

OCEAN ISLE BEACH CHAPTER of the American Wine Society

“Cheers to 10 years!”

When you think wine, most people would hardly consider the east coast of North Carolina as a vibrant location for wine lovers to gather and experience the pleasure of fine wine, to increase their knowledge of wine, and its appreciation. Yet in this great expanse of wide sandy beaches and championship golf courses, a chapter of the American Wine Society was started.

North Carolina may be known best for things other than wine, but North Carolina vineyards have put their mark on the American wine scene. The state is the home of our nation’s first cultivated grape: the scuppernong and had as many as 25 wineries dating back to the early 1800’s. The famed “mother vine” of the scuppernongs is located on Roanoke Island, so it is only fitting, that this heritage and wine culture be embraced and cultivated.

The idea for a local chapter of The American Wine Society grew in the minds of a couple of New England transplants. What better way to meet neighbors with similar interests and exchange the love and knowledge of wine? The Chapter was founded in 2011 by Stan and Tess Barwikowski with the help and support of Dana Keeler, Silver Coast Winemaker and Maryann Azzato owner of Silver Coast Winery. The chapter has been very fortunate, that in this area of beaches and fairways, that we have a winery that is actively helping and supporting our efforts. The Silver Coast Winery has allowed their facility to be used as a venue for our monthly meetings. The winery staff are active participants in every meeting, lending their expertise to help educate members and guests. Without their support and promotion of our efforts, it would be extremely difficult to have a viable chapter.

The American Wine Society is the largest consumer-based wine organization in the country with over 7000 members and 180 chapters located in 47 states. The mission of the organization is to promote wine appreciation and education. It also has a scholarship fund which provides scholarships to worthy candidates who seek advanced degrees in enology and viticulture. The organization also provides wine judging and consumer certifications.

So, on December 12th the Chapter will be celebrating its 10th Anniversary, a decade of wine education and appreciation. The Chapter has held over 100 tasting events and has provided members with the ability to taste nearly 1000 unique wines from 17 states and 19 countries. There have been tastings presented by national wineries such as J. Lohr and Reustle Prayer Rock Vineyards, wines presented by Italian Importers and even an Italian Wine School.

As the famed “mother vine” helped root a wine culture, so has the OIB Chapter performed in a similar manner. From its early beginning of only 2 members, the Chapter has helped spawn chapters in Southport, Shallotte, and Myrtle Beach. The coastal Carolinas now have over 300 members and provide the opportunity to attend an AWS tasting event four times a month. And so, it has been a truly remarkable decade and the Chapter now sets its sights on the next 10 years. Cheers to 10 years!