

the pinot & paella FESTIVAL

An annual affair that shows plenty of muscle

Since its start in 2004, this Templeton event has become so wildly popular, ticket sales are now limited to 500

By Rebecca Juretic
Special to The Tribune

Every year on the first Sunday in June, 20 local chefs head to Templeton Community Park with truckloads of firewood and barbecues in tow. Though it may seem like a classic California cookout, there will be no tri-tips or beans on the grill. On this occasion, the menu is more Catalan than cowboy.

Those chefs, along with 20 wineries, will be participating in

the annual Pinot & Paella Festival. The event, which benefits youth performing arts, pairs creative renditions of the traditional Spanish rice dish with tastings of Paso Robles pinot noir.

This year's festival will be the 10th annual.

The inaugural event in 2004 was the brainchild of Marc Goldberg and Maggie D'Ambrosia of Paso Robles' Windward Vineyard. Windward has the rare distinction of strictly producing Burgundian-style pinot noir.

"We wanted to demonstrate

the versatility of pinot noir as the most food-friendly wine, being able to be paired deliciously with the variety of different paellas, from vegan to wild game to seafood," D'Ambrosia said.

Windward was the sole winery for the first event, which was held at its vineyard. A total of 125 guests attended; hundreds more were turned away.

Realizing they had hit on something, organizers relocated the next festival to Templeton Community Park and began inviting other wineries. More

chefs joined the event, some hauling in Santa Maria-style barbecues and portable fire pits to accommodate the large paella pans that can measure more than 30 inches in diameter.

Live music joined the mix soon thereafter, and the festival began to develop its own distinct personality. Some guests mingle or chat up the chefs and winemakers. Some dance. Others prefer a more languid afternoon of feasting and lounging on lawn

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PHOTOS BY JAYSON MELLOM

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: From Tognazzini's Dockside Restaurant and Fish Market, Nicole Richardson, right, and Julie White serve paella. A bubbling pan of paella at the festival. Charles D. Paladin Wayne from Catering by Chef Charlie cooks his paella in a traditional pan over a fire.

A sampling of 2013 charity wine events:

A Night at the Opera, March 9.
Vina Robles Winery, Paso Robles;
benefits Opera SLO

Wine 4 Paws; April 13-14.
Various participating wineries;
benefits Woods Humane Society

Taste of Pismo; April 26-28.
Dinosaur Caves Park in Pismo Beach;
benefits the Pismo Beach Chamber of
Commerce

Wine, Waves and Beyond; May 30-June 2.
Various locations in San Luis Obispo
and Pismo Beach;
benefits Association of Amputee Surfers

Forks & Corks; July 6.
Halter Ranch Vineyard in Paso Robles;
10 percent of the proceeds benefit
Must! Charities.

Central Coast Wine Classic; July 11-14.
Avila Beach, Shell Beach and
San Simeon locations;
benefits various charities

**Club Member Appreciation Evening;
November — Date TBA.**
J. Lohr Paso Robles Wine Center;
benefits Meals on Wheels,
San Luis Obispo County

Rockin' Stomp 4 Arts; Oct. 19-20.
Rockin' R Winery in Paso Robles;
benefits various arts organizations

Rockin' Harvest on the Coast; Nov. 1-3.
Avila Beach Golf Resort;
benefits Hospice of San Luis Obispo

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chairs and blankets under the canopy of oak trees. It's what D'Ambrosia had originally hoped for: an event dramatically different from the typical winemaker dinner.

The festival's popularity grew, but organizers still limit ticket sales to 500 to keep things intimate. Last year's event sold out a month in advance, with attendees coming from as far away as Florida.

Windward still organizes the event, but all producers of Paso Robles pinot noir are invited to participate.

"When people think pinot noir, they may think Russian River Valley, not Paso. So the focus of the festival is to show people that really great pinot noir is grown in this area," said festival organizer and Windward tasting room manager Anna Tognazzini.

Participating chefs come from throughout the county and beyond, representing upscale restaurants, casual eateries and catering companies. The students of Paso Robles Culinary Academy presented a dish last year, as did those from the Santee Education Complex in Los Angeles. The diversity of chefs begets a stunning assortment of dishes, which is in line with the origins of paella, known widely as the national dish of Spain.

"Shepherds would carry their big tin pan over the mountains and make the paella with wild artichokes, rabbit, snails, whatever they could forage," said Charlie Paladin-Wayne of Catering by Chef Charlie, who has been integral to the festival since the beginning. "For us, you

have to have a pan, rice, saffron — and from that point on, everything else is a go."

Some Pinot & Paella chefs stick with the tried and true. Shanny Covey, who has participated with two of her restaurants, Robin's of Cambria and Luna Red of San Luis Obispo, contributed one traditional seafood and sausage version, and one more unusual version featuring quail at last year's festival.

At past festivals, Paladin Wayne has made his paella with duck, wild boar and squid ink, and he even tried his hand at a vegetarian version. Last year, he decided to feature local, sustainably harvested abalone.

"I'd been in cahoots with an abalone farm in Cayucos," he said. "The dish created quite a stir."

Many chefs plot out their paella according to what's local and in-season. Chef Chris Kobayashi of Artisan in Paso Robles favors rabbit because he can acquire it from a local farm and because the meat stays moist during the extended serving period. Morro Bay's Tognazzini's Dockside Restaurant, which is owned by Anna Tognazzini's in-laws, always features fresh-caught local seafood served up in an oyster shell. Last year, their paella centered on king salmon caught by the proprietor, Mark Tognazzini, on his commercial fishing vessel.

Often, it's the wildly nontraditional paellas that capture the most attention. Each year, guests vote on their favorite dish by placing a ticket at that booth. Last year's people's

choice winner was a coconut curry paella prepared by Ryan Hernandez of Thomas Hill Organics. His Thai-inspired interpretation featured Jasmine rice, shrimp, pork belly, fragrant lemongrass and ginger.

"We were discussing what to make, and we thought, why do what everybody else is doing?" said head chef Julie Simon. "We do a lot of Asian cuisine, so it was a good fit for us."

Restaurants and wineries donate their time and product so all proceeds can benefit charity. To date, the festival has raised about \$150,000 for the Paso Robles Youth Arts Foundation.

"It seemed like a very worthy cause that no one else was donating to," D'Ambrosia said. "The Paso Robles Youth Arts Foundation specifically is the only organization locally that offers free classes to youth in the community in art, drama, dance and music. We felt that was a great thing to support."

Although the charitable component is why most participants get involved with the festival, other factors keep them coming back.

"It's my personal favorite event," said Sherrie Holzer, enologist for Castoro Cellars in Paso Robles, a longtime festival participant. "Limiting the number of tickets makes it more of a quaint social gathering. I get to really talk to people rather than just pouring and moving them along. There's more of a sense of community — plus it's just a lot of fun." 🐾

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IF YOU GO:

Sunday, June 2, 2-5 p.m.

Templeton Community Park

\$65 per person, available at www.pinotandpaella.com/tickets

Tickets sell out in advance. The fee includes a souvenir burgundy-style wine glass, 20 pinot noirs to taste, 20 paellas to taste, and live music by Incendio. Blankets and lawn chairs are welcome.

For more information, email anna@windwardvineyard.com or call 805-239-2565

AT TOP, Doug Kruse, owner of Jack Creek Cellars pours a glass of pinot noir. At far left, Shanny Covey from Robin's Restaurant serves up a hearty portion of her paella. At left, Chef Shaun Behrens of Luna Red serves his paella to a hungry patron. Bottom, Andrew Bresnan, right, from Asuncion Ridge Wines pours a glass of pinot noir. Also from Asuncion Ridge are Philip Krumal, center, and Lacy Collins, left.

PHOTOS BY JAYSON MELLOM