, most definitely are. Many thanks to Gary for his outstanding work and his great sense of humour. We would be remiss, however, if we did not underline the gravity of the situation now facing us. Simply put, the Chief Steward is one of the pivotal positions in running an annual competition, since it is she or he who receives the entries, verifies that they are in class and properly bottled, arranges for stewards and the set up of the "show bench", tabulates results, arranges for certificates to be prepared and presented, and - in the classic bureaucratic phrase - "performs other duties". The Chief Steward does, of course, have many willing hands available who pitch in and help, but without someone to take on this vital management rôle, there is a distinct possibility that the annual AWO Competition could be in jeopardy.**



**The logistics of the situation are that it needs to be someone from within about an hour's drive of central Toronto; it requires good organizational skills, and offers in return a unique opportunity to be at the heart of the judging process, and - at the dinner for judges following the judging itself - a chance to sample the best amateur wines in Ontario. This is, in other words, a superb opportunity for someone aspiring to membership in the Judges' Commission to hone their skills and learn the craft as an insider. If you have the interest and management ability, and some spare time a few weeks prior to the Festival, please contact either Dan Ostler or Peter Pigeon immediately.**

## **PRESIDENT'S NOTES**

**by Dan Ostler**

**For most people this time of year is slower and quieter, as they wait out the dead of winter, huddled in front of the fire with a good book. But not us winemakers! Now is the time that the fall's wines are starting to clear and we begin to assess their quality and start the blending exercise – the real "art" of winemaking. As**

**well we are tasting the cellar's various offerings with an eye to picking this year's competition entries (winners?).**

**An additional element of excitement to start the new year is the launch of AWO's web site, located at "<http://www.makewine.com>". We are very enthused about this new effort to promote the AWO and all aspects of our winemaking hobby. Rowan Shirkie of Selene Communications is developing the site. Rowan is a member of the Niagara-on-the-Lake club, so we benefit by having our Web manager already fully knowledgeable about our hobby. We have a lot of plans for expanding upon what you see there now, but we are looking for your input as well, so please pass on your thoughts, suggestions, criticisms, whatever. The e-mail address is "[awo@makewine.com](mailto:awo@makewine.com)". One of our primary goals is to continually expand the content and make the site one that you will want to have at the top of your bookmark list.**

**We are looking at how we can provide the AWO (and AWC) historical point standings on the site as well. For this reason I have NOT MAILED the usual diskette to club reps, a very costly exercise. But we know that not everyone has access to the Internet so, if your club still requires a disk with the text file of the**

**results please give me a call.**

**Another major activity for AWO this year is addressing the proposals from our Restructuring Committee. Please be sure to discuss this at your club meetings, as we will be voting on motions at the AGM in Peterborough which could have major implications for our organization.**

**In May many of you will have the pleasure of completing an entry form for one of your wines going to the annual competition. Be sure to record the ingredient information on the entry form. It is very valuable to AWO to be able to report back to our suppliers information on their wines which have won awards.**

**The programme that Kawartha Krushers have planned for us in June looks like a winner, so don't miss this chance to renew acquaintances, taste a lot of great wine and, hopefully, pick up a medal for your trophy case!**

**Further contributing to a busy year for AWO is our hosting of the AWC competition in the fall. AWC President Gord Barnes has some plans up his sleeve that he hopes will have us all driving to Niagara for a fall wine event. Watch for more in the next newsletter and on the web.**

**Your Executive has struck a committee to update the book of wine class descriptions. We need a few volunteers to assist so if you can spare a few hours please give Gord Barnes, Steve Gunning or me a call. Good luck with your competition entries – see you at "makewine.com"!**

## **KNOW YOUR LIMIT!**

**By Don Eastman**

**An essential part of our winemaking hobby is the consumption and enjoyment of the fruit of our labours, our friends' production, and commercial stuff to see how we (and they) stand. While the overwhelming majority of consumption is done in moderation, the nature of the beverage is that there is always the risk of excess. Long term health issues are important, but the pressing concern relates to the consumption of alcohol prior to driving a vehicle. If you are lucky, the worst that may happen to you while "driving under the influence" will be the loss of your driver's license for an extended period of time. Driving while under the influence places other, innocent, people at risk.**

**You have a responsibility to ensure that you, personally, are legally fit to drive following a club meeting, or on other occasions when you may be consuming alcoholic beverages. More than that, your club has a responsibility to ensure that everyone leaving a club meeting, and driving, can do so safely. If you have a member, or members, who present a problem in this regard, deal with it!**

**Several years ago my winemaking club (Wentworth West Zymologists) acquired an alcohol breath tester. Based on our finding we found that we could have a good, enjoyable meeting, including the consumption of reasonable amounts of wine, and still blow comfortably under the legal threshold. The key to responsibility was to exercise some caution during the evening, but with particular emphasis on eliminating consumption after snack time. Much as our host wants to be generous, we no longer tolerate "you just have to try some of this..." late in the evening. We have also seen a lot more car pooling and designated drivers for our meetings.**

**I strongly recommend that each club have in its possession an alcohol breath tester, and that you ensure that you are being a responsible organization. One such tester is currently available through the Grape Marketing Board for \$149**

**plus tax; a bargain if you consider the alternatives! (Ed. Note: Others may be available for as little as \$50 plus tax: contact AL Monitor Inc., 2300 South Sheridan Way, Mississauga Ont. L5J 2M4. This is NOT an endorsement).**

## **13TH ANNUAL EOAWC**

**On the facing page is an entry form for the 13th annual Eastern Ontario Amateur Wine Competition. This is an open competition - i.e. any amateur may enter directly - and will be judged using the standard medal award approach. Only one entry form is required per person; the "Official Bottle Label" (on page 7) may be photocopied as required. Up to two bottles may be entered in any category, provided they are not identical blends. Entries are due to the Registrar no later than March 20th. To avoid shipping accidents, please see Charles Plant's informative article "On the Matter of Shipping Competition Wines" in AWOnews issue No. 7 (November, 1997)**

## **CHIEF JUDGE'S COLUMN**

**By Peter Pigeon**

**As mentioned in the last newsletter, the Judges' Commission will be offering another "New Judges Training Session" this fall. If you would like to learn more about wines, improve your tasting ability, or serve in the Commission, an initial taste test is the first step. If you do well in the test, you will be invited to attend a two year training session.**

**The initial Taste Test cost is \$10.00, and you must pre-register by May 31st by sending a cheque to myself, Steve Gunning or Paul Dunseath. The Taste Test will be held in Peterborough, June 6th at the Festival '98. The highest placed candidate will also be awarded the InterVin Trophy for the AWO Wine Taster of the Year Award.**

**As I've stated before, we need a much bigger female representation on the Judges' Commission, so let's hear from at least as many gals as guys in AWO!**

**Speaking of training, your existing judges have been very busy in the Masters Program, investigating AWO wine classes to better understand the indications of**

**quality, common and also unique to each class, as well as a common understanding of these standards among judges to ensure the best evaluation of your winemaking efforts. We taste amateur and benchmark commercial wines to ensure a truly comprehensive understanding.**

**To date, the following classes have been presented: Riesling, Chardonnay, Other White, Pinot family, Sparkling, Red Hybrid and After Dinner, with a new class presentation each month. The first graduate Master Judges will be announced in the next AWOnews.**

**Best of luck in your upcoming club competition!**

## **MEASUREMENT AND CONTROL OF ACID**

**by Paul Dunseath**

**The two common methods of acid measurement are by pH, which measures the strength of the acid, and titratable acidity, which measures the total amount of acid, without regard to its strength.**



**The definition of pH is "the reciprocal of the logarithm of the Hydrogen ion concentration"; it is the hydrogen ion which results in acidity in a liquid, and this bit of mathematical legerdemain avoids having to deal with long strings of zeroes, although it has the unfortunate, and non-intuitive, result that the lower the pH, the higher the acidity. Consequently, possible values for pH run from 1 to 14, with 1 being that of a highly caustic acid while 14 is that of an equally highly caustic alkali. Pure water has a neutral value: 7.**

**The pH values of wines range generally from about 3.6 to 2.8, and can be measured approximately with litmus paper, or fairly accurately with pH meters. These latter can be bought from about \$50 up to several hundred, and require calibrating before use with "test liquids" of known pH. For the simplest types, a portable, shirt-pocket size, one simply dips the end in the liquid, presses a switch, and reads the pH from a LCD display.**

**Human taste responds not only to the strength of the acid, but also to its total amount. In addition, wine contains buffers - substances which tend to inhibit a solution from changing its pH when the total acidity changes. Consequently the pH value of a wine, while important as an indicator of the ripeness of the grapes,**

**and the ability of the juice to withstand bacterial attack, does not track fully with the change in taste as total acidity changes; the quantity of acid present - to which our tastes are sensitive - can vary quite widely without any significant change in the pH, if the wine is heavily buffered by such compounds as tannins and proteins. Different grape varieties have different buffering ability, while other fruit used in "country" wines may have a considerable buffering capacity; elderberries and bananas are prime examples.**

**For most home winemakers titratable acidity, which directly measures the acidity in a wine and is unaffected by buffers, is the simplest measure to use. It is based on two facts: one is that alkalis (commonly called bases) and acids neutralize each other, and the other is that there are substances that change colour depending on whether they are in an acidic or basic environment.**

**Titratable acidity is measured by adding to a measured sample of the wine a few drops of an indicator (typically, phenolphthalein, which is colourless in acids but bright pink in bases). A base of a known strength is added, drop by drop, and when a colour change occurs and remains, it is evidence that the acid has been completely neutralized. Knowing how much base was required indicates very**

**quickly the acidity of the sample. The sample is then discarded. Since each acid has a different level of activity, it is necessary to define the amount present as "equivalent" to that of one acid. As tartaric acid is the most common one in wines, we define the acid level in terms of "tartaric acid equivalent". This gives us such typical values as 5.5 ppt (parts per thousand) "as tartaric".**

## **FESTIVAL 1998**

**On the back page is further information from the organizers of festival '98. The speakers listed are those confirmed to date, but the organizers hope to add additional topics and speakers by the time the registration package is sent out.**

**The Sunday morning brunch and awards ceremony is designed to give you a chance to relax, recover from your busy Saturday and socialize before heading home with your medals.**

**Costs will be similar to previous years. The full registration package (Friday, Saturday and Sunday, including all meals) will be \$160. Saturday (seminars and lunch) will be \$70. Sunday morning only, including brunch, will be \$50. Rooms**

**will be available separately from Trent University at about \$25 per person per night. Complete details of the registration options and costs will be provided in the next issue of AWOnews.**