

Beckstoffer buys historic St. Helena vineyard

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Grapegrower Andy Beckstoffer and his family have bought part of the historic Bourn/Hayne Vineyard vineyard, which had been in the same family since 1874.

Beckstoffer declined to say how much they had paid for the 13.25 acres at Sulphur Springs and South Crane avenues in St. Helena. "We'd rather not focus on the dollar amount," he told the Register, adding that the figure was in the "hundreds of thousands of dollars" per acre. He said the amount he paid "was

probably the second highest price for land that I've ever heard of in the Napa Valley."

Beckstoffer said he knows of only one higher price paid for vineyard land — the amount Francis Ford Coppola paid for the Inglenook property.

Co-owner William Alston "Otty" Hayne, who has been vineyard manager since the mid-1980s, said before the sale that the 56-acre parcel also was owned by his brother, Elliott Hayne of Novato and their first cousins, Martha Talbott of McLean, Va. and Sarah Simpson of Hood. Elliott Hayne sold his par-

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cel to Beckstoffer.

Otty Hayne said his brother "regretted" selling the land but did so "to take care of his grandchildren's education."

Beckstoffer said he began negotiating for the land in mid-summer and, as part of the negotiations, he had soil pits dug, examined the soil's gravel con-

tent and had a water well dug, to prove there was water.

"We've got two vineyards in that area and, of course, it (the Bourn/Hayne Vineyard) has a legendary reputation so we proved the reputation was real," Beckstoffer said.

Of the 13.25-acres, nine are planted to petite sirah

and three to cabernet sauvignon. Hayne said he helped his father replant the petite sirah vines in 1953 or 1954 and today the grapes are sold to Larry Turley. The crop from the cabernet sauvignon vines, planted in the 1990s, had been sold to the Joseph Phelps Winery until two years ago, Hayne said, but the grapes are now sold to Nickel & Nickel.

Hayne said he and his two cousins have "no intention of selling" their portions of the vineyard, which was bought by William Bowers Bourn, Hayne's great-grandfather, in 1874. Hayne said

when he took over management of the vineyard from his father in 1986 it included Napa Gamay grapes, which were sold to Louis P. Martini, and Green Hungarian, which were sold to Sebastiani. After both Martini and Sebastiani didn't renew their contracts, Hayne pulled out both varieties and planted 14 acres of cabernet sauvignon.

The entire vineyard also includes century-old zinfandel vines, and the grapes are used to produce wines for S.E. Chase Family Cellars.

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'One of the very best'

Beckstoffer said he considers the vineyard "legendary" in terms of producing cabernet sauvignon grapes. "It is one of the very best cabernet pieces of ground in the Napa Valley and it has been that way for a zillion years," he said. He calls it one of "maybe" five legendary spots for cabernet in the Napa Valley and is enthusiastic about buying the property.

"These things never come up for sale; you know it's been years since we've been able to find cabernet vineyards like this," said Beckstoffer. "We've always said we don't want to buy land in the Napa Valley, we want to buy the very best cabernet land and we're willing to pay hopefully more than anybody else."

Beckstoffer worked for a farm management company in 1970 and then bought the company three years later. It was not until 1981 that the family-owned company was able to buy land and it started slowly. But when phylloxera hit in the early 1990s, the company was able to acquire a lot of property, in great part, Beckstoffer said, because the wineries that owned the property didn't want to pay to replant their vineyards.

From 1983 to 1997, the Beckstoffer family bought five of what Beckstoffer considers legendary Napa Valley vineyards:

- the Beckstoffer Las Piedras Vineyard, 25 acres in St. Helena;
- the Beckstoffer Vineyard Georges III, 300 acres in Rutherford;
- the 89-acre To Kalon Vineyard in Oakville;
- the Missouri Hopper vineyard, 45 acres in Oakville;
- the 25-acre Dr. Crane Vineyard in St. Helena.

Reflecting on the current situation in the wine business and the difficulty selling expensive wines during a recession, Beckstoffer said some people have no problem paying four to five times the county average for cabernet sauvignon grapes from these five vineyards because they're putting the grapes in wines that sell for \$100 to \$200 a bottle.

"They want more grapes to expand their businesses," he said. "There are cases, whether it is Schraders or Paul Hobbs or others, who have earned the right over a number of years to charge that much for a bottle of wine."

There are others, however, who didn't earn that right but arbitrarily set a price at \$120 a bottle, who are now struggling.

"I think the established guys, Silver Oak and Harlan for example, are doing very well," Beckstoffer added. "We must sell to 15 guys like that and all I can tell you for sure is they want more grapes at those high prices."