

Stamp of approval for annual wine Passport Weekend

By Kathryn Reed

PLACERVILLE – It's not exactly like the bar Cheers where everyone knows your name, but it's close because more people are apt to know you by the time you leave.

Passport Weekend in El Dorado County is like one big party – except it's at 26 locations.

Some might say visiting 26 wineries in two days isn't possible. Cara Alfonso of Sacramento hit all the wineries last year during Passport Weekend. By Sunday afternoon she was at 13 while she sipped some red at Boeger Winery. She and her friends were at No. 4 on Sunday, having hit nine on Saturday. The little one she was carrying in front of her might have been slowing her down.



With all those barrels,
Boeger isn't
about to run
out of wine to
taste.

Photos/Kathryn
Reed

“It's a fun community event,” Alfonso said. This was her

fourth Passport. "You meet people from all over."

She brought along Marilyn Hovland of Fresno as a newbie to the event. The food pairings are what stood out for Hovland. It wasn't just food to eat, but learning what foods go well with particular wines.

At Boeger Winery there was not a consensus by the crowd as to what would taste best with the mac-n-cheese provided by chef Beth Sogaard. The line for the decadent comfort food on this blustery Sunday was almost as long as the line for wine upstairs among all the barrels.

It was Auriga Wine Cellar's beef stew that had Sue Wood of South Lake Tahoe admitting she found one better than her mom's. She said it was scrumptious with the Syrah.

"What we are striving for here is the melding of food and wine," Richard Stading, owner and winemaker at Auriga, said.

Stading said his winery is all about education – especially about how food and wine complement each other. They have recipes on their website and suggest wines for the food.

This is Auriga's first Passport. Party tents were taken down when at 10am a 40mph gust of wind nearly took everything down. However, it just meant the party moved inside.

The weather (so far) is forecast to be more spring like for the second weekend of Passport. Tickets are still available.

Meeting the winemaker or owner is common at Passport. Most tasting rooms are staffed with people who know the wines and aren't just reading from cheat sheets.



Raymond McKay
signs a bottle
at Chateau
Rodin.

Raymond McKay at Chateau Rodin will sign personal messages on bottles people buy. In 2003 and 2006 Chateau Rodin was voted best winery at the annual Soroptimist International of South Lake Tahoe wine tasting.

Joe and Lena Martini of Reno have been coming to Passport for the last decade. It's a birthday gift to Lena from her parents each year.

"I wouldn't miss it. Everyone is friendly, the food is fabulous and there are great prices on wine," Lena Martini said.

The 16 people in their group had hit five wineries each of the two days. Joe Martini called it a slow weekend for them because in the past they've visited 10-14 wineries in a day.



Reds Regan of
South Lake
Tahoe is
painting at

Lava Cap both weekends.

Instead of merely having art for sale, Lava Cap Winery had the artist creating original work. Reds Regan of South Lake Tahoe will paint an original canvas both weekends.

“Passport Weekend was launched by El Dorado’s wineries 19 years ago to encourage people to explore our beautiful wine country in the springtime. Since then, Passport has grown to include two popular weekends that attract multiple generations of families from across the U.S.,” said Beth Jones, owner of Lava Cap Winery and president of the El Dorado Winery Association.

For more information about Passport Weekend, [click here](#).