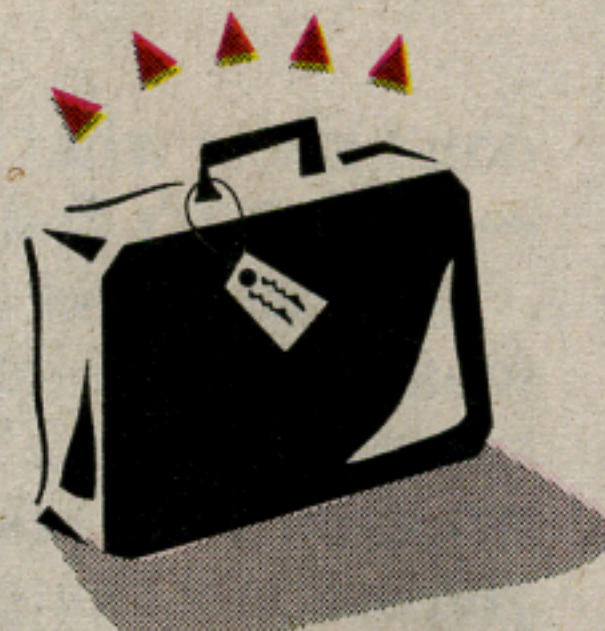


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SCOTT MANCHESTER / The Press Democrat

Andy Beckstoffer, the largest independent grape grower on the North Coast, in one of his vineyards near Rutherford.

Andy Beckstoffer plans to permanently preserve 1,000 acres of his prime Napa Valley vineyards, hoping other growers will follow suit

Vineyard Legacy

ANDY BECKSTOFFER

Age: 63

What: Owner of St. Helena-based Beckstoffer Vineyards; North Coast's largest, independent grape grower.

Vineyard holdings: 1,056 acres in Napa County, 1,138 acres in Mendocino County and 1,121 acres in Lake County.

Family: Wife, Betty Beckstoffer, five children, David, Dana, Tuck, Steven and Kristin, and three grandchildren.

Education: Engineering degree from Virginia Tech University, master's degree in business from Dartmouth College's Tuck School of Business.

By TIM TESCONI
THE PRESS DEMOCRAT

At 63, grape grower Andy Beckstoffer, as robust as one of the cabernet sauvignon wines made from his grapes, is still adding vineyards to his 3,000-acre viticultural treasure trove in Napa, Mendocino and Lake counties.

As Beckstoffer expands his holdings, he's also pondering his mortality, taking steps to permanently protect the historic Napa Valley vineyards he has collected during the past 30 years.

He is the North Coast's largest independent grape grower, with a wine grape em-

pire that spreads from Napa Valley to Mendocino County, and now to Lake County, where he's developing 1,000 acres in the Red Hills area near Lower Lake.

The courtly Virginian's business acumen brought Heublein Inc., a multi-national conglomerate, into the wine business and him into the vineyards. Beckstoffer has made a fortune growing grapes. Now he's looking to give something back to the Napa Valley wine region.

"I take a lot of pride in being a farmer," said Beckstoffer, who doesn't own a winery. He has always focused on growing grapes, selling his fruit to more than 50 wineries, many of them producers of luxury

TURN TO LEGACY, BACK PAGE

LEGACY: Beckstoffer working to preserve his historic vineyards as farmland or parks

CONTINUED FROM PAGE D1

ry wines.

While he prides himself on being a farmer, Beckstoffer has also been a public policy pioneer for the wine industry, championing the preservation of agricultural land.

Beckstoffer plans to preserve nearly 1,000 acres of his prime Napa Valley vineyards with legal protections that lock up the land for farming or open space. His heirs will continue to farm the land and sell the grapes, prospering as farmers, not land developers.

"This will tie my family to the Napa Valley forever," said Beckstoffer, whose speech is tinged with a Southern drawl even after more than 30 harvests in Wine Country.

He declined to put a price tag on his 3,000 acres of North Coast vineyards, but estimates by land experts put the value at more than \$300 million.

He has already protected one of his vineyards through an agreement with the Land Trust of Napa County with more to follow. Land Trust officials believe Beckstoffer's lead will encourage other grape growers to preserve their vineyards, too.

"It's very significant that someone who owns as much Napa Valley land as Andy is making the move to permanently protect it. Andy is a dedicated steward of the land, and he's doing this for all the right reasons," said Joel Tranmer, president of the Land Trust of Napa County.

Farmland or parks

Beckstoffer said he will continue to put conservation easements on his other Napa Valley vineyards in the years ahead, taking advantage of tax benefits while knowing the land will be producing fine wine grapes for centuries to come.

Even if the glassy-winged sharpshooter or some other plague, pestilence or prohibition wipes out the wine industry, Beckstoffer said the land will remain as farm land or parks.

"The preservation agreement will be iron-clad so some spouse of a great-great-grandchild doesn't fight and undo it. This is some of the best vineyard land in the world. I want it to stay in the family and never be developed," he said.

Man of foresight

Beckstoffer has been a wine industry leader and visionary since coming to the Napa Valley in 1969. He founded the Napa Valley Grape Growers

Association and became active in land-use issues aimed at protecting agricultural land.

"Andy is a man of foresight, a visionary who helped bring the Napa Valley to world-class status. He brought an outside attitude to the valley that took us to where we needed to be," said Bob Steinhauer, vineyard manager at St. Helena-based Beringer Vineyards since 1979.

Beckstoffer and his wife of 42 years, Betty Beckstoffer, have five grown children. Son David Beckstoffer, a graduate of Stanford University, has returned to the family business, overseeing farming operations on the more than 3,000 acres of vineyards in Napa, Mendocino and Lake counties.

Andy Beckstoffer said it's not really his desire to rule his family from the grave. But the methodical planning for the future is in keeping with the take-charge attitude that has characterized his life as family patriarch, industry leader, businessman and wine grape entrepreneur.

Virginia native

A native of Richmond, Va., Beckstoffer attended Virginia Tech University on a football scholarship and earned a degree in engineering. He became smitten with California in the early '60s when he was in the Army and visited San Francisco.

After military service, he returned to the East Coast to earn a master's degree from Dartmouth College's Amos Tuck School of Business. Armed with a prestigious degree, a brilliant mind and lots of get-up-and-go, Beckstoffer was recruited in 1966 by Connecticut-based Heublein Inc., a food and liquor conglomerate, as an analyst in production and finance.

Within three years, his planning and business acumen would bring him to the Napa Valley. Beckstoffer convinced Heublein executives of the great investment opportunities in the California wine industry.

"All the studies we prepared clearly showed where the premium wine market was headed," said Beckstoffer. "Heublein was one of the first to discover the super-premium wine potential."

To get Heublein in the wine business, Beckstoffer and his team negotiated the purchase of a majority interest in United Vintners, a company that owned Inglenook, one of Napa Valley's oldest premium wineries.

Beckstoffer, just 28 years old, moved to the Napa Valley in 1969 after being appointed vice president of planning for United Vintners. That

Battle over vineyard name

Andy Beckstoffer's most-prized vineyard is Beckstoffer Tokalon Vineyard in Oakville, one of the best places on the planet to grow cabernet sauvignon.

The vineyard is historic, famous — and now a legal battleground as well.

Beckstoffer is engaged in a legal dispute with Napa Valley's Robert Mondavi over the use of the Tokalon name on wine labels.

Beckstoffer and Mondavi both own portions of the original Tokalon Vineyard, first planted by Hamilton Crabb in 1859. Mondavi has a trademark on the "To-Kalon" name, and filed suit when a win-

ery that bought grapes from Beckstoffer Tokalon Vineyard used the name on the label.

Beckstoffer, who has countersued Mondavi, believes that wineries buying grapes from his Tokalon Vineyard should be able to use Tokalon as a vineyard designation on their wine labels.

Crabb named the vineyards Tokalon, a Greek word that means "the highest beauty."

A Mondavi spokeswoman said the issue will be resolved by the courts.

As for Beckstoffer, "This fight is about preserving the history of the Napa Valley," he said.

— Tim Tesconi

year he negotiated Heublein's purchase of Beaulieu Vineyards — Napa Valley's most famous wine estate — from the Marquise de Pins, daughter of winery founder Georges de Latour.

In 1970, Heublein formed a small subsidiary, Vinifera Development Corp., to farm the parent company's grape-growing land and to establish new vineyards. Beckstoffer was named president of the new company, learning grape growing from the ground up.

He adopted new vineyard technologies such as overhead sprinkler systems for frost protection and closer vine spacing. And he began replacing old-fashioned grapes such as petite sirah and carignane with cabernet sauvignon, now the Napa Valley's signature grape.

Buys coveted parcels

In 1973, Beckstoffer bought the Vinifera Development Corp. from Heublein, adding vineyards in Napa and Mendocino counties to his company's portfolio. Over the past 30 years, he continued to pick up coveted vineyard parcels such as the old Beaulieu Vineyard No. 3, the Rutherford vineyard originally developed by de Latour and the source of Beaulieu's finest wines.

Beckstoffer doesn't own vineyards in Sonoma County, drawing questions about his opinion of Sonoma as a premium grape-growing region.

"I like Sonoma County," said Beckstoffer, "it's just that we've never had the opportunity to buy the kind of large-scale vineyard, 1,000 acres or more, that would make it feasible for

us to farm in Sonoma County."

He said if the right vineyards became available at the right price, he would be growing grapes in Sonoma County.

Beckstoffer said many of his best vineyards were purchased during down cycles in the wine business. With the current downturn, he's on the lookout for prized properties that may be put up for sale.

"It's not so much that the price drops for great land in difficult times. It's just that the land becomes available," said Beckstoffer. His philosophy: "Buy only the best and pay what the market demands."

Beckstoffer embraces science and technology to produce superior grapes. He mixes and matches new rootstocks with clones of select varieties for specific vineyard sites, allowing grapevines to reach their ultimate potential in the soil and climate where they are planted.

He has taken his grape-growing know-how to Lake County, where in 1997 he started buying land, old walnut orchards and a cattle ranch. Plans are to develop 1,000 acres of vineyards, with more than half already planted and some of the acreage in production.

"We are exporting all of the new technology we learned and developed in the Napa Valley to the Red Hills district of Lake County in an attempt to truly make that area premium wine country," said Beckstoffer.

More affordable wine

He said the goal is to grow red grapes of excellent quality to make

premium California wines more affordable. Instead of \$50 to \$75 for a Napa Valley cabernet sauvignon, Beckstoffer said the Lake County vineyards could produce a great cabernet sauvignon for \$20 a bottle.

That's because land prices are so much cheaper. In Lake County, land for vineyards is about \$10,000 an acre, compared to \$200,000 an acre in Napa County.

"When Andy Beckstoffer came to Lake County to grow grapes, we knew we had arrived," said Shannon Gunier, executive director of the Lake County Winegrape Commission. She said Beckstoffer has been generous in sharing information on vineyard development and hillside erosion control.

Since the early '90s, Beckstoffer also has been moving to sustainable farming, a system that uses biological controls rather than chemicals to control pests and diseases.

"No one wants to work with toxics," he said.

And he is still figuring how to use the explosion of grape-growing information over the past decade in his vineyards from Carneros to Lower Lake.

"The adoption of new global technologies, rootings and clones in the vineyard and the attitude to strive for the highest quality allows us to enter the 21st century as consistent producers of many of the best wines in the world," he said.

Beckstoffer sells his grapes to more than 50 wineries, working closely with the winemakers who will showcase his grapes.

Celebrated winemaker Paul Hobbs, owner of Paul Hobbs winery in Sebastopol, buys grapes from the Beckstoffer Tokalon Vineyard in Oakville to produce a cabernet sauvignon that commands more than \$100 a bottle.

"It makes great wine," said Hobbs. "It's all the stuff that everybody talks about in a classic, great cabernet. It's a beautifully elegant wine with power and finesse."

Beckstoffer prefers to let passionate winemakers like Hobbs make wine from his grapes. As a dedicated farmer, Beckstoffer said he remains focused on growing great grapes, with no plans to ever venture into wine-making.

"Just because you grow good wheat doesn't mean you can sell bread," said the grape grower.

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