

Wine tasting at Vino 100/Tinderbox

I will be the first to admit that I don't know the difference between a sauvignon and a shiraz. Left to my own devices, I'm a waiter's dream — if you recommend it, I will order it.

The thought of a wine tasting — which I had envisioned as a room full of people who actually know good wine and can offer intelligent commentary on bouquets and perfect pairings — was a bit intimidating.

But in the interest of expanding my vineyard horizons I dropped into a wine tasting at Vino 100/Tinderbox in downtown Alpharetta to check out the event I've heard so much "buzz" about. I quickly learned my impression of a snobby wine tasting was way off the mark.

The owners of the store, Pete and Hazel Servold, offer a wine tasting every Saturday evening, that has grown from a handful of wine lovers a year ago to the "it" place to be for dozens of area folks each week.

It's a family affair at the wine tasting. Sons, Peter and Tim, handle the pouring, educating customers with their extensive knowledge of the weekly selections. Pete mingles with the crowd, the consummate host, while Hazel welcomes the customers and keeps things moving along. The matriarch of the family, Pete's mother Anne, works in the background setting out the array of appetizers, including a pork tenderloin that wowed the crowd.

The format for the wine tasting is simple and straightforward. Each week six selections are featured, from different regions, different tastes and ranging

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from affordable (under \$15) to more mid-range (\$30 to \$40). Customers are given a form describing the wine, with room to jot notes to remember the wine for later.

What makes the evening special, apart from the live jazz guitarist playing in the background, the soft lighting, the aroma of wood and cigars, and of course, the fabulous wines, are the people. Time and time again, patrons approached to tell me how coming to the wine tasting each week was like dropping in on family.

"(The Servolds) are so welcoming and open and you really feel like part of the family," said Babs Pirkle of Milton, who regularly attends the wine tasting. "We'll meet friends here first then go out to dinner. It's become a tradition for us."

But I've saved the best part for last. The entire two-hour event, including appetizers and six glasses of wine will set you back only \$10. Even better, the Servolds have found

a way to combine their love of wine with community service, donating half of the proceeds of the wine tasting to selected charities.

To date, Vino 100/Tinderbox has given more than \$25,000 to charitable groups, with this month's recipient the ALS (Lou Gehrig's Disease) Foundation.

If the selected wines are not your taste, browse the Great Wall of Wine, which offers 100 brands of wine at \$25 or less. The Alpharetta store is one of many franchise locations of Vino 100, which was developed to take the mystery out of buying wine. The wines are arranged by a unique barometer system, displaying an easy-to-understand wine rating graphic, to allow customers to key in on their favorite tastes.

Vino 100/Tinderbox is at 131 South Main Street in Alpharetta. Open Monday through Saturday, 9 a.m. to 8 p.m. The Wine Tasting is 4:30 to 6:30 p.m. every Saturday.



Sampling an array of wines at a recent Vino 100/Tinderbox event are Northside residents, from left, **Nancy Thompson, Anna Ramirez** and **Renee Coordes**.