

## RETAIL

# Private Stock

## New VQA Shop to Grow on Strength of Local Vintners

It's no secret that B.C.'s wine industry is growing by leaps and bounds. The competitive mix of small and more established vintners has resulted in the production of a healthy bouquet of fine, award-winning wines.

Okanagan entrepreneurs are also cultivating new enterprises to support and promote the growing industry. Count Tracy Gray and Suzanne Mick among those entrepreneurs. They recently opened the doors of Discover Wines in Orchard Plaza. As the only privately owned and operated VQA store in Kelowna, the partners say they share a



**Suzanne Mick and Tracy Gray raise a toast to their new, privately-owned VQA shop, Discover Wines in Kelowna.**

vision to create a unique purchasing experience, as well as a one-stop resource centre where the public can learn all about B.C. wineries and wines.

"Visitors are already saying that the atmosphere

feels like one of the great wine stores you might find in the Napa Valley," Gray says. "But we are uniquely Okanagan. Every time people come in, they can discover a different Okanagan wine," she notes. "As part of our

tasting programs, they can sample wines all day long."

### Education

Gray and Mick have put their creative minds together to offer tutored tastings, events, seminars and wine clubs. With a focus on education, they have brought together a comprehensive resource of information about B.C. wines, vintners, wine routes, winery services and events.

Detailed profiles about each of the VQA wines they sell are also provided. Gray points out that many of the VQA wines produced by the smaller or lesser-known vintners in the Valley are not sold in traditional liquor stores. Many of those producers are unable to fill the larger quantity orders required by liquor stores, or by choice, prefer to sell their wines in the more personal atmosphere of a VQA store.

"These vintners are working hard. It's their livelihood, and we want to promote it," Gray says. "We feel it is something important to do."

Their dedication to the success of even the smallest vintners is a labour of love. "Suzanne and I have been working in the industry for a long time," she says. "It's in our blood, and we are passionate about it. It's exciting to be involved with others who are also passionate about growing their businesses, and producing better quality wines and grapes."

### Support

The partners are proud of their growing success, and grateful for the support they received from the Women's Enterprise Society of B.C. (WESBC) financing program. WESBC assists women entrepreneurs in B.C. in starting or growing a business through information referral, business counselling and financing.

"Working with WESBC allowed us to open our business on our own," says Gray. "The support they provided was tremendous. They looked at our concept and business plan, and made suggestions. Best of all, they have provided us with an ongoing support network, which you just don't get from a traditional lending institution."