

# La Buona Vita



## The Good Life

Bargetto wine-making family still going strong after 70 years

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SENTINEL STAFF WRITER

There is a photo of the Bargetto family taken in 1928.

It shows two solemn-faced sons in black, sitting next to their mother. Behind them is a row of six unsmiling sisters.

They look like the most grim people on earth.

Oh, how times have changed.

When the Bargetto family gathered for a recent photo, they lined up in their vineyard in the hills of Corralitos and lifted bottles of wine into the air.

They laughed and joked.

In the photo, every one of them is smiling.

But what hasn't changed is the close-knit Italian family and their dedication to making wine.

It was a dedication that death, backstraining work, bad weather and even Prohibition couldn't stop.

Saturday, the family will celebrate 70 years of making wine in Santa Cruz County with a party and the release of their newest premium wine.

They're inviting the whole com-

### If You Go

**WHAT:** Bargetto Winery 70th anniversary celebration, includes barbecue, wine tasting, music and release of the 1999 La Vita wine.

**WHEN:** 2-6 p.m. Saturday.

**WHERE:** Bargetto Winery, 3535 N. Main St., Soquel.

**COST:** \$29.

**RESERVATIONS:** 475-2258.

munity to help celebrate.

### Good vines, hard times

It was not a great year for Pinot Grigio grapes.

John Bargetto, who oversees the family vineyard outside of Corralitos, shook his head as he walked past the rows of grapes that slumped over trellises like tired runners after a long race.

"This is going to turn out to be a painfully light vintage," said John, watching pickers move through the vines, clipping clusters of purple



Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel photos  
**ABOVE:** Rafael Rodriguez harvests Pinot Grigio grapes at Bargetto Winery's Regan Vineyard in Corralitos.

**TOP:** John Bargetto, Loretta Mujal, Beverly Bargetto and Martin Bargetto to celebrate the Bargetto Winery's 70th year.

See **BARGETTO** on **PAGE B2**

Wineries

10.803

## Bargetto

Continued from Page B1

grapes by hand.

His mother, Beverly Bargetto, agreed with a tone of voice that let a listener know she's seen it all before.

Winemaking, she seemed to say, is not a profession for the faint of heart.

The first Bargettos to come to Santa Cruz — brothers John and Phillip — learned that lesson when Prohibition crushed their wine business, according to the family.

They were strong, sturdy men with a work ethic as big as the redwood trees that grew in the hills behind their winery — and they came to America to be a success.

They married two sisters and the four of them lived in one house in Soquel. The hills, they said, reminded them of Italy.

Phillip and John worked 6½ days a week, according to the younger John.

Sunday afternoon was their only day off.

The wives would go to Mass while the men stood out on the church steps smoking cigars. Then, the family would go for a drive, or head to one of the Italian dances.

Sometimes, John would barbecue a goat.

But when Prohibition came, business was cut off at the roots.

The men resorted to selling fruit from their orchard in the Soquel hills — and as the law permitted, made 200 gallons of wine per year per head of household.

Martin Bargetto, the new Bargetto president and Beverly's son, smiled.

"Of course, we had lots of heads of households," he said.

The Bargetto brothers hardly passed when Prohibition was repealed on Dec. 5, 1933.

That day they restarted their winery on the banks of Soquel Creek and opened a liquor store on the spot where the Santa Cruz Post Office is now.

Their wines were hearty and red, and they would sell it in barrels to restaurants around town.

When John's sons, Lawrence and Ralph, came back from World War II, they joined the family business.

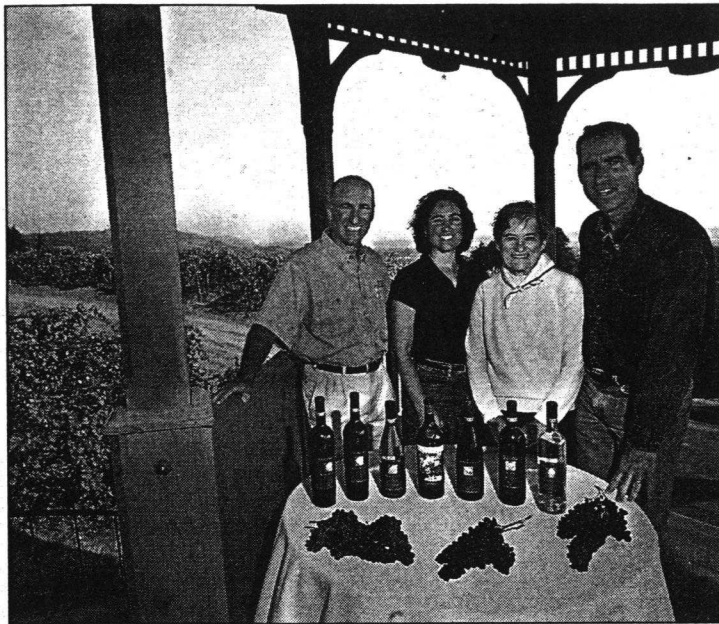
Their arrival would signal a change not only in the family business, but in wine drinking across the country.

### Roots

The Bargettos sit on folding chairs in a big gazebo that sits amid the vines of their 40-acre Regan vineyard in Corralitos.

From where they sit, they can see across the Pajaro Valley and to the ocean six miles beyond.

It's a spot that seems to lend itself to history-telling, and since the Bargettos' winery is the oldest in Santa Cruz County, there's plen-



Shmuel Thaler/Sentinel

John Bargetto, Loretta Mujal, Beverly Bargetto and Martin Bargetto show off some wine at their family's Regan vineyard.

ty of history to be remembered.

They launch into the story of the second Bargetto generation — Lawrence and Ralph — and how wine drinking changed.

When Ralph and Lawrence came back from the war, American drinking habits were shifting. All those American soldiers were coming back from Europe with a taste for wine, Martin said.

Wine sales, mostly dessert wines, surged.

The family jumped on the bandwagon, then shifted again as tastes

became more sophisticated.

In the '60s and '70s, when Lawrence was running the winery, the family began to produce Chardonnay and Pinot Noir wines because that's what America wanted.

Business was good.

But then the winery was dealt a blow, the family said, that shook it to its core.

Lawrence, who ran every part of the business, suffered a stroke and died.

The family was stunned, but

knew they had to act quickly.

So Lawrence's widow, Beverly, stepped in as president, and the rest of the family jumped in too.

It was a steep learning curve, they said.

But now the family has settled in and is steering the business back to the winery's roots, said Loretta Bargetto Mujal, Beverly's daughter.

"We're coming back full circle," she said.

Their dream of a family-owned vineyard like the one their grandfather had come true 11 years ago when they planted the Regan vineyard in Corralitos with vines.

As a tribute to their ancestors — and also as part of their focus on premium wines — they planted several grape varieties, including three from the region where their grandfather was born.

Nebbiolo, Dolcetto and Refosco grapes grow on the vineyard which sits only six miles from the ocean and is one of the coolest grape growing climates in California.

The Italian grapes are difficult to grow — late producing and mildew prone — but the family blends them into the wine they call La Vita because it signifies their idea about life and wine.

They bottle only 300 cases of La Vita per year, and the wine retails for \$50 a bottle. But a portion of the proceeds always go to a local charity.

This year, money raised from La Vita will go to Hospice Caring Pro-

ject.

The family laughs as the stories come out — about their years in the wine business, about family barbecues, about their decision to plant untested grapes in their vineyard.

It's part of what has given them success, according to June Smith, former co-owner of Roudori-Smith Winery. Smith, who recently sold the longtime winery, said the secret to success in the wine business is a good support system.

Since the '70s and '80s, several wineries started up in the Santa Cruz Mountains but did not make it because of death or divorce, she said.

With the Bargettos, it is different.

"Family members are able to use their special talents in the job they choose to do," Smith said. "It may be the Italian tradition which contributes to the pride and loyalty among them."

Last year, the Bargettos sold 40,000 cases of its wine around the country — and, best of all, they said, they still enjoy each other's company.

"To me, it's the enjoyment of life," says Beverly, the matriarch of the winery. "It is a whole lifestyle.

"You have to take the ups and downs."

But, she says, it is a wonderful life.

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