

THE CATALINA ISLANDER



PERIODICAL PERMIT

PHOTO BY CHRISTINE LESTER-DEATS

SEPTEMBER 11, 2009 50¢
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Free flu vaccines available

The county will provide enough vaccine to immunize everyone this year

Seasonal flu vaccine will be widely available this year. Flu vaccines will be available free to anyone who would like to protect themselves against seasonal influenza. County officials expect that Catalina Island Medical Center will receive its allocation of influenza vaccine sometime in September. Once the vaccine has been received, a one-day event will be scheduled at the medical group in order to vaccinate as many people as possible at the same time.

"This year the seasonal flu vaccine will be widely available," said Doreen Macktal, the Medical Center's chief patient care services. "The county of Los Angeles has informed us that they will provide enough free flu vaccine for anyone who would like to be immunized."

In the past, flu shots have been provided free of charge for those at higher risk of complications. This year, the flu shot will be available free for everyone. Vaccines will also be available at the Catalina Island Medical Group for those unavailable to attend the one-day event.

The annual influenza vaccine

Alison Wingley Rusack picking Pinot Noir grapes during the first harvest at El Rancho Escondido.

Geoff Rusack emptying freshly harvested Catalina Pinot Noir into a picking bin for transport to the Airport-In-The-Sky.



First harvest for Catalina's Vineyard

In the pre-dawn hours of Tuesday, Sept. 1, under the light of a nearly full moon, Catalina's first grape harvest commenced at El Rancho Escondido. Due to an unanticipated and extensive heat wave that had hit the Island, sugars in the grapes had started to skyrocket, necessitating immediate picking. According to Rusack Vineyards' winemaker John Falcone, conditions were getting "close to critical."

An early morning harvest was chosen to keep the grapes as cool as possible as they made their way from Catalina to the Santa Ynez Valley. Generators were placed in the vineyard to power work lights, and some of the crew were equipped with individual headlamps. Row by row, the clusters were hand-harvested and carried in small buckets to the larger picking bins placed at the ends of the rows.

block (with a different sun exposure) to ripen more fully.

The grapes were then transported in half-ton bins to the Airport in the Sky where they were loaded—with razor thin margins—through the cargo door and snugly fit into the fuselage of Catalina Flying Boats' Cessna Caravan. Via three separate flights, the grapes were airlifted to the Santa Ynez Airport for a quick pick up and processing at Rusack Vineyards' winery.

Pinot noir was the first of the three varieties (which also include chardonnay and zinfandel) being grown at the ranch to ripen. For

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Harvest

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those of you unfamiliar with the term, a varietal means a wine made from a particular grape. The pinot noir wine, for example, is made from pinot grapes. The pinot grapes are grown mainly in Burgundy and Alsace, France.

While, wine grapes are usually picked at a 23- to 24-degree brix level, some preliminary measurements of Catalina's new pinot were noticeably higher. To complicate matters, some clusters were showing signs of dehydration and, simultaneously, bees were starting to devour the fruit.

The quick-harvest action appears to have paid off, and the grapes and juice are now fermenting under the constant watch of John and Helen Falcone-Rusack Vineyards' famed husband and wife winemaking team.

Early reports of the Pinot's quality have been favorable. Notes Helen, "Not only did the fruit look great when it arrived, but the color extraction that is now coming from it is incredible." She adds, "Ph and acid levels were well within a good comfort zone, which bodes well for a naturally balanced wine."

This historic harvest is the culmination of a 25-year dream of Geoff and Alison Rusack. "It's almost surreal to be standing in the middle of some of our family's old horse pastures and seeing them filled with beautiful vines and flowing with grapes," said Alison. "This is a new way to create energy at this

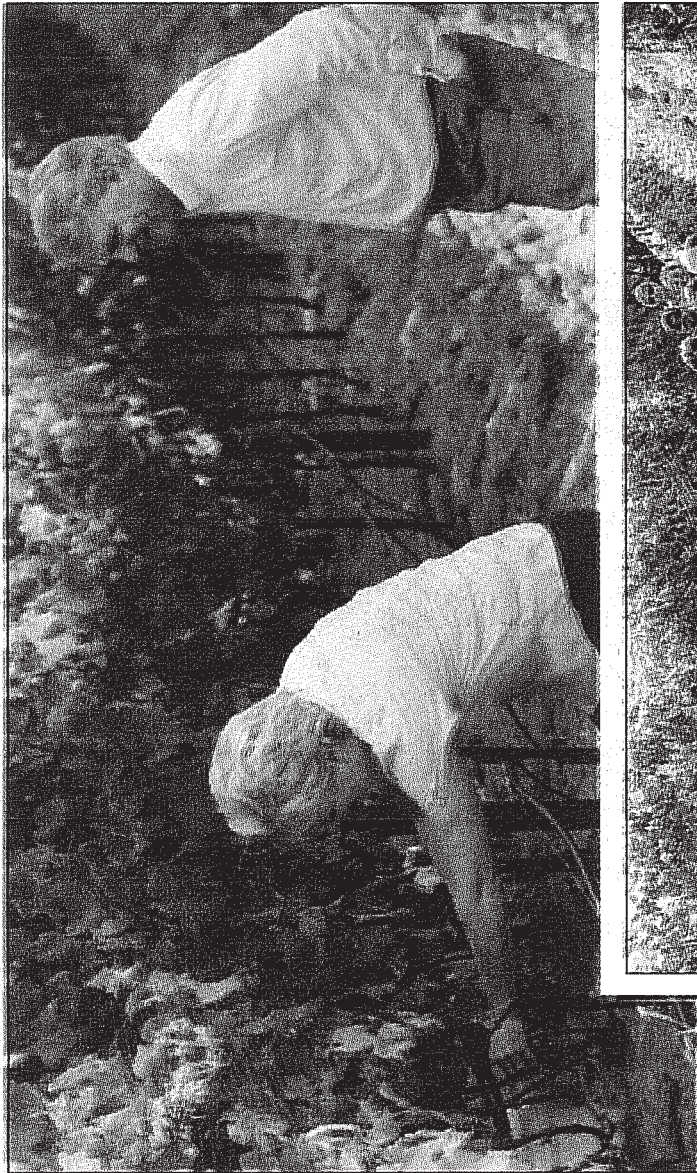
Viticultural Area, a classification akin to France's well-known Appellation designations.

While the burgundian varieties are probably the best suited to Catalina's weather, the Rusacks couldn't pass up an opportunity to gather Zinfandel wood from one of Catalina's sister channel islands, Santa Cruz. In the early 1900s, Santa Cruz had had a thriving vineyard and winemaking business.

When Prohibition became the law of the land, the owners ceased operations and pulled out almost every vine. Of the ones that remain, a few serve as landscaping for the chapel and most of the rest are growing wild in the hills. The Rusacks obtained permission to gather some of the wood from those vines and now have grafted enough to have both a Santa Cruz Island Zinfandel block at El Rancho Escondido and one at their vineyard in Santa Ynez.

"With most of the pinot now in and going through fermentation, we are one step closer to the lingering question, when will we actually have Catalina wine to try? And the answer is not for another year," Geoff said. "What we have right now is primarily grape juice and, even after it is fully fermented, there are still numerous things that must be done before bottling. Needless to say, patience is a virtue in this business."

Trying not to get too excited, Geoff said, "We really won't even know what we have for another seven months ... but for now, the juice is delicious!



Alison and Geoff Rusack harvesting the first Catalina Pinot Noir grapes, above.

At right, Left to right - Austin, Alison, Geoff and Parker Rusack. Behind Parker - Bob and Tina Kennedy, Tony and Shelley Brasher, Beau Franklin. With bucket, Stewart Rasmussen. Tex on far right.

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wonderful ranch and add another dimension to what makes Catalina so very special—and, yes, we still have the horses!”

“Growing these grapes has not been an easy task,” reports Geoff. It was vital to us to do this project in a responsible way that would work with Catalina’s special environment.”

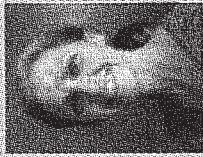
Among the various goals were obtaining organic certification, using only previously disturbed areas for the vineyard blocks, and finding various biodegradable products. Those products would handle erosion control and moisture retention and create a weed barrier. Ultimately, the Rusacks are hoping to show that an agricultural project can thrive while preserving and enhancing its surroundings—in this case the rest of El Rancho Escondido and the ranch’s neighbor, the Catalina Island Conservancy.

According to the Rusacks, no effort has been spared in creating this vineyard and now the goal is to get all the remaining grapes safely into the winery and then handcrafted into world-class pinot, chardonnay and zinfandel.

“After studying the historical temperatures at and near El Rancho Escondido, the climate appears similar to some of the finest burgundian growing regions in California, including Santa Rita Hills and the Russian River Valley,” John Falcone said.

It may even be that the El Rancho Escondido area will gain its own designation as an American

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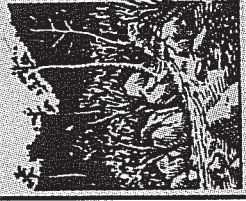
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