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THE WINE PAGE

Behind The Wines

His money grows on the vines

Andy Beckstoffer buys premium Wine Country land

By Jim Wood
EXAMINER FOOD AND WINE CRITIC

ANDY BECKSTOFFER, the courtly Virginian whose quiet purchases of prime vineyards has made him one of the Wine Country's largest landholders, has done it again.

This time he's bought the 89-acre Beaulieu Vineyard No. 4, on Route 29 at Oakville, directly across from the Opus One winery and just south of the Robert Mondavi Winery. Because of its location along the highway where hundreds of thousands of tourists pass each year, the vineyard is probably one of the best known in the Napa Valley.

It is famous for producing the famed Georges de Latour Cabernets for Beaulieu Vineyard.

Beckstoffer, who is vacationing in Hawaii, told The Examiner that some vines on the property have phylloxera, and that he plans to pull those vines out and replant over the next five to six years.

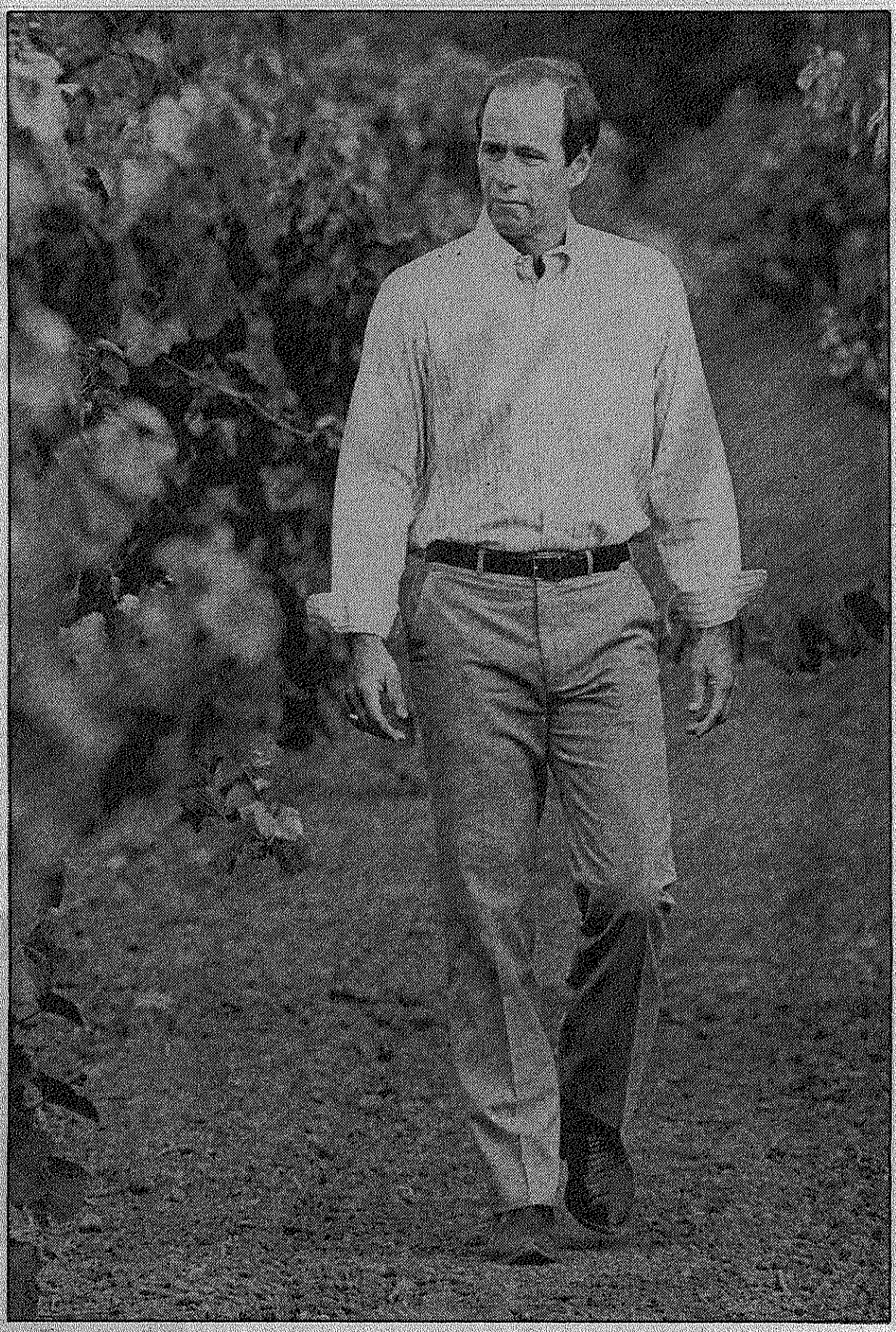
"Long range I have a lot of confidence in the grape industry," he said. "Short range I don't think anyone has ever made it in agriculture."

Beckstoffer described phylloxera as the latest "bug of the month," saying experienced vineyardists now knew how to deal with it. He predicted that other problems would arise in growing grapes, but was generally optimistic that they too would be solved in time.

Beckstoffer's recent purchases have made him one of the largest landholders in the grape country. In 1988 he bought 250 acres of Cabernet in the Rutherford Valley, also from Beaulieu. Next, in 1992, he purchased Charles Krug's 200-acre Cabral vineyard, planted to Pinot Noir and Chardonnay in the Carneros District. He bought another 120 acres of Carneros land, the Las Amigas vineyard from Louis Martini earlier this year.

In all, the Beckstoffer holdings now total more than 1,000 acres in the Napa Valley, and some 900 acres of grape land in Mendocino County.

Beckstoffer said most of his acreage is of good quality while some is superior enough to be selected as of reserve quality. Grapes from the latter acreage are sold for vineyard-designated wines. One of these wines, the 1990 Guenoc Winery Beckstoffer Vineyard Reserve Cabernet Sauvignon, was selected in November by the Wine Spectator as one of the top 10 wines of the vintage.



Andy Beckstoffer's *purchase of vineyard No. 4 makes him one of the largest landholders in grape country.*

Beckstoffer said the latest purchase was a result of a series of conversations with Hublein, the giant wine and spirits combine that has bought grapes from Beckstoffer for years.

A Virginia native who got his financial training at Dartmouth's crack Tuck School of Business, Beckstoffer came to the Napa Valley in 1969 and at one time worked for Hublein. His farm management business had once cared for, among other properties, Beaulieu Vineyard No. 4. Since then, as he developed his extensive vineyard holdings, Beckstoffer has sold grapes to Hublein and relations remained cordial.

Beckstoffer said that although vineyard No. 4 was not formally for sale, he and Hublein executives came to an understanding that his buying the vineyard fitted well with both organizations' objectives.

"We are thrilled with this property," Beckstoffer said. "I know of no single vineyard that has made so significant a contribution to the Napa Valley."

The vineyard was first planted in 1859 by Hamilton W. Crabb, a horticulturist who helped found the California wine industry. He called the place To-Kalon, and he used the property in his experiments with new grape varieties in California. In 1899, he sold the vineyard to Edward S. Churchill who kept it for 44 years.

In 1943, Georges de Latour bought the vineyard for Beaulieu and now after 50 years the company has sold it to Beckstoffer.

In addition to his extensive vineyards, Beckstoffer has a winery, Fremont Creek, making wine, he says, "in a small way."