



BOORDY (and others) USE SPECIAL EVENTS TO CREATE SPECIAL CUSTOMERS

BY TEDDY DURGIN



Throughout Maryland and elsewhere, more and more vineyards, wineries, breweries, and distilleries are hosting special events on-site. In some cases, they're putting on shows -- quite literally -- to get people to come out and taste their products. For instance, the Fiore Winery and Distillery in Pylesville, Md., offers its Music in the Vineyard series every Saturday night through mid-September.

Among the most active, though, is Boordy Vineyards in Hydes, Md., nestled in the heart of Baltimore County's Long Green Valley. Every Saturday evening during the warm months, the property hosts a Summer Concert Series that features a diverse array of local bands and performers. And every Thursday afternoon/evening in the summer and well into the cooler months, Boordy offers its "Good Life Farmers Market."

For visitors, it's a chance to come to

a working winery, enjoy some good food and drink, and just unwind "in the country." For Boordy, it's a chance to promote the brand. "These events are powerful marketing tools," declared Boordy Vineyards President Rob Deford, "and they have a broad impact since we have visitors from all over Maryland and from neighboring states. When people enjoy a beautiful, festive afternoon or evening at Boordy, it builds a familial bond between us that translates into brand loyalty. I can

say this with confidence, because when we started our concert series over two decades ago, sales in our regional stores picked up in direct relationship to the growing popularity of our events."

Bruce Wills, Boordy's National Sales Director, concurred. He pointed to the last Farmers Market Boordy put on just prior to our interview in late June. The 3 p.m. to 7 p.m. event drew nearly 1,000 people. "And most probably drank a glass of Boordy at some point," he remarked.

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"So, there is a 1,000-person group who will go back into their communities and hopefully go to their local wine store and buy additional Boordy wines. And, yes, these folks come from all over the place. They come from southern Pennsylvania and Delaware. I've met folks here from Northern Virginia and Washington, D.C. Boordy has become a destination place for nice wine, nice people, music, and food. That impression seems to travel out into the community and throughout the mid-Atlantic region."

The Retailers' Perspective

Skeptical at first, store owners and operators are beginning to acknowledge that events like the ones Boordy, Fiore, and others put on around the state create new customers for them. Among them is Larry Dean, proprietor of Bel Air Liquors. "It's helpful, because they really do drive



people to the local stores," he said. "If they're going there for a specific event, whether it's a band they want to see or to buy things at a farmers' market, they also get exposed to the product line. I think it not only drives them to us in the retail market, but it also gets people to ask for the wines or beers or what-have-you when they go to restaurants."

He continued, "We're just far enough away that I would say our customer base will buy, say, Boordy's wines here as opposed to making the trek and going all the way back to the vineyard. And, yes, we do hear, 'We went to this concert at Boordy last weekend, and we loved their

wines!"

Wills and Deford insist that store owners and operators like Dean should never feel their sales are threatened by such on-site events. The former commented, "There is no conflict in pricing. We might actually be a little bit higher by design here at the winery than at a local wine shop. And it's not unusual for people to stop at any of the wine shops in this Baltimore County area and buy Boordy wine before they come to the concert. The local wine shops should know they will get residual business from the visitors to Boordy. Hopefully, the people who visit here have such an enjoyable experience that they go back to their homes in York, Pa., or Mt. Airy, Md., and buy Boordy."

Deford added, "It is often at a farmers market or a concert that people are first introduced to our wines. However, since Boordy is not located on a convenient route for routine purchases of our wines,

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repeat sales are made more in retail wine shops and restaurants around the state. When I wear a shirt with the Boordy logo, I encounter people in all walks of life and all over our state who stop me to say that they have enjoyed an afternoon or evening at the winery and cherish the memory."

Longevity is Key

The Boordy events have been going on for so long and are so well-known that Deford, Wills, and Co. have to do very little promoting at this point. "We no longer have to aggressively advertise," Wills confirmed. "It's on our website, Boordy.com. It's on our Facebook page. We sell out to capacity just about every week. We know we're going to get 1,700 people for the Mahoney Brothers or 1,500 for Mood Swings. People go on the website, see who's playing next, buy the tickets, and it all just seems to come together."

So for any other winery or brewery operator reading this who is interested in putting on similar events, do Wills and Deford have any advice? Wills, who has been with Boordy since September 2015, was the first to respond. "It's a handful,"

he acknowledged, with a slight chuckle. "It is crowd control-plus! You have to have a really crack team of people who just do the concerts, and we do. We have security. We sell tickets. It's all very well orchestrated, organized, and monitored. And it's not an easy thing to do until you get a lot of experience. So, my advice would be to start small, take baby steps, and learn what's involved in growing into a larger event and venue."

Deford agreed, adding, "I have two recommendations for anyone considering hosting events at their facility. One, remember that the quality of your product

is your most important asset. So, don't let events distract you from this primary focus. And, two, be a good neighbor! Do not over crowd your events. Keep them in proportion to the size of your property and to the capacity of public access roads, and be sensitive to noise levels. We have taken many steps to mitigate the impact of our events so that we are in harmony with our community, and this ensures a positive and sustainable relationship well into the future."

Deford concluded, "I have attended so many concerts and farmers markets over the years here that it would be impossible to single out one memory, but I do have a favorite composite memory: it's of a clear summer evening with dusk just settling in, a good band is playing, people are dancing, enjoying our wine, food, and good company, and a general air of happiness and joy is prevailing. Wine and the celebration of life have belonged together for thousands of years. We are simply continuing that wonderful tradition!" ■

