

DIX HILLS

Winemaking Family Will Teach You How It's Done

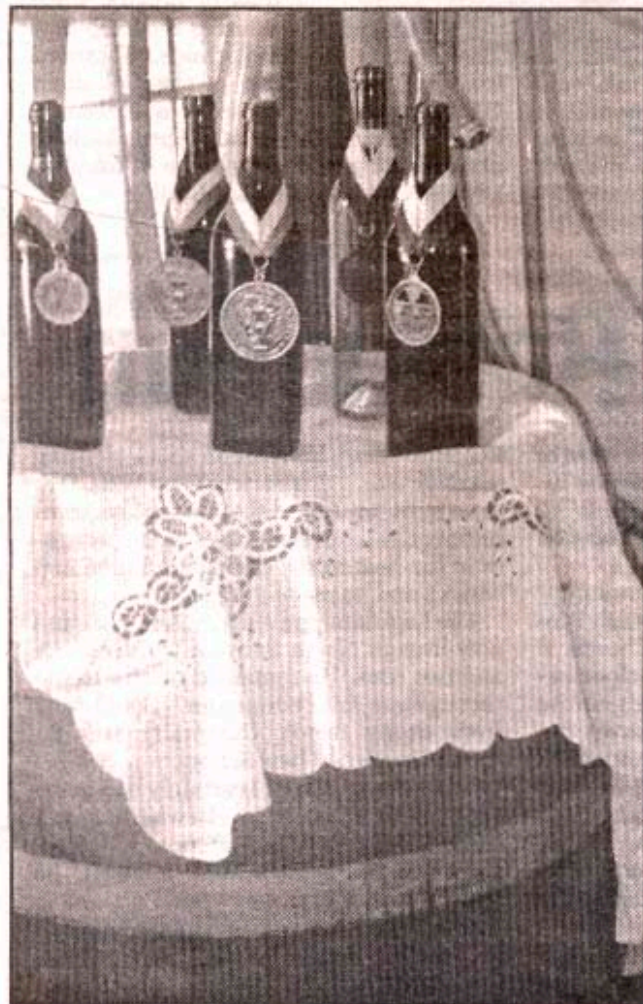
Hills grads open Cutchogue winery as a members-only educational center

By Tricia Arend

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Anyone who's ever been interested in the process of winemaking can learn about the process firsthand at the first-ever home winemaking vineyard on Long Island, thanks to two Half Hollow Hills graduates.

Bella Vita Vineyard in Cutchogue is a new home winemaking center where wine lovers and enthusiasts can receive a hands-on winemaking experience. For the cost of an annual membership, aficionados will learn how to do everything from picking the right grapes to bottling and corking the end product. Additionally, members will take two educational viticultural sessions and one wine tasting class.



Some of Bella Vita Vineyard's award-winning wines show of their medals.



Half Hollow Hills High School East graduates Lisa and Anthony Sannino recently opened the first home winemaking vineyard on Long Island. With them in their Cutchogue winery are their children, from left, Francesco, Ava Grace, Marissa and Miranda.

"We're offering an education based program. We're educating people from the vine to wine process. We're not selling wine, we're selling the complete education, including wine tasting," said Anthony Sannino, the co-owner and the center's leading winemaking instructor.

Bella Vita is the only vineyard that offers this process to its consumers on Long Island. Enthusiasts will begin in the vineyard in October, where they will crush and destem their own grapes. One to two weeks later, members will return to press and barrel their grapes. Later on in the year, members will clarify and stabilize the wine in the third session, and will bottle, cork and label their wine in the last session. The barrel will yield 23 cases, or 275 bottles, of wine.

Members can choose to make one of three red wines: Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon or Cabernet Franc. Co-owner and founder Lisa Sannino is also planning on offering a Rosé this season and wants to set up a program to produce sparkling wine by next year.

High school sweethearts and graduates in Half Hollow Hills East's Class of 1986, Lisa and Anthony are optimistic that their unique program will not only attract numerous members, but will thoroughly educate the public on the wine making process.

"Education is the key. That's what we're looking to give. Some members have never made wine before and they're just interested, and some people have but don't have the space for equipment or don't like the way it's coming out," Lisa said. "We don't just make them a barrel of wine, they have to do it themselves and learn and we'll be there to consult and teach them."

Member applications are due by September 10. There will be a wine makers' open house on September 8 from 12 p.m. to 3 p.m. where interested consumers can enjoy a tour of the vineyard.

"It's unique and different," Lisa said. "When you come here you'll feel like part of the family. Instead of shopping at a department store, you're shopping at a boutique. Everything is hands on."