



# POURING PARTNERS

by CHRIS COOK

*Ashland Wine Cellar owners  
Lisa and Brian Dunagan*

*Debra Thornton Photography*



*Jacksonville Inn Wine Shop  
Photo by Melissa Ghiglieri*

It may seem as though wine shops are in competition with wine tasting rooms—both selling the same product. In fact, it’s just the opposite. They have a collaborative relationship that is flourishing in Southern Oregon.

**A**shland Wine Cellar owners Lisa and Brian Dunagan say they spend a lot of time helping visitors to the Oregon Shakespeare Festival decide which local wineries to visit. “I like to think of our wine shop as a resource to promote Southern Oregon wineries,” Brian said. Oregon’s oldest independently-owned wine shop, the Ashland Wine Cellar has weekly tastings with local winery reps and always has flights of wine and wines by the glass available.

It’s a gathering place for tourists and locals alike. During my recent visit to the Ashland Wine Cellar, I ran into local resident, Bobby Townsend, and three friends enjoying a glass of wine and chatting with the Dunagans. “There’s nowhere locally like this place—a great mix of wines from Southern Oregon and around the world. I can get expert advice on wines and tasting rooms,” Bobby said.

When the Jacksonville Inn’s wine shop opened in 1982, there were only a handful of wineries in Southern Oregon. Owner Jerry Evans remembers that while Valley View Winery was fairly new and just down the road, he had to drive to Portland to find a decent selection of wine to stock his shop and adjoining restaurant. Today, he sells upwards of 2,000 different wines—about one quarter from Southern Oregon. Having bought the Jacksonville Inn and Restaurant in 1976, Evans says he has visitors from all around the world, especially California. They come for the Britt Music and Art Festival and lately for the wine, given the recent wine region recognition by *Forbes* and *Wine Enthusiast*.

Head over to Medford from Jacksonville and you will find two other well-stocked and well-staffed wine shops. Spirits World, which also sells hard alcohol, recently

enlarged its wine section, which opened just two years ago. Owner Chuck Horton has effusive enthusiasm and a large selection of Southern Oregon wines. “When people ask me which tasting room to visit, I tell them to visit them all! Wine is the future of our economy—we’re not selling lumber anymore,” he said.

On “Wine Wednesdays,” Chuck enjoys seeing his customers meet the winery owners who come to provide tastings. “It gets people interested in the wineries and then they go out and visit the tasting rooms.”

At the Harry & David Country Village store in Medford, you can find local gourmet foods and produce, delightful treats and one of the largest wine and beer selections in Southern Oregon. Wine Sales Manager Scott Zagar stocks approximately 40 percent of his wine inventory from Southern Oregon and 50 percent from Oregon. Approaching sales of \$1 million per year in wine, Scott says that he has the largest selection of wines in Southern Oregon.

With approximately a third of Scott’s customers visiting the area as tourists, Scott has a great opportunity to direct people to local wineries. “We get a lot of support from the local wineries—they are in here doing tastings every Friday, Saturday and Sunday. We want to support them as much as possible,” he says.

With more than 120 wineries in the region, visitors can look to local wine shops for advice on which to visit and can talk with the knowledgeable staff about which wineries specialize in their favorites. Our visitors find that from Albariño to Viognier, Southern Oregon wineries have something for everyone.