

Published October 12th, 2011

## Orinda Takes the Lead in Mapping Lamorinda AVA

By Sophie Braccini



Victoria Smith (left) and Emmanuel Ursu (center) taste local wine with LWGA President Susan Captain (right) Photo Sophie Braccini

The social scene at the Moraga Barn on a late September evening was as diverse and festive as all of the monthly wine tasting meetings of the Lamorinda Wine Growers Association (LWGA). Among the usual aficionados one could spot a few newcomers including Orinda's Mayor Victoria Smith and Planning Director Emmanuel Ursu, who were invited by the LWGA to meet the group, talk to Orinda growers and make a critical evaluation of the local wine production.

As grape growing and wine making take off in Orinda, Smith and Ursu wanted to show their support and start asking questions about the impact this activity could have on their city.

"When I recently saw the LWGA map, with all the Lamorinda property where grapes are grown, I was struck by the number of properties in Orinda," said Smith. Planting grapes in one's backyard does not require a permit of any sort. The city only hears from the grower when (s)he wants to be legally allowed to produce and sell wine under his or her own name (becoming a bonded winery). When Smith got an invitation to come to the monthly LWGA libation at the Moraga Barn she decided it was time to get better acquainted with them.

"We had a wonderful time," said both Smith and Ursu. The City of Orinda is coming out in support of the Association in their quest for getting an official Lamorinda appellation (becoming an American Viticultural Area or AVA).

"LWGA needs a lot of different elements in order to be approved as an AVA," said Smith, "weather data, soil analysis, and also detailed mapping of Lamorinda, and our Orinda Planning Department will be working on creating the Lamorinda map for the AVA."

Ursu also supports the idea of growing grapes in Orinda, but he has a few concerns about the possible impact from an operation standpoint. "We want to make sure that this does not get out of control," he said, adding that he believes that the city's rules are probably already adequate. But he noted that commercial activities, such as selling wine from the home, are not allowed in most of the neighborhoods where the grapes are growing.

"We are not in favor of over-regulating," said Ursu, "as long as the residential character of the neighborhoods are preserved and things are conducted to everyone's satisfaction we do not need to step in." He believes that small-scale operations should not create a problem. "Wine growers can apply for temporary events permits if they want to have a wine tour a few times a year, like a home tour or a garden tour," he says, "Orinda is first and foremost a residential bedroom community, there can be a small, limited amount of agriculture, but no undue impact on surrounding properties." Ursu also expressed possible aesthetic concerns with grading on hillsides and the potential removal of native vegetation to accommodate vineyards.

"If this really takes off, we could look at what other cities such as St. Helena have done to regulate the activities of the wine growers," added Smith, who believes that these activities would be beneficial to the economics to the region. "We also want the LWGA to be more involved with the city, its events and the Chamber of Commerce," says the Mayor, who would love to see downtown restaurants serving local wines and a tasting facility in the downtown area, "so people from out of town can come and go by BART."

Reach the reporter at: [sophie@lamorindaweekly.com](mailto:sophie@lamorindaweekly.com)

Copyright © Lamorinda Weekly, Moraga CA