



Ten Questions with Lynn Diehl

Nathan Carlson — Center of Effort

Mild winter weather conditions make it feel like springtime on the Central Coast, but growers and winemakers know that frost can be a threat into May. In the cool-climate growing areas such as the Edna Valley, they keep a close watch on their vineyards. The cool conditions during the growing season have been wonderful for Chardonnay and Pinot Noir. Last year, a new brand (produced by some well-known local wine people) made it to select wine outlets. It could mean smooth sailing for Center of Effort Wines because of that experienced and dedicated team. General Manager Nathan Carlson answers Ten Questions with Lynn Diehl this week. www.centerofeffortwine.com

Q: Let's start with the basics: How did the name Center of Effort originate? How is the meaning applied to the wine product?

A: 'Center of Effort' is a term that may be familiar to anyone who has studied physics or raced sailboats. In sailing it refers to the theoretical, constantly shifting point describing the sum of the forces of the sails. The owners identified with this as an analogy appropriate to crafting the finest wines. As a team we are constantly trimming the 'sails' of viticulture, winemaking technique and artistry in the pursuit of the wines that are compelling and a faithful expression of our estate.

Q: Who is part of the team and what are your (team) goals?

A: I am so fortunate to work with a great cast of highly talented characters. Kevin Wilkenson and Travis Monk of Talley Vineyards direct the viticulture on the estate – with Talley's *Stane Carral* vineyard just across the street from us, and *Oliver's* a stone's throw further away, they have an intimate understanding of successful strategy for vineyards in our shared terroir. Mike Sinor has been the consulting winemaker for the project since it began in vintage 2008. Mike is a longtime friend and talented winemaker whom I am deeply passionate about Pinot Noir, having been one of the founders of the World of Pinot Noir, and one who is very well-versed in the specific expressions it reaches within the Edna Valley AVA, having spent many years as the winemaker at Domaine Alfred (Chamais) as well as for his own Sinor-LaVallee wines. Combined with owners (the Swanson and Rossi families) who have a vision of what this estate can become, and a trust in the team to make that a reality, CoE is a really exciting prospect to all of us who have been working together on it.

Q: The property is the former Corbett Canyon location although CoE has never been affiliated with that brand. How is the facility being utilized. Is it sort of a "wine campus" in the business sense?

A: Our property contains the original Lawrence winery, opened in 1978; it is one of the oldest in the Edna Valley AVA. (Rob Rossi was a partner at that time in the architecture firm which did the original design.) It is a much larger facility than is needed for our own modest production (~63 acres of fruit, ~1,000 cases of wine), and so we have leased the facility to SLO Wine Studio, a custom winemaking business which has become the shared home of nearly 20 small, high-quality wine producers (Henson, Drake, Baker & Brain, Wedell, Broadside, Giornata, Sinor-LaVallee, Ortman, and several others). It is a lot of talent packed into the space, and the camaraderie and shared ideas make for a very positive creative atmosphere.

Q: What has changed in regards to the vineyards and what is the plan going forward?

A: These vineyards were planted in 1997 as a production vineyard, with minimal farming input and maximum fruit output for the first years of its life. Kevin and Travis' team from Talley has reversed that equation – they are coming into their third year of management, healing some of the damage that was done to the vineyard in the past, and holding yields to the lower levels that our sandy soils naturally will support and excel at. We have been learning about what we have here, rather than making drastic changes – it takes a period of time to begin to understand a piece of land. When the time comes to make improve-



ments, I believe we will introduce some new clones and rootstocks, modify row spacing, and fine-tune irrigation blocks to maximize quality and interest of the pieces we will ultimately harvest for our wines.

The big changes we do have underway are more related to infrastructure. We swapped out 30 year old diesel irrigation motors for new low-emission engines which will run on bio-diesel, we invested in a new well which gives us water security and some of the best water quality in the Edna Valley, and are looking at rainwater collection from the winery rooftops as a way to capture this valuable resource. We are investigating a biological treatment system for our winery wastewater stream, which will use less energy and result in water so clean that we can use it to make compost tea.

Q: CoE released Pinot Noir and Chardonnay this year. Which varieties will you concentrate on and are there any plans to plant other varieties?

A: Pinot Noir (23.5 acres) and Chardonnay (39.5 acres) make up our ~63 acres of planted vineyard area (of a total of ~100 total estate acres). Currently, there are no plans to plant other varieties on this site, though there is one rocky hillside on the back of the property which we sometimes talk about planting some Grenache on to see how it does. CoE will probably remain a Chardonnay and Pinot Noir project – (we might have a sparkling wine cuvee up our sleeve, but just for friends and visitors).

Q: When will the next vintage be released? How many cases will you have and will it be more widely available? This year, restaurants snapped it up, right?

A: The 2008 release from Center of Effort was approximately 300 cases each of Chardonnay and Pinot Noir. We initially offered the wines to family and friends just ahead of the holiday season, with a small allocation to two distributors (J&L wines on the Central Coast, and Carolina Wines in Massachusetts) that placed the wines primarily with top restaurants and a few select retail accounts. About half of our 2008 vintage stock still remains. In the next few months we will make a wider offering of the 2008 wines to those on our mailing list (you can join at our website, or by telephone) and we are expanding placements into some great restaurants in the Los Angeles and San Francisco areas. The team has been working on the final blends for the 2009 wines, which should bottle in March. We look to be at roughly the same level as the 2008 wines – about 12 barrels each of Pinot Noir and Chardonnay.

Q: We've had substantial rain followed by warm and sunny days. Are the vines still sleeping or do you think you might have an early bud break? Any forecasts for the growing season 2011?

A: As much as I have enjoyed the warm days this January, I do worry that we are setting the stage for an early bud-break, and thus some vulnerability to crop loss due to frost events that can damage the new growth once it emerges. In the Edna Valley, we have had frost events as late as May in

some years, so an early February budbreak would mean an extended period of danger.

The early rainfall this year was substantial, but it was also mostly torrential, with a lot of the water running off on the surface. Soil moisture monitors in the root zone of our vines show that they are moderately dry, below field capacity at the moment. That is okay, as we should be able to control the vigor of the vines with thoughtful irrigation sets, and apply water stress when needed to for optimal growth. This is specific to our estate, with fairly well-drained soils. Perhaps in heavier soil areas, there will be higher vigor and more difficult to control growth.

Q: I know you are very interested in food. What are your favorite foods to match with these wines?

A: I am really interested in food, flavor, and aromas. Both our Pinot Noir and Chardonnay have levels of acidity that lend themselves very well to the table. Simple, but perfectly executed foods always show wines best; the sweetness of roasted duck or chicken is great with our Pinot Noir, particularly if stuffed with a bit of marjoram. This winter the local Chanterelles have been abundant. A simple Chanterelle omelet has been my hands-down favorite pairing with the rich tones of the CoE Chardonnay.

Q: On a note outside of the winery, I know that you've personally made cheese at home – I presume you have a garden...what's in it? Are you considering keeping bees?

A: I have been making goat's milk cheese for quite a while. Ten years ago I used to swap a bottle of Chardonnay every few weeks for a couple gallons of milk from a neighbor. I've progressed to raw milk, aged, mold-ripened cheeses – they can look a little scary, but the flavor becomes intense and beautiful, and they are unlike anything you can buy legally in the United States.

Kristin and I love to garden. Our goal is to eat something we grew every day for most of the year. At the moment, we have Brussels sprouts, collards, green onions, salad greens, many herbs, and eggs from our hens. Asparagus, edamame, favas, beets, cucumbers, tomatillos, and tomatoes are favorites, depending on the time of year. It has become important to me to know where my food comes from, and to be a part of the cycle of the seasons. Our garden is no showpiece, but it is a roughly functional collection of plants in various stages of growth, maturity and sometimes decay. The amount of work that goes into growing some of your own food brings a respect for the ingredients, and I swear it makes the food taste better!

Beekeeping is one of my resolutions for this year. Bees are fascinating to watch. They bring their own energy to the garden, along with being supreme pollinators.

There is a saying I heard somewhere that I hold close – 'Even the smallest act of creation is sacred.' I believe that for myself. I am always happiest learning how to do something or grow something or create something, and in sharing the result with friends. I think that as humans we require a creative aspect in our lives to be balanced. It could be writing, restoring a car, knitting, raising a family, it doesn't matter what, we are at our best when we put our best effort forward.

Q: What's the most exciting aspect of the local wine industry these days?

A: In the past 15 years or so that I have been involved in winemaking, the local wine industry has gone through a tremendous growth phase. Wine is solidly one of the most important economic and cultural activities in our community – it has become a part of all of our lives. It feels like we have reached a certain level of maturity as an industry and the world has taken notice of the best of what can be done here. I think we will see more recognition of our region from outside our area. There are also a number of young faces emerging from Cal Poly, or starting to take over vineyards and wine businesses that their families established. They are going to put their own stamp on our area. It will be interesting to watch as they innovate and contribute to the shared success of our region. ❖