



THE SWEET SMELL OF SUCCESS: Now in its 16th year, the Colorado Mountain Winefest just keeps getting better. The event draws many Front Range winelovers to the Grand Valley.

Better with age

Sweet 16 and never been missed.

It's hard to say how many people have attended all 15 of the previous Colorado Mountain Winefests. Bet if you asked around during this year's 16th-annual celebration, particularly during the latter stages of the rollicking Festival in the Park at Palisade's Riverbend Park, you'd find scads of folks who'll assure you that, "Oh, yes, I was there" for that first intimate gathering in the Palisade Town Park.

Funny, that, since the initial Festival attracted only 500 or so onlookers curious about this new-found thing called "Colorado wine."

But that's OK. If 3,000 grape-lovers tell you, "I was there, sure I was," just smile and thank them for having a small part in the opening act of a wine industry that now ranks about 20th in the nation and contributes more than \$40 million annually to the state's economy.

Little would those early Winefest goers have surmised that the two dozen or so wines poured that first year would turn into the hundreds of

wines available this year, including exotic varieties that make even the most-devoted Colorado wine lover stop their sipping and ask, "What did you call this?"

If you doubt that, stop by Yvon and Joanna Gros' Leroux Creek Vineyards booth and sample their

tasty chambourcin and cayuga, the former a velvety red grape more often found in France and the U.S. east coast and the latter a white grape developed in 1972 for the Finger Lakes Region of New York.

Last year's 15th annual celebration drew more than 10 times as many guests as the first year and seven times as many wineries, and this year promises to be even bigger yet, with 43 wineries scheduled to make an appearance.

"Last year we sold 5,800 tickets" to the Festival in the Park, said Winefest executive director Marilyn Jensen, who expects at least that many winelovers to sip away during the Sept. 15 wine and food-tasting Festival. "We put a cap at 6,000, but we've never sold out."

Three years ago, the Winefest board of directors and the Town of Palisade took the bold move of moving the Festival away from the cozy Town Park to the roomy, tree-lined expanse of Riverbend Park.

"This is a great place to have the festival," said festival goer Todd Malmsbury of Boulder during that first venture into Riverbend Park. "Lots of room, great food and music, and there are some terrific wines here."



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COLORADO MOUNTAIN
Winefest



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Malmsbury is one of many Front Range winelovers who each fall leave those big cities for a weekend in the Grand Valley. They come for the wines, of course, as well as to enjoy events ranging from dinners with winemakers to winemaking and food-pairing seminars to bicycle tours of the vineyards.

And along with their bottles of wine, all snuggled up in souvenir boxes, will be copies of this year's Winefest poster by Hot Springs, Ark., artist Carole Katchen. Titled "Kick Up Your Heels" (pictured above) an original pastel showing two bandana- and toque-wearing chefs carousing and stomping gleefully in a vat of grapes.

The most-memorable of the posters soon become collectors' items and it's not uncommon to have requests come in for the first poster (by artist Wilda Fortune) and the most-popular, the 2002 10th-anniversary poster by Colorado artist Buffalo Kaplinsky. You can see (and purchase) those posters and more at www.coloradowinefest.com.

Seminars, dinners, bike tours, posters and a day of meeting Colorado's hard-working winemakers. There's no shortage of memories to take home from the Colorado Mountain Winefest, memories sure to last another 16 years.