

Winery working to support horse rescue

By Lisa King



Photo by Lisa King

Denise Nelson, president of Chrisman Mill Vineyards, was thrilled with the success of the winery's first artist signature series. All 1,000 bottles bear a sketch by Jack Nicholson.

A local vineyard is the toast of the town with its support of horse rescue with the help of mega-celebrity Jack Nicholson.

Chrisman Mill Vineyards has almost sold out of the 1,000 bottles of Kentucky Chambourcin it produced that bear a sketch done by Nicholson on the labels, according to Denise Nelson, president and co-owner of Chrisman Mill Vineyards. The sketch is of Silver Charm, a horse that lives on a Scott County horse rescue farm called Old Friends.

Being horse enthusiasts, Nelson said Chrisman Mill wanted to do a fundraiser to help horses who were in danger of being slaughtered.

"It's just sad that these horses give their heart and soul to racing and then are just cast away like they are nothing and are sent off to slaughter houses," she said. "So we wanted to do something to help, especially now with the Derby

coming up, and since one of our girls has a connection to Old Friends, we just decided to contact them and see what we could come up with."

What they came up with was nothing short of sensational, with a huge public response to their fundraiser, which is expected to bring in \$32,000 a year for Old Friends.

"We had no idea it would be such a huge success," Nelson said. "We are already working on the 2008 series, and it will be even bigger."

Michael Blowen, owner of Old Friends, said when Nelson approached him with the idea, he was overcome.

"I was so excited," he said.

The winery's "Artist Signature Series" features a new design on a wine bottle every quarter and proceeds from bottles bearing those labels will go to benefit Old Friends. The wine, a full-bodied red, which bears Silver Charm's image is on sale at Liquor Barn Stores and Bacchus Fine Wine-Spirits in Midway for \$21.99. Nelson said there may be a few bottles left at these locations, but the two cases she has left will be sold at the winery on Chrisman Mill Road, and at the winery's store at Hamburg Pavilion in Lexington.

Blowen said when he agreed to the project, he and Nelson began looking among his collection of horse photos for a idea for the first edition.

“Then she saw the sketch of Silver Charm and said, ‘Oh, I love that one!’” he said.

The sketch was a gift to Blowen from Nicholson. When he called Nicholson to get permission to use the sketch, he said the star gave his consent wholeheartedly.

“He was thrilled,” Blowen said.

Nelson said she is planning to ask Nicholson to do another sketch for next year’s artist series. The next series this year is scheduled to come out in April, and will be designed by comedian and film star Albert Brooks.

“The horse that they chose for Brooks is said to have a real attitude, similar to that of Brooks himself,” she said, laughing. “They try to match the artist with the horse. Each artist will sketch their horse, and Brooks is working on his now.”

Nelson said other stars the winery plans on working with in the future include Angie Dickinson and another star who was “very big.”

“We don’t want to give out the name yet, but everyone knows her,” Nelson said.

The Nelsons, originally from Texas, settled in Nicholasville more than 10 years ago, and will celebrate the 10th year anniversary of their winery this spring.

“We just have a passionate love, not only for growing grapes, but also for the earth, and for this community,” she said. “As soon as we saw this property, and learned of its history, we just fell in love with it.”

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