



*In the crush building, once used by the historic Locatelli Winery,*

# Four Young People Keep Alive The History Of Sunrise Winery

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Four young people are keeping alive a piece of county history by operating the Sunrise Winery at the north end of Empire Grade Road.

This winery — now owned by Keith Hohlfeldt, Barbara Lawrence and Ron and Rolayne Storz — occupies the site and some of the old buildings of the Locatelli Winery which produced wines at the site from the 1930s until the late 1960s.

The owners of Sunrise Winery, which was established in 1976, lease the winery site from Vince Locatelli, former winemaker and former county supervisor.

Locatelli recently related that his father began making wine in this county in 1907.

Lawrence, who assists winemaker Hohlfeldt, said that she and her coworkers have depended greatly on Locatelli's expertise in making wines. "He always has a better way and it always is the better way," she stated.

Locatelli presently is recuperating from a stroke "and we really miss him," Hohlfeldt added.

A visit to Sunrise Winery, which is open to the public by appointment on weekends, sends one back to the days before prohibition when winemaking was such a common occupation in this county that there were over 2,000 acres planted as vineyards.

Some old, gnarled vines at the side of the road are the first indication that one has come upon a winemaking operation.

This vineyard, which once produced Locatelli wines, no longer is productive, Hohlfeldt explained, but he and his coworkers plan someday to replant the area with Pinot Noir and Riesling grapes.

The old, barnlike buildings and the out-of-the-way setting also add to the traditional flavor of this winery.

No other building or house can be seen from the winery, just the rolling golden hills and Eagle Rock standing like a sentinel above Empire Grade Road.

The quiet enveloping the area also tends to give one a sense of the past. The only sound that breaks the stillness is an occasional car coming from the Santa Cruz branch of Lockheed Missile and Space Corp., the winery's nearest neighbor.

Hohlfeldt said that he has spent days at a time at the winery without hearing another human voice. It did get a bit lonely, he admitted.

While Sunrise Winery's equipment is new and modern, the crush building shows evidence of the winery's historic past. Here are located large concrete tanks that once held Locatelli's wine.

The tanks used nowadays, Hohlfeldt pointed out, have been liked with porcelain to make them more sanitary.

An old wine press stands in one corner of the crush building. "People always think that press is so picturesque until they've had to work on a crush," Lawrence laughed, explaining that crushing is hard work.

The idea to start a winery originated with Hohlfeldt, who earned a degree in microbiology at UCSC and was working as a microbiologist for Paul Masson winery when he got tired of corporate wineries and decided to strike out on his own.

Hohlfeldt said that being able to lease the Locatelli Winery made it all that much easier for he and his friends to start a winery because they didn't have to go through the sometimes long and involved bonding process.

"We leased it because the equipment was already there, because it was established and because it was much less a problem to bond it than it was to bond a new winery," he explained.

Sunrise Winery was bonded within two weeks, while it has taken some new wineries almost a year to get their permission to run commercially.

The first wines with the Sunrise label were released in 1977 and things were looking good for the young winemakers until disaster struck in 1978.

In April of that year, a fire destroyed Locatelli's house on the property and much of the winery which was located in the basement of the house.

All that was left was the concrete floor and walls of the winery, Hohlfeldt said. All the wine in storage had to be drained from the wooden barrels that had been blackened by the flames.

Hohlfeldt and Lawrence still are amazed at all the help the winery received immediately from friends after the fire. "Everybody came to help us," Hohlfeldt exclaimed.

The roof of the basement winery was rebuilt and an adjoining office and lab were constructed, but the Locatellis decided not to rebuild their home.

The fire set back Sunrise Winery's production goals the next year, but now the winery is growing again, producing 5,000 gallons this year and aiming for 8,000 gallons next year.

It specializes in Pinot Noir, Chardonnay and Cabernet, but also has a Zinfandel and a Port on the market.

Anyone wanting to visit the historical winery, can contact either Hohlfeldt or Lawrence at 423-8226.



(Sentinel photos)

*Keith Hohlfeldt of the new Sunrise Winery surveys storage tanks.*