

A glimpse into the rigors of operating a winery

By Kathryn Reed

STATELINE – Rattling off a slew of women’s names, Maggie Bush proved men do not dominate the wine industry.

She credits the profession being only a few decades old – at least in the United States – for it being a field equally open to both sexes.

Bush, with husband Paul, owns and operates Madroña winery in Camino.



Maggie Bush

“I’ve never been in a spot where I was stopped or hit a bridge because I’m a woman,” Bush told the group from Soroptimist International South Lake Tahoe on Nov. 10 at Harrah’s. “Women have always been involved in wine.”

As a family operation, she does a little bit of everything. She’s picked grapes, crushed them, drove a tractor, tasted wines at 9am (to which she says she’s learned to spit), figured out marketing is creating rack cards and knowing the wines are in the correct restaurant, dealt with cash flow (she was once a certified public accountant), and worked on frost protection (where 30 minutes can mean the loss of an entire crop).

Those are just some of the hats she wears.

Bush married into the business. Her in-laws, Dick and Leslie Bush, planted the first grapes in 1973, with the inaugural harvest coming five years later. The tasting room, where 70 percent of the business comes from, opened in 1980. Nine years ago they turned the reins over to the next generation.

Maggie and Paul Bush have two young daughters; one who tells people she is the owner and the other who wants nothing to do with the winery.

Madroña got its name from the large 300-year-old madrone tree in the vineyard that continues to be a pillar in the vineyard. It's the symbol on their label.

While some wineries buy grapes from elsewhere, all of Madroña's are from land the family owns – thus being able to use the term “estate” on all bottles.

Many wineries that bottle 12,000 cases a year specialize in a handful of varietals. At Madroña they grow 27 kinds of grapes. They make what they like to drink.

At the Wednesday gathering Bush was asked what her favorite wine is. She smiled, saying that's a bit like asking which of her children she likes best.

But she did admit Cabernet Franc, Malbec and Riesling are some of her favorites.

In fact, the family will be spending a few months next year in France immersing themselves in the world of Malbec. It's their travels that keep them rejuvenated, Bush said.

Creating wines that go well with food is one of Madroña's goals. For those who want to experience that, for one night there is no need to go off the hill. Madroña's wines will be poured Nov. 12 during the Soroptimists' annual wine tasting fundraiser from 6-9:30pm at Harrah's Lake Tahoe.