

Jack Sanders Brings Modern Wine Making to Pahrump



By Christine Butler

When Jack Sanders came to Pahrump for the first time in 1985, never did he think he would be spending the rest of his life here. It wasn't love at first sight, but the town grew on him over time, and now he can't imagine living anywhere else.

In March 1985, Jack was driven out to Pahrump by former Lt. Governor Clifford Jones, who was a legal representative of a company that was going through involuntary bankruptcy. Jack was brought in to help wind down that company. He was the on-site administrator for the project. Although he lived in Marin County, CA at the time, it was more efficient for him to operate out of Pahrump. No one got hurt in the bankruptcy, which is a positive for everyone involved.

While he was here, Jack came to know a lot of the movers and shakers of the town, including, the Wulfensteins, Hafens, Bowmans, Floyds, Mankins,

and others. During this time, he also met Bob Huffman, who owned Saddle West Casino. There was no hotel associated with it at the time.

Jack was President and CEO of The Discovery Institute in California, and his areas of expertise included personal development of middle management personnel, teaching public relations and generally, how to be good at what you do. These skills came in handy when he became involved with Saddle West and Bob Huffman.

Jack spoke at a few Chamber meetings, and Huffman took notice. In October 1985, Bob asked Jack to come to consult for him in the expansion of Saddle West. There were no hotel rooms in town, only small motels. Huffman planned to add a hotel to his casino, but his experience was in gaming. He wanted Jack's help on the marketing aspect and offered to hire his company.

Jack was caring for his elderly mother in Harrisburg, PA, and was unable

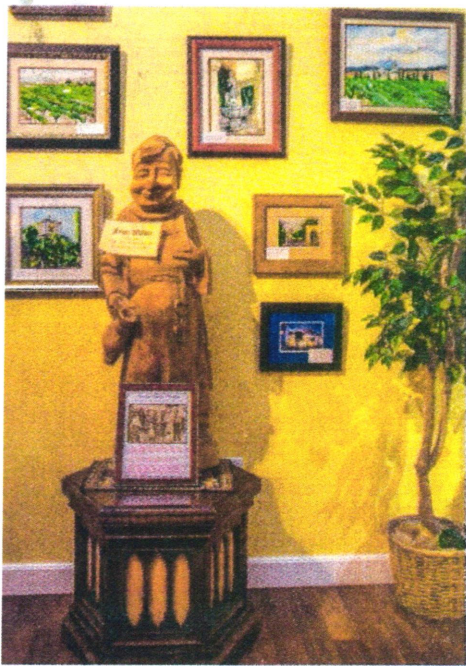
Betsy and Jack Sanders with their adopted rescue dog Charlie.

to take the job. Huffman didn't give up. After Jack's mom passed, Bob asked Jack to stop by for a chat, which he did.

Saddle West offered live gaming at the time, but mostly had slots. By the time he got there, Jack had to visit the restroom. When he went in, it was the worst bathroom he'd ever seen. I won't go into the details but imagine your worst experience and multiply it by ten. Jack came out of the restroom and didn't want to touch anything! When offered a cup of coffee, Jack wanted to see the kitchen first. To his relief, he found it to be immaculate. It had all new appliances and was absolutely spotless.

Jack still wasn't sure he wanted to take the job so quoted what he thought was a ridiculously high price and Huffman accepted it and considered the arrangement closed.

For a start, Jack went to the superintendent of Death Valley National Park (DVNP) to gather some statis-



tics. He found that most of the traffic from Nevada to the park came through

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Beatty. Bell Vista, the current road from Pahrump to Death Valley was not open yet. He also discovered that 75-80% of the visitors entering the park came from California. Day trips and bus tours were popular, and many tourists would end their excursion in Las Vegas. He took the numbers from this study and guesstimated the market. Las Vegas was the market, and the target was the vast international and domestic visitors as well as Las Vegas residents.

Jack started inviting Vegas connections to Pahrump for a weekend,

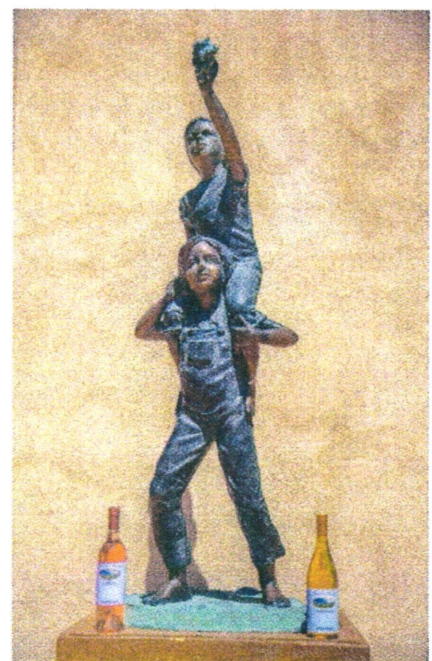


The winery is built in the Renaissance Period Italian Tuscan Villa Style.

which for the gambling community is Sunday, Monday, and Tuesday. He established this as the target market.

They started putting the deal together for the hotel. All of the contract work was to be done by local contractors except the design work which came out of Los Angeles. Huffman wrote Jack into the deal. Jack told him his current marketing person, TC Wells, was more than capable of handling the job. But he was unsuccessful at convincing Bob. Jack was part of the team.

Jack brought TC into one of the first meetings and asked her what she thought of the bathrooms. She said they were outrageous. Jack defined to Huffman that the bathrooms were the problem. Bob was taken back. Jack presented a proposal to him, asking for \$25,000 to remodel the bathrooms. He also sought TC's thoughts on a mar-



The Sanders are big supporters of the arts.



Only the Petite Syrah and Zinfandel grapes are grown on the property.

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keting campaign promoting the new bathrooms.

Starting tours in the bathrooms during construction was TC's suggestion. She also ordered baseball caps for everyone decorated with admiral braiding and military scrambled eggs on top. Huffman's hat said, "Saddle West, Colonel of the Urinal." Everyone else was a Lieutenant. This campaign resulted in a 300% increase in business in the bar, restaurant, and casino. All because of the bathroom remodeling.

Once everything was open, Jack started marketing to the various group organizations, such as Moose Clubs, Kiwanis, Elks, and to gamers. They offered specials, including golf packages. The first group to sign up was El Monte, CA Moose Club, who rented

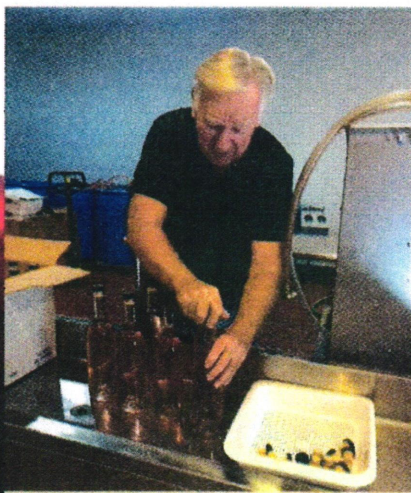
70 rooms and basically took over the hotel. The hotel was off to a great start.

Jack had to return to California to finish a project underway back there. In January 1986, he returned to Pahrump and soon moved here permanently. After some research, Jack learned that grapes grew here. In fact, he discovered the Paiutes made use of the wild grapes growing here before the 1800s. He decided to start a winery. Because wineries were new to Nevada, Jack wrote the legislation for wineries in our state. He included the ability to have restaurants as part of the business.

He was still involved with Bob Huffman, who in addition to the new Saddle West Hotel, built the Pahrump Valley Speedway. Bob supported tourism 100% and encouraged Jack to be-

come engaged in the introduction of room taxes. These taxes are paid by visitors, not residents, and help fund tourism. Working with the Wulfensteins, the Floyds, and the Town Board, they helped create this new tourism revenue opportunity. These funds were designated to promote tourism and economic development, parks and recreation, arena, fairgrounds, and other selected attraction projects that will make Pahrump a desirable place to visit and live.

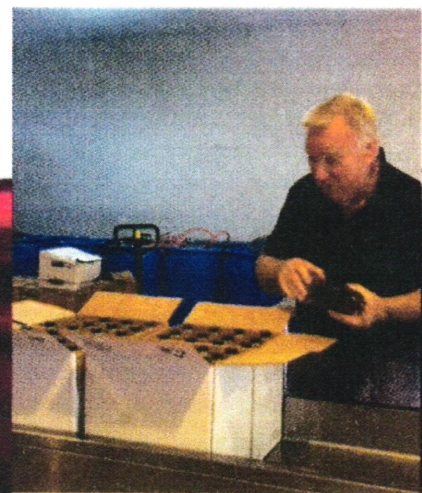
From 1988 to 1990, Jack was busy pursuing his dream of building a winery. He purchased the land and created the first modern winery in Nevada called Pahrump Valley Winery. During the development, they made an outdoor stage on the property to provide entertainment for the community. They looked for strong amateurs or wannabe entertainers as well as rising and falling stars, they could put on stage.



Jack corking wine in his production room.



Sanders' bottling process.



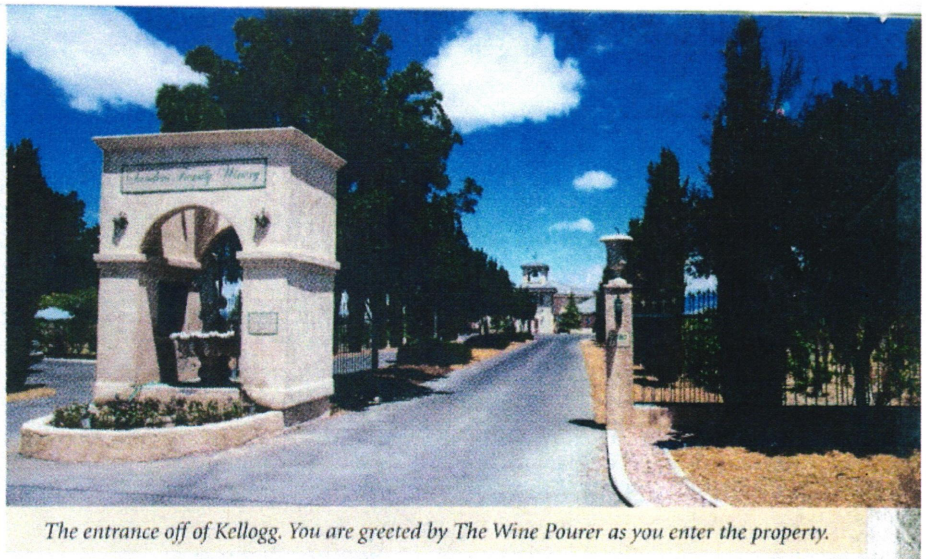
Packing cases of bottled wine.



Copy of a ledger from the original winery bonded by Frank "Pop" Buol.

He was introduced to the Myron Heaton Corral, a singing and performing group. To persuade them to come and perform at the winery, Pahrump Valley Winery became a sponsor. The group was full of talent. They performed the show choir hit "Give Me Gershwin," a production of his songs with the choir and actors. Betsie was the choreographer and a performer. That's how they met.

According to both of them, Jack paid no attention to her even though the group kept coming back to the winery. Jack was invited by the Laughlin



The entrance off of Kellogg. You are greeted by The Wine Pourer as you enter the property.

Chamber to come down for a special formal event. He didn't have a significant other, which he was encouraged to bring. He thought of Betsie and invited her to join him on this river cruise. It was a bit surprising because unbeknownst to Jack, Pahrump Winery received a significant award that night. It was also the beginning of Jack and Betsie's relationship. They've been happily married since 1999.

Betsie was an elementary school teacher in Clark County for 30 years. Before that, she was an entertainer and was on stage with Carol Channing in Hello Dolly in New York City, performed with the Harkness Ballet also in New York City, and worked with Bea Arthur and Angela Lansbury in Mame.

Jack teases her by saying she was a former "strip dancer" in Vegas...mean-

ing she performed on the Vegas Strip, not that she was a stripper. Betsie performed from 1968 to 1976 in the production shows Les Folies Bergere, Playmate Review, and Casino de Paris.

Betsie attended UNLV and received her teaching degree. She soon realized that "showbiz" was not forever and began her second career as an elementary school teacher. She retired after 30 years but never stepped off the stage. She is still a choreographer and a dancer.

She fell ill and almost lost her life in 2018. She had A-fib and congestive heart failure. After heart failure, thanks to her great medical team, she is now completely recovered. Betsie highly recommends to anyone recovering from an illness to make the most out of the physical rehab programs. It makes a world of difference. Today she is still dancing and is a member of the Silver Tappers.

Jack had no intention of selling Pahrump Valley Winery when, in 2004, a friend in the finance industry brought in a group to look at the winery. Western Horizons Membership RV Parks wanted a toe hold in the Vegas market. They were unable to get into Vegas proper so came to Pahrump. They wanted to build an RV park at the winery. They made Jack an offer he couldn't refuse with no non-compete clause attached. He accepted it fully, intending to stay in the wine business.

The same day that deal closed, he



Sanders Family Winery tasting bar.

started Sanders Family Winery. They now have the equivalent of five acres of grapes on 2.5 acres of land. They process about 4,000 cases a year. All of their wine is produced at the winery except for the Champagne which they have for the many weddings they host. Petite Syrah and Zinfandel are the only grapes they grow on their property. They buy grapes from various vineyards to make the other wines. They are encouraging grape growing in Nevada to expand the wine industry.

Sanders Family Winery is run with a staff of five people, Jack, Betsie, Cellar Master Ken Walker (who was with him at Pahrump Valley Winery as well), Krystal Hollis, and Julie Morris. Each staff member can perform all tasting room duties in the winery.

Kim Lyle is the entertainment director but also a performer herself. She's performed in *Lido de Paris* which is a cabaret and burlesque show performed on the Champs-Elysees in Paris as well as in *Moulin Rouge*, also in Paris. She was the principal dancer in The Stardust's *Lido Show* in Las Vegas for over 12 years. She is now responsible for booking all the live entertainment at the winery.

Betsie and Jack are very thankful for all the help the Pahrump Community has given them. They are also grateful to concert volunteers like Donna Blethen, Michael Lyle, Roxy Jones, Cathy Cobillas, Marie Santa Cruz, and so many others who assist in bringing top entertainment to Pahrump.

When they built the new winery, they designed it in the renaissance period Italian Tuscan Villa style. An open courtyard is located in the front which is the Betsie Sanders Theater for the Performing Arts. Here's where they carry on the tradition of providing entertainment for the community. Performers come from Las Vegas, Chicago, Nashville, Hollywood, or they solicit local talent to perform for the crowd. Guests bring their own food, partake in a glass of wine or two, and enjoy the show. These shows are scheduled from the end of April through October on Saturday evenings.

Jack has three bits of advice for anyone contemplating going into the wine business:

1. Never make wines that you like; make it to please your customers.
2. Make sure the wine is balanced between alcohol, sugar, and acid.
3. Always carry some wine forward from year to year, so the taste is consistent over time.

Sanders Family Winery Concerts
SUPPORTING THE ARTS

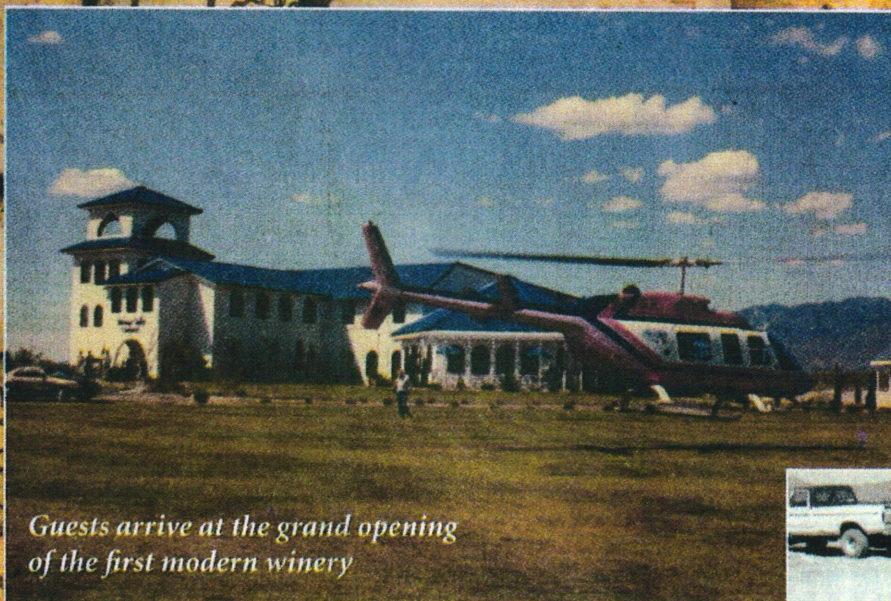
MARIO ROSALES COMEDY-VOCALIST SAT. MAY 18	MARK PRESTON SINGER SAT. JUNE 1	FRANK SINATRA TRIBUTE SAT. JUNE 15	"SOUL TOWN" MUSIC OF MOTOWN SAT. JUNE 29
DENISE CLEMENTE SAT. JUNE 19	NEIL DIAMOND TRIBUTE SAT. JULY 27	ROMOVON TEA VARIETY SAT. AUG. 14	MICHELLE MURKIN SAT. AUG. 24
ROUTE 66 CLASSIC COUNTRY SAT. SEPT. 7	THE CARPENTERS TRIBUTE SAT. SEPT. 21	"ROD STEWART" TRIBUTE SAT. OCT. 12	



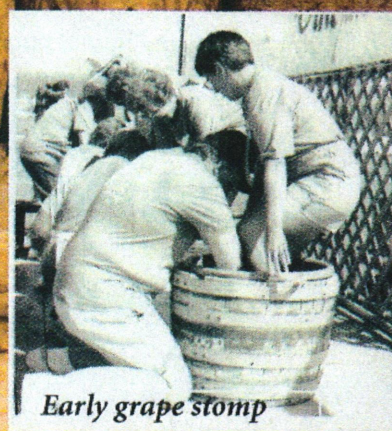
Christmas in the tasting room.

Sanders Family Winery was not the first winery in town. That honor belongs to Frank "Pop" Buol who was the first to establish a bonded winery in Pahrump which operated from 1936 to 1939. Sanders was the first modern winery, and he carried his bond with him from one winery to the other. It remains the oldest operating one in Nevada.

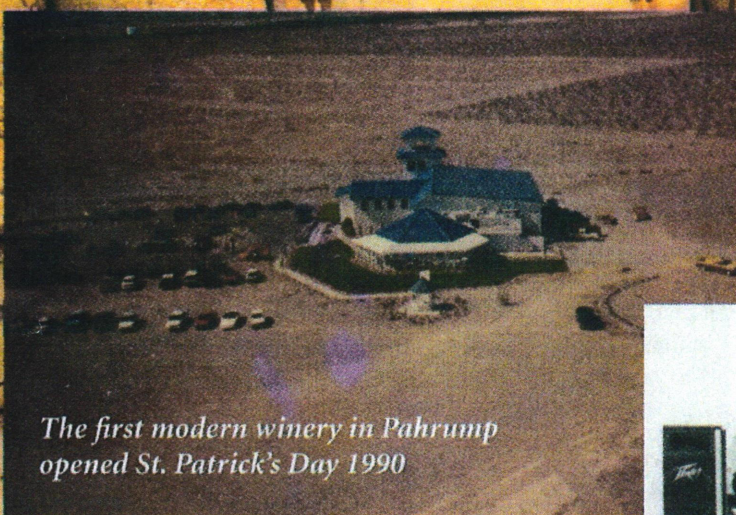
So, come and try some of Sanders award-winning wine. It's located at 3780 Kellogg Road in Pahrump. Their website is www.sanderswinery.com and phone is 775-727-1776. Enjoy chatting with Jack and Betsie around the large table sitting in the tasting room with blue wing-back chairs that came from the original Bugsy Siegel Flamingo Hotel. If you're lucky, you too can hear more stories about old Pahrump and how wineries got started in town.



*Guests arrive at the grand opening
of the first modern winery*



Early grape stomp



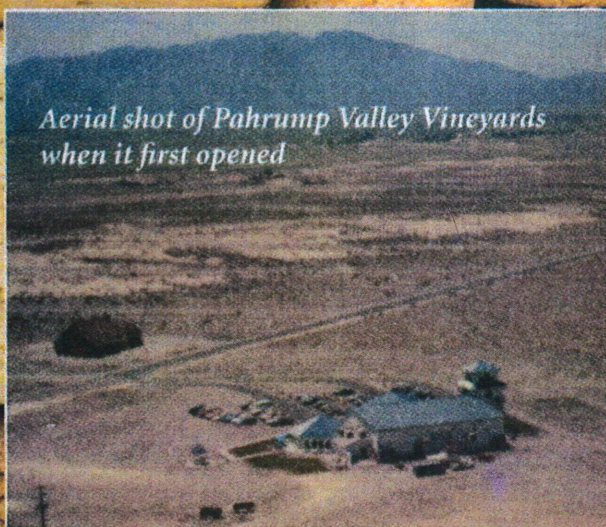
*The first modern winery in Pahrump
opened St. Patrick's Day 1990*



*BBQ at the
Jazz Festival*



*They built an outdoor stage for
community entertainment*



*Aerial shot of Pahrump Valley Vineyards
when it first opened*



Vendors participated in the festival