

Unionville Vineyards Tastes Gold

The local winery wins big in a nationwide competition

By João-Pierre Ruth, NJBIZ Magazine

RINGOES - The bouquet and flavor of Unionville Vineyards' 2005 Chardonnay wowed the panel of judges at the first National Women's Wine Competition in Santa Rosa, Calif. The wine earned a double gold medal at last month's competition, one of just six such awards that were handed out.

"You had several of the top women winemakers in the world who were judges," says Patricia D. Galloway, co-owner with husband Kris Nielsen of Unionville Vineyards in Ringoes. "The other double gold medal award winners were all from California and here we are from New Jersey.

"We entered five wines and we got medals on three," adds Galloway, whose day job is as CEO of a civil engineering firm. "We got bronze for our Cool Foxy Lady, a dessert wine," which sports a picture of Galloway in a black evening dress on its label. Unionville also won silver for its late harvest Vidal Blanc.

"We both come from farming backgrounds," Galloway says of her husband and herself. "My husband's family was dairy farmers in Connecticut and my family grew tobacco, corn and other crops in Kentucky."

Last month's victories attested to the quality of wines grown in New Jersey, which is home to 20 wineries. Hopewell Valley Vineyards in Pennington took home a bronze medal for its white merlot.

"Unionville and Hopewell Valley should be very proud of themselves because they went up against international palates," says Lea Pierce, director of the National Women's Wine Competition. "New Jersey rocks."

Pierce says the goal of the competition was to create "a woman-to-woman roadmap to the wine marketplace."

About 816 medals were awarded in the two-day tasting, with 543 going to California wines. The event, judged solely by women, included more than 1,800 wines from 523 wineries across the country and was open to both male and female winemakers. Women for WineSense, a Napa, Calif.-based nonprofit organization for wine education, organized the competition.

The exposure should broaden the market for Unionville Vineyards. "It's probably unlikely that a lot of women wine drinkers outside of New Jersey and the East Coast would know about Unionville," says Pierce.

"We make 16 different wines and it's a cross between European Vinifera varieties and some hybrid wines," says Cameron Stark, Unionville's winemaker, who brings his experience in Napa Valley to the vineyard. Vinifera is the shortened name for *Vitis Vinifera*, the species of most European grapes.

Stark says the 2005 double-gold chardonnay "was a wonderful, dry vintage. "Most people were complaining about their grass all drying out. That's when I'm the happiest. Perfect conditions for grape growing."

The chardonnay was aged for nine months in the barrel before being bottled, which is about half the normal barrel time. "I wanted to highlight the fruit flavors," says Stark, who produced about 280 cases of the winning wine.