

Wine Awhile owners have fun with vino one glass at a time

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Photo by Jessica Johnson

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Anthony Pugh of Wine Awhile demonstrates how the WineStation works.

A vending machine does most of the work when it comes to tasting beverages at Mount Pleasant's Wine Awhile.

The WineStation, a machine about the size of a small dorm refrigerator, dispenses wine by the taste, half glass or a full glass, depending on the customer's desire.

Anthony Pugh said he and his wife, Rebecca, ordered the Napa wine machine for the S.C. Highway 41 shop around Thanksgiving 2008, and it's been drawing customers ever since.

"Wine is too good not to have fun with. I think the machine is just fun," Pugh said.

Residents from nearby neighborhoods gather in the shop during the evening hours sampling wine and hard-to-find brews. The machine has turned his shop into a bar -- minus a tender.

The WineStation has increased sales by 75 percent compared with sales during Wine Awhile's monthly wine tasting events, Pugh said.

"We have a wine tasting every single day," he said.

The machines are self-serve. Customers simply place money on a prepaid card and slide it into the machine, then select which wine they'd like to try. Prices are based on the cost of a full bottle. Recently, prices ranged from a little over a dollar for a taste, 1.25 ounces, to \$4.72 for a full glass of 2006 Shooting Star Aligote or \$12.50 for a glass of Testarossa Pinot Noir from California.

Once a bottle is opened, the machine reseals it with argon gas, preventing the normal process of oxidation that ruins a bottle of open wine in about three days, Pugh said.

In the WineStation, a bottle can last up to 60 days, though most bottles run dry within a week.

He uses two WineStations: one set to 52 degrees for white wine and another set to 59 degrees for red.

"It turns people on to wine the right way," Pugh said.

If all goes well, he hopes to expand Wine Awhile and add a wall of WineStations offering 48 wine varieties at once.

Pugh opened the store two years ago after spending more than a decade in the food and beverage industry. Most recently, he purchased wine for California Dreaming restaurant, where he learned to enjoy wine while sampling his purchases.

"Wine's become a passion. I absolutely love it," Pugh said.

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