

Southern Oregon winemakers discuss marketing

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Guests listen to a speaker at Tuesday's wine conference in Umpqua Community College's Lang Center.

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Vineyard owners and operators Kim Kinderman of Agate Ridge in Eagle Point, left, Earl Jones of Abacela Winery in Roseburg and Herb Quady of Quady North and Troon Vineyard in Jacksonville, answer questions about marketing wine and other products at Tuesday's conference at Umpqua Community College.

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WINCHESTER — A panel of Southern Oregon winemakers agreed Tuesday the best way for the region to grow its reputation and stand out from the competition is to combine marketing efforts.

If Southern Oregon becomes renowned for the wine it produces, the Umpqua Valley will benefit, said Earl Jones, owner of Abacela Winery in Roseburg. The region's wineries should pool their resources, he said.

"Not everyone has the same business plan. What we need to do in Southern Oregon is to fit our business plans together to keep us buoyant as individuals," Jones said.

Jones was one of three panelists who spoke about marketing wine during the Southern Oregon Wine Marketing & Sales Conference at Umpqua Community College. Hosted by the Southern Oregon Wine Institute at the Lang Center, the full-day conference attracted about 100 people from Southern Oregon wineries.

Deb Hatcher, who leads marketing for REX HILL Vineyards in Newberg, which she co-owns, moderated the panel discussion. Jones was joined on the panel by Kim Kinderman, the general manager of Agate Ridge Vineyard in Eagle Point, and Herb Quady, owner of Quady North and Troon Vineyard in Jacksonville.

The Umpqua Valley will find success as a wine-growing region if it joins forces with wineries in the Rogue Valley, Hatcher said. Wineries in both areas should work together to encourage people to visit and sample wine from throughout Southern Oregon, she said. Wine drinkers will then start to recognize Southern Oregon as they do other notable wine-growing regions, Hatcher said.

"I would build a Southern Oregon wine category. It's your only hope," she said.

Panelists talked about what makes wine from Southern Oregon distinct from varieties produced in the Willamette Valley. In particular, they noted that more than pinot noir grapes thrive in the region.

One reason why Abacela has done well is because of a commitment to growing different varieties of grapes, Jones said.

"We came here planting tempranillo and found early success," he said. "We stuck with the idea of planting things in the right climate."

This will be key to Southern Oregon's success as a wine-growing region, Kinderman said.

"I think we need to hang our hat on diversity," she said. "We need an umbrella organization that is going to send a message out to the rest of the country that Oregon does produce other wines besides pinot noir."

Southern Oregon wineries face an uphill battle to distinguish themselves from all other wines produced domestically and abroad, the panelists said.

Jones said people mistakenly believe his winery competes with others in Southern Oregon.

"Our competition is Australia, it's Europe, it's California," he said. "This region has a problem of not having a compelling story."

Kinderman said her winery would love to raise its profile.

"It's been very hard to getting our story out of Southern Oregon," she said. "That's our biggest struggle, is to get that message out."

Among the most effective marketing strategies at Agate Ridge is putting on events at the winery, such as a summer concert series, Kinderman said.

Getting people to come to a winery is key to its success, Jones said.

"That's what sells wine," he said.

Fortunately, Southern Oregon is a great place to visit, Quady said.

"We are lucky to have one of the most beautiful places in the world and that will sell wine," he said.

People who visit a winery in Southern Oregon and have a good time will forever associate fond memories with the wine, Quady said.

People who visit a winery in Southern Oregon and have a good time will forever associate fond memories with the wine, Quady said.

"Once people do experience the area, then they will keep buying the wine off the shelf," he said.

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