

## Vandals Uncorked Wine Club Turns Three!

Although the idea of a wine subscription club is nothing new, the University of Idaho Office of Alumni Relations (OAR) saw it as an opportunity to showcase the great work of Vandals in the wine industry. Since its launch three years ago, the Vandals Uncorked wine club has grown into one of OAR's most successful programs.

"We had seen it at other institutions, and we thought we'd give it a try," said Tim Helmke '95, director of alumni engagement. "We asked other alumni offices about their wine programs. They said, 'Yes, do it!' So, we did. Our first release was fall of 2017."

When the OAR team created Vandals Uncorked, they wanted to feature high-quality wines that have a relationship to the University of Idaho. Whether the owners of the wineries are Vandals, or a key employee is a Vandal, each winery included in the wine club must have a Vandal connection.

To be considered for the club, Vandal-connected wineries complete a questionnaire and send their top wines to OAR, which organizes a blind taste-testing and scoring event twice each year.

"Wine testers are composed of OAR staff and other U of I staff and faculty members," Helmke said. "We also include the Moscow Chamber of Commerce director, local business owners and restaurateurs, people from the agriculture industry, Vandals Uncorked members, alumni and other U of I-affiliated people who are knowledgeable about wine."

Based on the scoring, OAR selects the top four wines for the next shipment. A specialty vendor works with the wineries to facilitate shipping the wines to Vandals Uncorked members, who receive two shipments per year. Each release includes descriptions of the individual wines, tasting and pairing notes, winemaker profiles and links the wineries' websites.

Releases include both reds and whites of different varietals and styles. Club members have received a rich Tempranillo, German-style Riesling, velvety Merlot-Petit Verdot blend, a bright Moscato and full-bodied Cabernet in various shipments.

"We are proud to promote some award-winning wineries," said Katie Dahlinger '05, marketing and communications manager for OAR. Most recently, Clearwater Canyon Cellars (of Lewiston) won the 2020 Pacific Northwest winery of the year and Colter's Creek (of Juliaetta) won the 2020 Idaho winery of the year.

"We also love helping club members discover rising stars that are producing outstanding wines." we have "Vandal Connected Wineries" on the club website to list all wineries who have Vandal Connections. Dahlinger promotes the wines through U of I alumni social media and other channels, which gives exposure to the wineries and encourages new members to sign up. There is also a list of all "Vandal Connected" wineries on the club website.

"We market Vandals Uncorked to alumni and other Vandals across the globe," Dahlinger said. "Vandals Uncorked club member, Susie Jameson '77, said 'We're loving our Vandals Uncorked subscription! Each shipment comes with a variety of wines hand-picked by fellow Vandals! Our favorite part is trying a new wine with the information sheets that tell us more about the winery and the wines. They even give suggestions for food and dessert pairings with each wine.'"

"There's a 97% renewal rate per shipment and we receive five to ten new members after each shipment," Helmke said. "Vandals are making some great wine, and we want to grow the program to share their wines with more members of the Vandal Family."

To learn more, visit [www.vandalsuncorked.com](http://www.vandalsuncorked.com).