

Tree of Ted

Atwater's Ted Marks mentored a generation of winemakers

BY ERIN SCHERER

It has been Atwater Estate Vineyards owner Ted Marks' mission in life to support up-and-comers. For 20 years, he owned a store in Elmira called Bookmarks, where he mentored his high school employees by helping them with school and personal problems. After closing Bookmarks, he bought what was then known as Rolling Vineyards in 1999 from Ed and Joanne Grow. Rechr-

tening it Atwater, he reopened the winery (the Grows had closed their winery a decade earlier) the following year. Marks' passion for mentorship found a new, welcome home at Atwater. "While working with Ted I learned confidence, and I learned to trust myself because Ted trusted me," says Hosmer Winery's winemaker Aaron Roisen, who worked as an assistant winemaker at Atwater from 2004 to 2007.

The winemakers that have come through Atwater read like a Who's Who of contemporary Finger Lakes winemakers: In addition to Roisen, there's also Billsboro's Vinny Aliperti (who still works as Atwater's head winemaker), Hector Wine Company's Justin Boyette, Heart and Hands' Tom Higgins, and Bellwether's Kris Matthewson. "I think we're a pretty broad representation of the Finger Lakes wine industry," says Boyette, who worked as an

From left to right: Justin Boyette, Kris Matthewson, Aaron Roisen, Ted Marks, Tom Higgins, Vinny Aliperti





assistant winemaker at Atwater from 2007 to 2009.

Marks spent much of his life on the periphery of the Finger Lakes wine industry: His brother-in-law, Howard Kimball, founded Glenora Wine Cellars, and his niece is Nancy Fulkerson, co-owner of Fulkerson Winery. Yet Marks doesn't consider himself to be a huge wine aficionado: "I can't separate the varietals from everything else. They all taste like grapes to me." Atwater was initially a project for his daughter and then son-in-law Phil Hazlitt (Atwater being a name in the Hazlitt family lore). Hazlitt and Marks' daughter eventually split up, but Marks kept Atwater open and continued his mission to mentor neophytes. "Ted has always had a very generous side to him and a large heart," says Tom Higgins, who worked as an Atwater assistant winemaker from 2007 to 2009. "He has always been an extremely accommodating individual with his time, and his heart just bleeds over."

Vinny Aliperti credits the alumni of distinguished winemakers to

Marks' flexibility in the cellar. "Ted gave us space to be winemakers in the cellar, and never really got in the way. We were able to create and be expressive in the cellar as we deemed fit. I've worked in many cellars and that's not always the case. Typically, owners get in the way, and that was not the situation here. Ted lets us be who we want to be, and it shows in the wine." He also remains supportive of his protégés as they move on: "When we started Hector Wine Company, we used the bottling line at Atwater once or twice. He's always been supportive of every effort we've made," says Justin Boyette, who also served as an Atwater assistant winemaker from 2007 to 2009.

For all the praise he receives from those who have worked for him, Marks remains humble. "These guys had the ability to do all this on their own. I think maybe I helped them a little, showed them a little bit of the ways: how to be a mean businessman and a nice guy at the same time. They're crazy if they stay and work for me the rest of their lives."