

Local vintner produces award winning wines

Wineries
Pawloski has headed family-operated River Run in Aromas since 1978

DON ALSTON

FOR THE REGISTER-PAJARONIAN

At the southern end of the Santa Cruz Mountains, in the picturesque countryside of Aromas, there is a small vintner producing award-winning wines.

Established in 1978, River Run Vintners is a family-operated winery that produces 1,500 to 3,000 cases of handcrafted wine annually. J.P. Pawloski, owner of River Run, oversees the production process for his Cabernet Sauvignon, Merlot, Syrah and Zinfandel.

Pawloski takes pride in being a small wine producer, and as such, he is able to use traditional and contemporary methods for production: "Old World techniques of wine production are coupled with state of the art bottling to deliver unique small lots of wine to the market," he said.

Not able to grow grapes on his property because of a fungus in the soil, Pawloski buys grapes from various winegrape growers throughout Northern California, including the Central Coast and the Santa Cruz Mountains.

To find the growers for his unique wines, he learns all he can about a grower and the grower's property, and he may test the grapes for several years before buying them for his wines. Thus, each vintage is from quality vineyards located throughout Northern California.

Even though the Pajaro Valley has a booming agricultural industry, there are only a small number of wineries in this area compared to other industries. The Santa Cruz Mountains Winegrowers' Association reports that there are about 40 wineries in the area — most of them family owned. This is a small number when the excellent climate and growing conditions in the Santa Cruz Mountains are taken into account.

In California, the premium grapes for making wine are considered to be grown in Napa Valley. But the growing conditions in the Santa Cruz Mountains are considered to be excellent for producing quality grapes. Moreover, some believe that the climate of the Santa Cruz Mountains produces grapes that rival the highly esteemed Napa grapes. Pawloski seemed disappointed when he said, "There are not enough grapes grown in the area (Santa Cruz Mountains) to supply vintners."

In any event, whether grapes for River Run wines are from the immediate area or other parts of Northern California, this vintner produces fine wines that are sure to please the palate of even the most discerning wine aficionados. In 1997, The Santa Cruz Mountains Winegrowers' Association recognized River Run for its Syrah and Cabernet and awarded both wines gold medals. Since then, River Run's



Dave Brooks/Register-Pajaronian

ABOVE: River Run Vintners owner J.P. Pawloski discusses the wine business at his family-operated winery Thursday in Aromas.

RIGHT: River Run produces many different varieties of wine each year. Pictured is the Cabernet Sauvignon 1999 vintage.

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Syrah has continued to receive gold medal and best-in-show awards from other associations such as Tasters' Guild International.

The Syrah remains River Run's best seller. "There may still be some of the 1997 vintage on the shelves," Pawloski said, but don't feel left out if you can't find it because the 1998 Syrah, which should be plentiful, is of the same quality as the 1997. Another premier wine that will soon

appear on the market from River Run is a Grenache, a red wine that Pawloski described as "very fruity."

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River Run is one of the wineries in the Passport Program organized by the Santa Cruz Mountains Winegrowers' Association. Each year, the SCMWA organizes tours to more than 20 wineries in the area of the Santa Cruz Mountains. For more information on



these tours, see the association's Web site at www.scmwa.com.

River Run wines can be purchased in Watsonville at East Lake Liquors and U-Save, in Aptos at Deluxe Foods and in Santa Cruz at Shopper's Corner and Staff of Life. Learn more about wines produced by this local vintner by visiting www.riverrunvintners.com.