

AMY ALVAREZ-WAMPFLER & VICTOR PALENCIA

Stan's loans were
an investment



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who ARE we?

Washington's Kaleidoscope

*“Noah began to be a man of the soil,
and he planted a vineyard.”*

Genesis 9:20

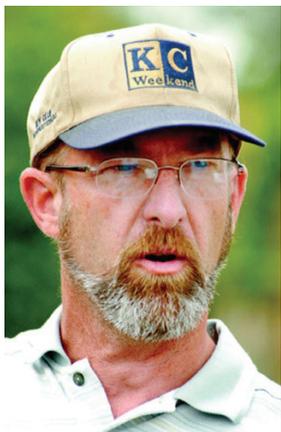


Amy and Victor at the Stan Clarke Vineyard at Walla Walla Community College. *Greg Lehman photo*

Amy Alvarez needed gas money to stay in school. Victor Palencia bristled at being an “alien.” And Stan Clarke wouldn’t let a 90-mile commute deter him from his dream job.

This is a story about two aspiring young winemakers and the teacher who was their yeast. They met at an enterprising community college in the heart of Washington wine country.

Some 20 years earlier, in the summer of 1980, Jesus and Sophia Alvarez were picking berries in the Skagit Valley when Sophia went into labor. The teenage couple made it to the hospital in Mount Vernon where their beautiful brown-eyed girl was born. Growing up, Amy remembers her folks bantering



Stan Clarke, a charismatic teacher who loved winemaking.
 Greg Lehman/Walla Walla Union-Bulletin

over where she was almost born: Was it a raspberry field or a strawberry field? “And my mom is like, ‘*I think I would remember!*’ Raspberries were harder for me to do pregnant, so I know it was strawberries. I had two baskets at my side as I was sitting and picking.’ ”

Ironically, given the career their daughter discovered, Jesus and Sophia grew up picking practically every fruit under the sun except wine grapes. Relatively speaking, there weren’t that many to pick. In 1980, Washington had only around 4,000 acres and 19 wineries. Today there are more than 870, capitalizing on 60,000 acres of prime fruit.

Now boasting one of the world’s greatest wine regions, Washington is second only to California in the production of premium American wines.

Hispanic vineyard workers have been the backbone of the West Coast wine industry for more than half a century. The Hispanic population of Washington State is up 83 percent to 808,000 since 2000. Two counties, Adams and Franklin, have Hispanic majorities; populous Yakima County is nearly there. While Columbia Basin Hispanics remain politically under-represented and economically disadvantaged, their sweat equity in Washington’s emergence as a world-class wine state is finally reaping rewards, in role models at least.

Amy Alvarez-Wampfler, at 35, is one of the top winemakers in the Northwest and a wine-magazine cover girl for “*Living la Viña Loca.*” Victor Palencia, handsome but humble, is a



Wine Press Northwest/Jackie Johnston

31-year-old vinicultural rock star, spotlighted in *The New York Times* when he was still too young to drink legally. Together with other young Latino vineyard managers and winemakers, Amy and Victor are opening new doors. Their stories are a blend of serendipity, talent, hard work and “not being afraid to chase your dreams,” as Victor puts it. Stan Clarke, who loved helping people as much as he loved wine—and that’s saying a lot—entered their lives at just the right time.



Victor with a haul of awards.
Palencia Wine Company

AMY’S EARLIEST MEMORIES are of waking up under a cherry tree, and later of playing in the shade while her grandma, aunts and uncles picked fruit. Her maternal grandparents had worked the fields from Texas to Tonasket. Her father’s father came to California in the 1950s, sent money back home to Mexico and gradually brought his family to the U.S. In California, one of their stops, farm workers lived in fear of random immigration crackdowns. Washington seemed more hospitable.

Grandma Manuela, Amy’s mother’s mother, was always cooking, sewing, painting pictures or working with papier-mâché. She challenged Amy and her sister to come up with fanciful creations of their own. “I got my artistic side from her,” Amy says, smiling at the memory of sitting cross-legged on the floor watching bushy-haired Bob Ross, the PBS painting-show host, swirl his brush to create clouds. If the girls were good they’d get peanut butter with their tortillas. Grandma was the classic Mexican-family matriarch. “She never worked, nev-

er drove,” Amy says. “She took care of the family. That’s all she did. She was the rock.”

Victor remembers crossing the U.S. border as a 2-year-old on his father’s shoulders. After the family made its way to Prosser, David Palencia worked the fields, shovel in hand, furrowing irrigation water to crops before becoming a vineyard foreman. By then there were eight kids. When Victor turned 13, he began shadowing his dad, “helping prune and pick grapes, learning to ride a tractor.” Victor’s mother admonished them to always carry the Green Cards that proved they were permanent legal residents. “I’ll never forget when we were given the



Victor as a toddler. *Palencia family collection*

‘Alien Registration’ papers. I’m like, ‘Alien?’ Is that what I am?” When Victor was attending Walla Walla Community College, someone broke into his car and took his wallet. He bounced between Immigration Services and Social Security for months trying to get a replacement card. “Finally, panic set in. I just hired a lawyer and put every dime I could into becoming a citizen. I bought a beef and bean burrito on the way back from the ceremony in Spokane just to make sure I still had it in me.”

Amy will smile when she hears that story. Though proud of her Hispanic heritage, there were times when she felt caught between two cultures. English was her mother’s first language and her father’s second. Her parents separated without acrimony when she was a preschooler. She still saw her father often and soon had half-siblings. When she was 9 her mother landed a job with the state. Amy was up extra early to make sure her younger siblings got ready for school, had breakfast

and caught the bus. “I had to grow up pretty fast but I learned some management skills, too. My mom was always working, but she was very good at making sure we never wanted for anything. We always had nice clothes. And she always made sure we went to the better public schools, regardless if she had to drive up town every day for a year. That was really a gift that I didn’t fully appreciate at the time. Sometimes it was like, ‘Why can’t we just get on the bus with the rest of the kids in the neighborhood?’ She ended up paying higher rent for an apartment closer to our school so we could just walk to school. I’m really glad she did that. We were around kids who were a little bit better privileged than we were. I think I really needed to see that. It gave me some goals.”

During high school in Yakima Amy often felt as if she didn’t fit in anywhere. Her second-hand Spanish sounded funny to newcomer Latino kids. She was teased “for not being Hispanic enough.” They didn’t like her clothes and pegged her as an uppity misfit. “I didn’t speak proper Spanish. I lived uptown, not downtown. It was, ‘Who can we pick on? How about her?’ You kind of find yourself in a little bubble of kids who didn’t fit in on either side.”

Graduating at 17, Amy started community college, stocked shelves at Safeway by night and ran herself ragged and bored. An aunt lived in Idaho, so she enrolled at Boise State. Higher tuition meant more part-time jobs. She quit school, married her high school sweetheart, had a baby—and an epiphany: “Once I had Jada, there was this reawakening in me, ‘OK, *now you have to take care of somebody else*. What are you doing with your life? Look what you’re doing—absolutely nothing.’ ”

In 2003 when her daughter was six months old, Amy was living in Hermiston, Oregon, near her father. She heard Columbia Crest Winery needed someone who spoke Spanish in its tasting room just 25 minutes away across the Columbia River in Paterson, Washington. She knew “next to nothing about wine.” During her first weeks on the job, she parroted how to swirl, sniff, sip and savor, marveling that “we never had a customer come in who wasn’t happy to be there. I remember thinking, ‘Why are they so happy to drink wine?’ It was an

experience I began sharing with the consumer. I learned as much as I could from the pamphlets and books they gave us. We'd have an enologist come in—the winemaker—and talk to us. It was fascinating—the soil, the vines, the climate, the whole process. I thought, 'This is so cool. They're hands-on. They're actually making something.' I wanted to be a part of it. I didn't want to just pour wine anymore. After about six months, I said to myself, 'Oh my God, I've fallen in love with wine! With the idea of making wine. This is something I'm passionate about. I need to go back to school.'



Stan Clarke loved the vineyards. He always said he was proud to be “a man of the soil.” *Greg Lehman/Walla Walla Union-Bulletin*

WALLA WALLA COMMUNITY COLLEGE'S Institute for Enology & Viticulture was the brainchild of Steven VanAusdle, the college president, and Myles J. Anderson, a superb winemaker and veteran educator. They envisioned a hands-on curriculum in vineyard management, winemaking and marketing. In 2002, they hired Stan Clarke, a charismatic teacher with a degree in viticulture, and began raising what would reach \$5 million in private donations. Amy Alvarez was one of the first to enroll in the two-year program.

College Cellars, now producing award-winning wines from student-tended vines and donated grapes, was “the first state-of-the-art teaching commercial winery in Washington State,” says Catie McIntyre Walker, author of a new book on the roots of winemaking in the Walla Walla Valley. Walker, another of Clarke's first students, remembers that “if there was one per-

son who could weave people together it was Stan.”

Given his globe-trotting Air Force career, it seems improbable that Stan Clarke landed in Walla Walla after a stint as a grade-school teacher. But vineyards were his passion.

Clarke grew up in the heart of California wine country. After graduating from Ukiah High School in 1968, he won appointment to the U.S. Air Force Academy and became a weapons control officer. He spent a year north of the Arctic Circle, keeping an eye on the Russians. “To keep from going nuts,” he contacted the University of Alaska and volunteered to oversee a study of agricultural products that could be grown in the inhospitable environment. Then, during a stint in Germany, Clarke met and fell in love with an American teacher, Carol Champion. “Here was this really cute Air Force guy who spoke German and took everyone on wine tours. But as a teacher the thing I liked the most,” Carol recalls, “is that he would take a week off to chaperone kids on ski trips. He was single, had no kids and really wasn’t a skier. But he was a kid himself in a lot of ways. All of his life his refrain was ‘What can I do to help kids succeed?’ ”

Clarke left active duty in 1976 and received a B.S. in viticulture from the University of California, Davis. Married in 1978, Carol and Stan moved to Grandview the following summer when Stan became the grower relations manager for Chateau Ste. Michelle Wine Estates, the state’s largest wine producer. He went on to become the first winemaker and general manager for Quail Run Winery (now Covey Run), served as president of what morphed into the state Wine Commission and began writing a popular column, “From Berry to Bottle,” for the *Yakima Herald-Republic*. “When our youngest son wrote in his ‘All About Me’ kindergarten book that ‘My mom teaches, my dad drinks wine,’ Stan declared it was time to do something ‘socially redeeming,’ ” Carol remembers with a laugh. “Washington State University-Tri-Cities had started a master’s-in-teaching program. So Stan continued to work in winemaking, did his master’s at night and worked with middle-school kids when he did his student teaching. I think our own kids were jealous because kids just surrounded him all the time.



Stan Clarke and Amy Alvarez bringing in the fruit at Walla Walla Community College's Institute for Enology & Viticulture. *Walla Walla Community College*

He became one of the best sixth-grade teachers they've ever had at Grandview Middle school."

Then one day in 2002, Walla Walla Community College called with an offer Clarke couldn't refuse. "Carol!" he declared, fizzing with excitement, "it's the opportunity of a lifetime: I get to do viticulture and teach? Does it get any better than that?"

Problem was, Carol had just been given her own important career-move. She was poised to become a principal in the Sunnyside School District. "No problem," Stan said. He'd just commute:

180 miles round trip, nearly four hours total, from Grandview to Walla Walla. Sometimes it looked as if he had slept in his clothes—"and for a while he did, in a camper parked at the college," Catie Walker remembers. "Sometimes he was wearing socks that didn't match—and no chocolate chip cookie was safe in his presence."

"All true!" Carol Clarke says. "I'd go, 'Honey, please wear matching socks for me. Please, just for me.' And he'd go, 'I don't care! Now watch.' He'd put on an unmatched pair and smirk 'Live with it.' What mattered to him was his students."

His students also quickly learned that Stan regarded Pinot Noir—the darling of aficionados like the merlot-hating protagonist of the hit movie *Sideways*—as prissy and overrated. If you are what you drink, Stan was a Cabernet man. “We’d all duck when some new student started raving about Pinot,” Walker fondly remembers, “because Stan would spin around from the whiteboard and toss a marker at the offender.”

WHEN HE ENROLLED at Walla Walla Community College, Victor Palencia had a substantial head start on Amy Alvarez. Palencia’s older brother, David Jr., was working in the vineyards at Willow Crest Winery at Prosser when Victor was a high-school sophomore. Victor told the winery owner, Dave Minick, he wanted to become a winemaker. He soaked up everything he saw and heard that summer. At Prosser High School, Victor immersed himself in chemistry and science. His counselor introduced him to Clarke. That the kid already had a great nose was abundantly clear. He wasn’t supposed to sip, Clarke said. “But boy, can he smell.”

“I skipped school a couple of times to meet with Stan,” Palencia remembers with a conspiratorial smile. “Had it not been for his early influence I probably would not have come to grips with what my potential was. I knew what I wanted, but my dream seemed unreachable. It was one of those things where you leap for the stars. Some people thought I was crazy. They said, ‘Winemaking—that’s a white boy’s job.’ Stan allowed me to forget, at least for a little bit, that I was a migrant, that I was only 18 years old; all these things that classify you and almost restrict you. He just treated me for who I was, and who I wanted to be and what my grades were. And that was absolutely enlightening.”

With Clarke’s help, Palencia secured a scholarship from Leonetti Cellar, which had put Washington winemaking—and Walla Walla—on the world wine map in 1981 when its 1978 Cabernet Sauvignon was hailed as the finest Cab in America by *Wine & Spirits* magazine. The valley’s emerging identity was shaped by “fruit like California in a wine that has acid and structure like Bordeaux,” as Leonetti’s Gary Figgins put it.

Amy Alvarez, meantime, landed a viticulture internship through Ste. Michelle Wine Estates to work in the vineyards during the summer. “I learned a ton of stuff. It was ‘Oh my gosh, I’m going to be a viticulturist! I’m going to be outside. I love being outside! So this is what I’m going to do.’ ” A second internship was even more fulfilling: The early-morning solitude of the vineyard; the smells wafting from the warming earth as she checked for pests and disease and compiled crop estimates. By 2005, however, the 55-mile trip from Hermiston to Walla Walla became an emotional and financial grind for the young mother.



Amy early in her career. *Wild Walla Walla Wine Woman/Catie McIntyre Walker*

“Stan Clarke was so encouraging and such an inspiration that I said to myself, ‘OK, I have to finish this.’ ” But one day when she arrived at school looking tired and discouraged, Stan wanted to know what was up. “I told him I didn’t have money for gas. He gave me gas money to stay in school, and I would pay him back the next month.” Her eyes well with tears. “He even paid for part of a quarter at school.”

“Amy wasn’t the only one,” Carol Clarke says. “He told me one day, ‘Don’t ever ask how much money I give out. *Don’t*. It’s something we have to do.’ Stan was a very frugal man, but he would pull out his wallet in a heartbeat if someone needed help to stay in school and follow their dream.”

WHEN COLUMBIA CREST had an opening for an intern winemaker, Amy was still struggling to make ends meet. Clarke understood. “See if you can get that job,” he said. “You can take some online classes or I can give you homework.”

It still seemed like a long shot—even more so after she

was interviewed by Juan Muñoz Oca and Daniel Wampfler, two of Columbia Crest's brightest young enologists.

"The first year of the Walla Walla Community College program is all viticulture; the second year is winemaking. I had finished the first year and was just into the second year. And here was Daniel, who has a master's degree in enology, asking me all these questions about pH levels and other technical things."

She drove home thinking she had blown the interview and that her future husband was "a jackass!"

"So I'm like, I'll go back to school or get another job or whatever.' "

Her excellent work in the vineyard, disarming honesty and Stan's endorsement carried the day.

At Columbia Crest, Amy's teachers included Ray Einberger, whose team's 2005 Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon would be rated the world's best wine, and Keith Kenison, who shepherded the whites. Columbia Crest's expansive vineyards gave its winemakers an abundance of wonderful fruit to fuel their esprit de corps. "Blessed with the fun gene, Einberger has a voice that sparkles," says Paul Gregutt, who has been writing about Washington wines since the 1980s. "Even his mustache looks like it's winking at you when he speaks." Kenison, like Einberger, had learned his craft from the ground up, starting as a cellar worker a decade earlier. Amy became his lead assistant. The alchemy of enology was intoxicating. "I was an intern in charge of all the Chardonnay—barrel-fermented and stainless steel. Over 10,000 barrels a year. I really fell in love with winemaking because now I'm like hands-on, experiencing the fruit coming in, crushing, fermenting—all the smells! Oh my God, it's just the best!" Yet when there were two openings for fulltime enologists she was hesitant. "I'm not qualified," she told Wampfler. "No," he said, "you are." And he meant it.

One of the jobs—a white wine enologist—became hers. Amy's internship days were over. Looking back, she believes starting her career with a high-volume, quality producer like Columbia Crest was a blessing. "Everything I learned there in one or two years would have taken me 10 years at a small win-

ery. You work with so many different barrels. 'OK, I like this one, but I like this one even better. I'm never buying that barrel if I'm on my own.' You get to taste all these different vineyards. You can do yeast trials. You learn all the tricks.

"During harvest I would sample maybe 60 to a hundred samples a day of fermenting juice. You teach your palate to look for certain things. I'm always looking for wines that are balanced. It's harder with a sweet wine. You have sweet juice; it's not even fermenting yet, but you're tasting it. It's so hard to picture where it's going to go in fermentation—which yeast to use? What barrel? Ray and Keith did a great job of showing me how to figure out the nuances of where a wine is going to go. Even when you're tasting juice, if it falls off the palate—you take a sip and then it's gone—that's important. But for me it just took a lot longer to figure out how to do that because it's so sweet." She mastered extracting flavor from the yeast sediments at the bottom of a barrel—the *sur lie* ("soor-lee") aging process.

"One day I had 5,000 barrels in the Chardonnay room, and we're adding the yeast. I wasn't adding it myself physically. You had to write a work order for the guys to do it because it's such a big lot. But it's like you're walking through this curtain of aromatics. 'Oh my God, this smells so good! I'm doing this!' Steering it toward the way I wanted it to be made was the eureka moment for me. 'I can do nothing else. This is it.' "

If any of the guys resented working for a 5-foot-1 Latina who looked even younger than 25 they weren't vocal about it. Regardless, Amy pays no mind to subtle slights. "Growing up the way I did you learn to dismiss stuff. I tend to overcompensate—not for being Hispanic. I always do my best; I try and do better than I think I should, so there's no doubt in anybody's mind that I did it myself, that I gave it my full effort. And I try not to hear negative things. I tend to just laugh it off. Or I won't even say anything."

AMY AND DAN WAMPFLER didn't talk much because he worked with the reds, she with the whites. But it was clear he wasn't really "cocky and full of himself" as she first imagined. He



Amy and her husband, Dan Wampfler, at Dunham Cellars, where Amy also produced wines for Sinclair Estate Vineyards. In 2016 they were hired by another of the Northwest's top wineries, Abeja.
 © Richard Duval Images

was a terrific enologist who said things people remembered and repeated, such as “Winemaking is science applied to art” and “We’re yeast shepherds.” That’s the scientist side. “He’s also hilarious,” Amy discovered. Moreover, he cooks, plays the drums and, in the right company, beer pong. He loves Notre Dame football and can dance. “I was impressed with his moves the first time I saw him dance,” Amy says, smiling.



The university-trained enologist from Michigan and the

young Latina whose gumption had propelled her to respected winemaker began falling in love.

In 2008, Daniel joined Dunham Cellars, the award-winning Walla Walla winery, and was soon recognized as one of the Northwest's genuinely gifted winemakers. Amy was reluctant to leave Columbia Crest, but the circuitous commute from Paterson to Walla Walla was exhausting. She and Daniel were married in 2009. Amy began working with Tim and Kathy Sinclair on their startup winery, Sinclair Estate Vineyards, and became their full-time winemaker in 2010, utilizing Dunham's facilities for production. Before long, besides crafting exceptional wines, she was doing the books, helping organize tasting-room events and working with distributors. She became a part owner. And she and Daniel produced a little sister for Jada.

In 2016, Amy and Daniel realized their dream of working together. They joined Abeja (ah-Bay-ha), one of the Northwest's most acclaimed small wineries, with a reputation for extraordinary, distinctive Cabernet Sauvignon. Wampfler had long regarded Abeja's John Abbott as one of the nation's best winemakers. "Neither of us was looking for a job" when Abbott moved on, Wampfler said. "But I was missing the opportunity to make wines with my wife."

Now and then, they ask their kids if they want to be winemakers when they grow up. "Jada, who is 12, says, 'No!' And Elise, who is 2½, says, 'Yeah!' " Amy says, laughing. "We just emphasize how important school is. We say 'You need to always do your best. Don't get discouraged. Tell yourself, 'I can do it.' "

VICTOR PALENCIA'S JOURNEY has been straight up since his graduation from Walla Walla Community College in 2005. After a short stint with Zerba Cellars, where he is fondly remembered, he went back home to Prosser and Willow Crest to oversee all aspects of its winemaking. Tim Egan, the noted Northwest writer, came calling on assignment for *The New York Times* soon thereafter. He found Victor inside the cellar, examining barrel samples at the crack of dawn:



Victor in the vineyards. © Richard Duval Images

He sniffed. Ran the wine over his tongue. Sniffed again, held the juice up to the light.

“I try to trust my nose,” Palencia said.

For now, the nose will have to do. The fate of this year’s vintage, picked when the clusters of syrah were tight and purpled like a bruise, and the future of an entire winery may hang on the olfactory sensibilities of an under-age snout.

Here was a bona-fide prodigy. “There’s no telling what Victor can do,” Stan Clarke said. “The Washington wine country is wide open, and the grape quality is really exciting.”

Next stop was Apex Cellars in Prosser. Before long, however, Palencia was snapped up by J&S Crushing in Mattawa, a high-volume, custom-crush operation that also owns Jones of Washington. Joining the Joneses “felt like home” to Victor. “We



Victor in the barrel room. © *Richard Duval Images*

just hit it off so well.” Now senior director of wine-making for J&S, Palencia was instrumental in the design and startup of what has become the third-largest winemaking enterprise in the state. He is the head winemaker for Jones of Washington and has consulted for other wineries in the J&S orbit. Call it a fruitful partnership. “Since his arrival at Jones, Palencia’s talents as a winemaker have been on display, with his reds, whites and pinks winning top awards and praise from wine critics nationwide,” Andy Perdue, one of the Northwest’s top wine writers, noted in 2013. “The job also gives him access to top estate vineyards on the Wahluke Slope, Ancient Lakes of Columbia Valley and Red Mountain. In 2012, *Wine Press Northwest* magazine honored Jones as its Washington Winery of the Year, primarily on the strength of Palencia’s winemaking talent.”

Victor’s dream—a winery of his own—came true soon thereafter. In his spare time (gales of laughter), and

of the Northwest’s top wine writers, noted in 2013. “The job also gives him access to top estate vineyards on the Wahluke Slope, Ancient Lakes of Columbia Valley and Red Mountain. In 2012, *Wine Press Northwest* magazine honored Jones as its Washington Winery of the Year, primarily on the strength of Palencia’s winemaking talent.”



The labels on Palencia wines honor Victor’s father and Michoacán, the Mexican state where Victor was born. Monarch butterflies winter there. *Palencia Wine Company*

with the Jones family's blessings, he launched Palencia Wine Company in one of the mini-barn incubator buildings the Port of Walla Walla established at the Regional Airport. The label features a Picaso-esque line-drawing of his father, wielding a shovel in a field. His "second" label, *Vino La Monarcha*, has already produced a first-class Pinot Noir rosé and sauvignon blanc. If you hold together two bottles of *La Monarcha*, the technicolor wings of monarch butterflies sweep around the sides. Palencia is saying something important with this symbolism. Michoacán, the Mexican state where he was born, is where the spectacular butterflies winter by the millions. The monarchs' multi-generational, back-and-forth migration from Canada to California to Mexico is "based on succession," Palencia says. "That first generation will never be back. It'll be four generations before their species will come back to their native land. It's just a great story that I think showcases the ability of a species like a monarcha—and our human spirit—and just be able to let your dreams take flight, believe in something better, believe in the future and go for it."

If he could fly, Palencia's frequent 110-mile trips between Mattawa and Walla Walla would be easier. "Hey, I'm still young!" Palencia grins, pouring the visitor a glass of his beautifully balanced Ancient Lakes Albariño, a toast to his heritage.

Tim Donahue, now director of winemaking at Walla Walla Community College's College Cellars, calls Palencia a brilliant winemaker: "Victor's a stud!" says Donahue, a burly, ebullient guy with a shaved head and rakish goatee. He has worked in wineries from Colorado to New Zealand, and received a master's degree in enology from the University of Adelaide.

What Palencia and Amy Alvarez-Wampfler have accomplished is also testimony to the power of com-



Tim Donahue. Greg Lehman photo



Victor and Amy sample some of the award-winning College Cellars wines in the tasting room at Walla Walla Community College. *Greg Lehman photo*

munity colleges, and to the underpaid Stan Clarkes of grass-roots higher ed. “Junior colleges are the GI Bill for everyone,” Eddie Smith, the popular former state legislator who headed Grays Harbor College, observed in the 1960s.

The Walla Walla school’s track record of placing its graduates in industry jobs elevates its Center for Enology & Viticulture to one of the top vocational programs in the West. “It’s not that we’re teaching anything here that’s dramatically different than any other wine school,” says Donahue. The difference is that the winemaking community’s collegiality is as remarkable as the valley’s terroir. “I think the best example of that is a quote that I’ve been stealing from Leonetti Cellar’s Gary Figgins forever: ‘In Walla Walla you push the guy in front of you and you pull the guy behind you.’ It’s just kind of how everybody here has worked. Part of that is just being stuck in an Eastern Washington farm community where you had to do that. It’s an attitude that pervades everything we do here. What I think makes us so successful is this idea that we all want to be better, and a rising tide raises all boats. I’ve been to winemaking communities all over the world and I’ve never been in one that is quite as collegial as Walla Walla. I hope it lasts forever.”



Stan Clarke gives Governor Chris Gregoire a tour of the Enology & Viticulture center. *Greg Lehman/Walla Walla Union-Bulletin*

So does the Chamber of Commerce. In summing up what wine has done for Walla Walla—once known for sweet onions and the state penitentiary—no one has put it better than Andy Perdue: “It wasn’t so many years ago that when people said they were going to Walla Walla, it was for 10 to 15 years—with time off for good behavior.”

WHEN STAN CLARKE didn’t show up for work on November 29, 2007, everyone knew something was wrong. He’d been shooting hoops with kids the night before. “We found him at home,” Carol Clarke says. “He was dressed to go to the vineyard. He had just dropped dead; only 57 years old.”

Carol, who had risen to superintendent of the Waitsburg School District, told the crowd at Stan’s memorial that he’d never given her a diamond ring. “But when the holiday season began, he was running around saying, ‘This is going to be the best Christmas ever,’ and singing ‘It’s the most wonderful time of the year.’ I thought, ‘We’re getting close to our 30th anniversary. I’m finally going to get my diamond ring.’ The night before his funeral, I realized I’d had a diamond all along. The many facets of Stan’s heart just sparkled.

“Many of you here today remember how he gave you money when you needed it.

“Your loans are forgiven.”

The vineyards at Walla Walla Community College now carry Stan Clarke’s name.

John C. Hughes

Legacy Washington

Office of the Secretary of State

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Amy and
Victor at the
Stan Clarke
Vineyards.
*Greg Lehman
photo*

SOURCE NOTES

Unless otherwise noted, all quotes are from oral history interviews with Amy Alvarez-Wampfler and Victor Palencia in Walla Walla, 10-26-2015

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