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"Roseburg Area 'Ideal' for Growth of Wine Industry" Article

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Roseburg Area 'Ideal' For Growth Of Wine Industry

TENMILE —Membership and interest in an organization to promote wine grape growing is rising rapidly, due largely to efforts of Paul Bjelland—director of Oregon Bonded Vintners license number 47. Bjelland, formerly a Southern California educator, moved here two years ago, with a desire to specialize in the production of fine table wines. He is one of the founders and current president of the Oregon Wine Growers Association (OWGA), in which membership has now climbed to more than 30, nearly all of

which are growing or planning to grow grapes for varietal wines. Through Bjelland's inspiration the number of varietal wine growers (each with more than a half-acre of grapes) has jumped from one to ten in the Roseburg area. Currently, according to Bjelland, there are only 13 in the state. For the last two years Bjelland has been a sixth grade instructor at Tenmile Elementary School, coming here from Long Beach, Calif., where he served as an executive secretary for Southern California Teachers

Association. "I always dreamed of buying a ranch," Bjelland said. "I moved here two years ago after checking out the fishing and the land availability for growing grapes." Bjelland purchased 200 acres of land on Reston Road, about three miles north of Tenmile. Grapes of different varieties are now planted on about 20 acres. During the summer months Bjelland plans to continue developing his own vineyards, advise others on growing wine grapes and travel the Northwest as a public relations representative for Hillcrest Vineyard, which he offers as "proof" that top quality wine grapes can be produced here. "Hillcrest Vineyard, now in its ninth year of operation, has shown that wine grape growing is a tested farming opportunity," Bjelland says. "This climate is similar to the burgundy and bourdeaux areas of Europe, and especially France, which means that we can get some of the best reds and white (wines) in the world right here." Primarily, that is the message that Bjelland will be presenting through the summer as he visits country clubs, fine restaurants and grocery chains in Oregon, Washington, Idaho and Northern California. Hillcrest Vineyard, in 1967, produced a variety of riesling wine, which is reputed by some wine connoisseurs to be equal to the tart dry wines of France. Richard Sommer, owner of Hillcrest Vineyard, was blessed that year with good weather condition, resulting in the production of hundreds of gallons of the 1967 riesling vintage. Most Country clubs, restaurants and large grocery stores in the state now have Hillcrest wines in stock. Bjelland himself is about

ready to begin marketing his own wine, also of the riesling variety. "I have about 350 gallons which will be ready for market in September," Bjelland said. "And, of course, visitors are welcome to my vineyard any Sunday from 4 to 6 p.m." Although membership in the OWGA now stands at 30, the monthly dinner-meetings have been attracting up to 50. The monthly meetings always feature a speaker and a gourmet dinner cooked with wine. Bjelland has arranged for such speakers as Dr. Hoya Yang, enologist from Oregon State University; Jack McCullum of Wine-Art of Oregon; and Dr. Lloyd Martin, horticulture specialist from OSU. Dr. Yang, regarded as an expert in enology (science of wine

and winemaking) indicated the Roseburg area could be one of the major industries in Douglas County's economical future. The OSU enologist estimates that Oregon has about 100,000 acres of prime land for growing wine grapes, much of which is located in the Umpqua Valley of Douglas County. Bjelland has taken the lead from Dr. Yang and has been up in promoting wine growing in this area. He has been trying to convince farmers that a profit can be made by leasing some of the acreage to small investment groups for raising grapes. "And most of them are about convinced," Bjelland says. "People will get more interested in a few years as our grapes will be producing an abundance of wine."

Bjelland himself is about