

Award-winning Placer County winery expanding

By Jon Tourney, Wines & Vines

AUBURN – After expanding wine production and sales for five years at its original location, Lone Buffalo Vineyards has roamed to a larger property in Placer County and built a new and larger winery and tasting room that opened Jan. 11.

The new 12-acre property is located northwest of Auburn, and north of Interstate 80, placing it within the Sierra Foothills American Viticultural Area and closer to a more heavily traveled section of the expanding Placer County Wine Trail. The new site is within three miles of a cluster of newer wineries and tasting rooms that include Dona Dal Cielo Vineyard and Winery, PaZa Vineyard and Winery and Wise Villa Winery.

Family-owned and operated by Phil, Jill and Jocelyn Maddux, Lone Buffalo began commercial operation in 2007 at a smaller, off-the-beaten path property with a one-acre vineyard south of Auburn.

Phil Maddux is a native of Sonoma County who practices real estate law, but he is increasingly devoting more time to the winery. He began making wine in 1971 and has taken winemaking and chemistry classes at UC Davis and Sonoma State University, and cites Sonoma County winemaking legends Dick Arrowood and Cecil DeLoach as mentors.

Maddux was an award-winning amateur winemaker for many years, and Lone Buffalo wines are now winners in commercial wine competitions. Most recently, Lone Buffalo won medals for each of its five wines entered in the 2012 San Francisco Chronicle Wine Competition, notably taking a gold medal for the 2010 Sierra Foothills Thunder Beast Zinfandel.

Jill Maddux, with a 25-year career in sales and marketing, manages Lone Buffalo's sales and accounting and assists Phil with vineyard management, including managing three 1-acre vineyards in Placer County, where the winery sources grapes.

Their daughter Jocelyn Maddux handles public relations, manages graphic media and the winery's website, electronic and social media in addition to operating her own marketing consulting business – jbrandmarketing.

All three Madduxes staff the tasting room on weekends. "Each of us brings our own skills and strengths to the business," Jill said. "We're a three-legged stool, and we complement one another in how we divide up the duties."

Success enables move Lone Buffalo's success and growth enabled the move and expansion.

"We've been profitable since our third year in business," Phil said, "and we'd been looking for a new location for almost two years."

Direct sales through the tasting room, a wine club and the website account for a significant part of sales, with the remainder of production sold through local retailers and restaurants along the I-80 corridor from Sacramento to Lake Tahoe. The new location on the Placer County Wine Trail is expected to draw more customer traffic.