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## Discover more about wine

From wine clubs to catered dinners, people are gathering to learn, discover, enjoy

*Nancy O'Donnell*

There's a reason so many drinking toasts compare a bottle of fine wine with a good friend: Who wants to savor a saucy Sauvignon, a mellow Malbec, a boisterous burgundy all by their lonesome?

Rochesterians looking to share their love of the grape are discovering wine clubs, wine classes and wine-centered fundraisers as a great way to raise a glass or two together. Here are some ideas.

### **Wine club**

Enzo Raffaele-Addamo founded Rochester Winos in 2004, indulging something of a family hobby. "My father made wine at home and a family cousin had a small winery in San Luis Obispo," Raffaele-Addamo says. Now with girlfriend Janice D'Ambrosia as partner, the group organizes fast-paced wine gatherings to hundreds of interested fans. "We serve six wines and six appetizers every 20 minutes," says Raffaele-Addamo. And after the wine and food pairings are done, there's always room for a dessert pairing: "dark chocolate with port or an ice wine with crême brûlée."

The Winos typically meet monthly at a variety of local restaurants. The tasting this month is on Jan. 15 at Sanibel's Cottage Restaurant in Penfield, and reservations are required. For more information, go to [rochesterwinos.com](http://rochesterwinos.com).

### **Tastings**

Of course, the Finger Lakes wineries offer tastings throughout the year.

Closer to home, Kristin Vanden Brul's Park Avenue shop offers free wine tastings every Friday night and Saturday afternoon. In addition, she has created three-week "symposiums" on wine. Week one in the Cabernet Sauvignon Symposium presented "budget" wines for \$15 and less. The next week featured "splurge" wines (from \$25 to \$50). In week three, a "blind tasting" of \$10 to \$50 wines challenged participants to see what they had learned.

Wine Sense also runs in-home wine classes, starting with a little education and ending with tastings. The cost depends on the wine you choose for your own private wine bash.

### **Special events**

Open That Bottle Night was established in the late 1990s by wine columnists for *The Wall Street Journal* who noticed that people would save certain bottles of wine as "too special" to drink. The couple chose a date in February for people to gather and "open that bottle." In 2006, The Bivona Child Advocacy Center, which aids children who are victims of physical or sexual abuse, decided to host a fundraiser around OTBN. It quickly became the center's signature event.

Guests bring in their long-held bottles and share them with others over dinner. Executive director

Mary Whittier said that sharing stories about how they acquired their wine — in addition to the wine itself — makes for a special evening for wine lovers.

Bivona's OTBN event will be held Feb. 28, at Locust Hill Country Club. The 2009 wine fundraiser will focus on wine, food, travel and sports. It will include a silent auction, wine tasting during cocktail hour and dinner, followed by a live auction of "elite items and special packages."

### **Competition**

The Finger Lakes International Wine Competition is one of the largest in North America, said Carl Rudolfs, communication specialist for Camp Good Days and Special Times, which benefits from the event. Last year, more than 2,000 wines were entered. While the competition is held in March, the real action for wine lovers will take place May 2 with the Wine Auction and Dinner featuring the winning wines from the competition. A panel of internationally recognized wine experts does the judging, so wine lovers know they're getting the good stuff. The event, at the Rochester Plaza Hotel (70 State St.), opens with a wine tasting, silent auction and a preview of the live auction. Dinner and the wine auction follow, with live music into the night.

### **Classes**

Andrea Bornheim, owner of Rochester Wine School (formerly A Wine Party Inc.), has designed a wine appreciation course for "uninitiated novices to experienced connoisseurs."

The Rochester native lived in the French Alsace region and studied wine in several European countries. She's certified in French wines through the Parker-Zraly wine certification program and is a member of the Society of Wine Educators. But her first teacher was closer to home.

"My grandfather, Charles Calandra, made his own wine, and he'd mix it with ginger ale and give it to me," said Bornheim. (For the record, her grandmother didn't approve.)

In Bornheim's wine appreciation class, participants taste \$1,500 worth of fine wines while learning "sensory evaluation, food and wine pairing, storing and serving wine, viticulture and winemaking along with history and politics of assorted wine regions." She also makes house calls with her Home Tastings Parties.

For one event, Bornheim joined The August Group at Sanibel's for a tasting. Linda Weissegger, a vice president for development at Community Place of Greater Rochester, voiced the sentiment of many. "I know what I like, but I don't find that I have a sophisticated palate." But she says the tasting was helping her palate mature.

### **Wine dinners**

Name your favorite wine to DarLyn Pochan, aka The Wine Chef, and she'll create a menu that complements it. She and her team will bring it all to your home and cook it for you and your guests, sharing techniques and tips along the way.

Pochan discovered her inner Top Chef four years ago, when she quit her executive job at Xerox and went to culinary school. Four years later she returned to Rochester, launched her business and never looked back.

For a recent dinner centered around a 1998 Beychevelle Bordeaux, she paired grilled salmon with peach-and-apple-wine reduction sauce. For a wine fancier's California Shalom Pinot noir, she chose haddock in papillote with tarragon and herb butter drizzle, and roasted parsnips with nutmeg on the side.

Pochan always tries to use locally grown and raised products and offers menus for vegetarians. She

brings a finish-up crew with her, so you only have to eat up and drink up, not clean up.

*Nancy O'Donnell is a local freelance writer.*

## Additional Facts

For information

**Rochester Winos:** [www.rochesterwinos.com](http://www.rochesterwinos.com).

**Wine Sense:** [www.wedefine.wine.com](http://www.wedefine.wine.com) or call (585) 271-0590.

**Open that Bottle Night:** [www.bivonacac.org](http://www.bivonacac.org) or (585) 935-7800.

**Finger Lakes International Wine Competition:** [www.fliwc.com](http://www.fliwc.com).

**Rochester Wine School:** [www.rocwineschool.com](http://www.rocwineschool.com) or (585) 671-5076.

**The Wine Chef:** [www.winechef.net](http://www.winechef.net) or (585) 671-4531.

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