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Yadkin wine tasting appears successful

By Laura Graff | Journal Reporter

The first bottle of red wine at Hanover Park Vineyards came uncorked about noon, when visitors began showing up at the front door of the farmhouse they've turned into tasting rooms.

Amy Helton, who owns the vineyard with her husband, Michael, smiled at the seven guests gathered around her table as she poured small portions of Hanover Park's Mourvedre-- pronounced "moo-ved-reh" -- into wineglasses stamped with the word "Yadkin."

"So," Amy Helton asked, handing a glass to one of the visitors, "where are you folks from?"

Throughout the rest of Yadkin County, other winemakers were asking similar questions over tasting-size glasses of red wine. This weekend was the first "Yadkin Winter Reds" event, sponsored by the town of Yadkinville and the Yadkin County Tourism Development Authority, and, by all accounts, it was a success.

The wine tasting started Friday. Tickets were \$25 and tasters got a glass and vineyard to start, then traveled at will to vineyards around the rest of the county.

The event sold out, attracting visitors from as far away as Florida, giving winemakers and Yadkin County leaders further hope that the region's growing wine industry is making the area a tourism destination.

"We've gone from 10 years ago having one winery in Yadkin County to now having 14," said Bobby Todd, the president of the county's economic development partnership.

This weekend's tasting was modeled after a similar event in the Finger Lakes region of New York as a way to attract visitors to Yadkin County's wineries during the off season.

"It's taking a weekend that is normally not a high-season weekend and trying to create some interest in the area," Todd said.

It seemed to work.

At Hanover Park Vineyard, one of the women at the Heltons' table told them she and her friends had traveled to the Yadkin Valley from Pinehurst, about a 2 1/2-hour drive.

"We like to come up here -- the wineries are just excellent," said Katie Cunningham, one of the Pinehurst travelers. "We're going to stay overnight and continue tomorrow."

The Heltons, who are retired art teachers, bought the land for the vineyard in 1996 and produced the first harvest in 1999. The vineyard has grown since then, from two acres of planted grapes to eight. They said they welcomed the chance to attract more customers.

"As we always say, first of all, you're farmers," Amy Helton said. "Then you have to make the wine. Then you have to package the wine. Then you have to sell the wine."

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