

The Perfect Blend

Winemaking and veterinary medicine mix well for CVM alumna

Photos and story by
Sue Myers Smith



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Dr. DeAnne Livingston (DVM '88) and her husband, Eric Seifarth, purchased the land for Crane Creek Vineyards in 1995, the same year that Livingston purchased her veterinary practice in Blairsville, Ga. They planted their first vines that same year, but it took until about 2001 for them to have enough grapes to begin producing wine. The pair met while serving in the U.S. Army—Livingston in the Veterinary Corps and Seifarth as an artillery officer—and became interested in the lifestyle associated with owning and running a winery while they were stationed for several years in Northern Italy. “We fell in love with wine in Italy, and were drawn to the connection you make with the land when you grow grapes and make wine,” says Livingston.

The original house on the property was built in 1886 and now serves as the winery’s tasting room. The couple lived in the old home with their two young sons when they first moved to Young Harris, but built a new house in 2000. In early 2011, they converted that home into a space that could accommodate their growing events calendar, and

moved into the vineyard cottage in anticipation of building a new home. The couple says that it’s difficult to just be a winery—you have to have a hospitality side as well. Since the event side of their business has been growing, Livingston has been working more and more with their tasting room general manager, David Sanford, in addition to working full-time at her veterinary practice in Blairsville.

The goal is for the vineyard to be able to produce 6,000 cases of wine per year; currently they make about 4,200. They plant additional vines each year, particularly on an adjacent tract of land they purchased in 2010. Once they’ve reached their ideal production level, they will thin the vines so they are producing fewer fruits per plant, thus increasing the quality of the grapes they get from each vine.

The vineyard is staffed by three to four full-time employees, including vineyard manager Russell Shannon and assistant winemaker Matt Matteson, as well as seasonal pickers, vineyard techs, and even an intern, all of whom participate in the fall harvest.

Livingston and Seifarth enjoy their Hellbender Red in the winery’s pavilion, which overlooks the vineyard.



Catawba, Livingston’s and Seifarth’s female Australian shepherd, relaxes in the retail section of the tasting room. We are sad to report that Catawba died shortly before this publication went to press.

Livingston with a dachshund puppy in the waiting room at Blairsville Animal Hospital, her veterinary practice in Blairsville, Ga. The clinic is about 12 miles from her vineyard home in Young Harris. Livingston is an avid folk-art collector, always keeping her eyes open for pieces such as the large-scale painting in the background. The painting was a gift from the late Jon Whiddon, who also produced the artwork for their wine labels.





◀ Jacky Fortier pours a glass of Mountain Harvest Blush in the Crane Creek tasting room. Fortier has been with Crane Creek since 2007, and started the popular “Wine 4 Women” monthly wine education series.

Eric Seifarth cultivates a plot in the late spring before planting new vines in May 2010. ▶



The harvest begins in early September and runs through early October—and it’s all hands on deck to get the vines picked at just the right time. In 2010, the harvest yielded 83,000 pounds of grapes; because of late spring frosts, however, Livingston and Seifarth expected about half that amount from the 2011 harvest. To combat any future losses from frost, the vineyard invested in a wind machine that circulates warm air from above the ground toward the grapes below.



▶ Grape picker Ashley Kelly snips undesirable grapes from a cluster during the harvest.

◀ Assistant winemaker Matt Matteson picks grapes during the fall 2011 harvest.



Two of Crane Creek’s award-winning wines, the Seyval Blanc from their Barn Swallow label, and Hellbender Red, are both produced from a single varietal. The Hellbender Red is particularly unique because it is made from Norton grapes, a variety native to America. The Hellbender has won three awards, including a Gold Medal at the 2010 San Francisco Chronicle Wine Competition. The Seyval Blanc was made from grapes from the first vines planted at Crane Creek; at the San Francisco Chronicle Wine Competition, this wine took home the 2009 Silver Medal and was the highest-rated Seyval.