

NIES: A chance to learn while you enjoy

Most of us who work daily in the wine business here in North Idaho would be impressed to know that the North Idaho Enological Society, NIES for short, has been around for 30-plus years. Impressed because as wine professionals working in the wine world daily, we have seen the marketplace come far over the last five years, and also see that it still has room to grow. So to think of what the marketplace for wine might have looked like 30 years ago, we are indeed impressed at how the folks at NIES not only got started, but have kept the focus on education and enjoyment of wine for all those years.

About a year ago, I had a chance to speak to the NIES gathering, and recently sat down with some members of the Board of Directors to learn more of their story, and how they view the future of their organization and the wine market in general here in North Idaho and Eastern Washington. Structured as a non-profit organization, they draw membership from all around our area. Their "Board" is comprised of 11 members and is authorized up to 13. The Board directs the programs for their 80-ish members, which they would like to see grow up to 120 folks who want to learn more about wine and enjoy it, as well.

While their emphasis is on education — after all, their program director Ann Brueggemann is a lifelong educator fluent in several languages — the Board is also quick to point out that their membership spans wine experience levels from beginners to the more educated. Demographically speaking, their youngest member is 21 and their oldest is 80-plus, but all are driven by a desire to increase their knowledge and understanding of wine while having an opportunity to try many new things.

When I spoke to the NIES gathering and in



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talking to the board members, I have been uniformly impressed with their open-minded approach to trying many new things — great news for a "wine geek" like me. Their presentations, too, are incredibly well thought-out and organized, providing true value, adding information on whatever appellation, varietal, or wine topic they are tackling at their monthly tastings.

NIES is great to work with, too, as they understand and support the wine industry at all levels, with specific emphasis on supporting small wineries, small local retailers, and the distributors that facilitate this key part of the wine economy. Many of their monthly gatherings will feature speakers from wineries located in North Idaho, like Coeur d'Alene Cellars and Pend Oreille Winery, as well as some of the producers from the appellations of our neighbor, Washington state.

NIES also hosts blind tastings that are regionally or varietally focused, where they are careful not to divulge the bottle prices until the tasting is completed and members have had a chance to evaluate the wines. This is, in our opinion, the best way to conduct tastings of this type so as not to influence perceptions of wines strictly from the price. In the future, too, NIES may start a more "field trip" approach to tasting, taking their members on the road for monthly meetings to taste at the source and get an even more in-depth look at the winemaking process, providing even more opportunities to learn.

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Annual membership is \$25, and individual events are priced in the \$20 range, which covers the wine for the event, the venue cost, and food that is provided at times. Their big holiday gathering and year-end dinner are not to be missed when they really step up the program, tasting some fabulous wines paired with great meals. While a bit more expensive, these two big events each year are truly special.

NIES is a great organization for all levels of wine enthusiasts and is one that we always look forward to interacting with, whether it be here at the shop or when we present to the group. As a wine professional, we support their mission and respect

their educational approach to wine enjoyment. To learn more about the North Idaho Enological Society and to become a member, contact them through their website, www.northidahowinesociety.org. You will find it a valuable addition to your overall wine experience.

If there is a topic you would like to read about or if you have questions on wine, you can email George@thedinnerpartyshop.com, or make suggestions by contacting the Healthy Community section at the Coeur d'Alene Press.

George Balling is co-owner with his wife Mary Lancaster of the dinner party, a wine and table top décor shop in Coeur d'Alene by Costco. George is also the managing judge of The North Idaho Wine Rodeo and is the wine editor for Coeur d'Alene Magazine (www.edamagazine.com). You can

learn more about the dinner party at www.thedinnerpartyshop.com. You can get all of these articles, as well as other great wine tips, by friending us on Facebook: www.facebook.com/#!/dinnerpartyshop.



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