

VITAL

Vital Winery launches non-profit wine label to help fund Better healthcare for vineyard, winery workers in Walla Walla Valley

*The community-driven project, led by Washington winemaker Ashley Trout, kicks off April 6
With first wine release and fund-raising charity dinner to benefit SOS Clinic in Walla Walla*

WALLA WALLA, Washington – Most wine regions in the United States depend heavily on seasonal workers in the vineyards and the wineries. Yet many of those workers don't have access to affordable healthcare.

Winemaker Ashley Trout has set out to do something about that in Washington State's Walla Walla Valley.

Trout recently launched Vital Wines, a community-driven, non-profit winery dedicated to providing better healthcare for vineyard and winery workers in the Walla Walla Valley. All proceeds from the sale of Vital Wines will go to SOS Health Services of Walla Walla, an urgent care facility that provides quality walk-in healthcare services to individuals without health insurance (or underinsured) in the Walla Walla Valley.

This is the first effort of its kind designed to support seasonal vineyard and winery workers in Washington's booming wine industry.

Vital Wines' first release in April will be a Rosé of Sangiovese from Seven Hills Vineyard, one of Walla Walla's most prestigious vineyards, followed by a red wine to be released in the fall. Vital Wines' inaugural 2015 vintage will total about 400 cases, Trout said.

The Vital Wines' project officially kicks off April 6 with a fund-raising celebration and dinner at Whitehouse-Crawford restaurant in downtown Walla Walla, Trout said. Information and tickets for the event are available online at www.vitalwinery.com and via the winery's Facebook page.

"The clinic serves many of our winery and vineyard employees throughout Walla Walla Valley," Trout said. "Most winery workers do not have health insurance due to the seasonal nature of their jobs and injuries or illness can cause great financial strain on them.

"It's critically important that we help them," she said. "Their work is vital to our valley. Our support is vital to their lives."

The state's wine industry has rallied around the project. Everything involved in the project, from grapes, barrels and corks to winemaking, production and marketing services, has been donated.

“The Vital project has been a force of community in the valley and around the state,” Trout said. “From fruit to lab work, corks to capsules, graphic design work to bottling – practically every ounce of these wines has been donated. The response has been stunning, absolute stunning.”

The SOS Clinic is a non-profit, bilingual, no questions asked, free health care clinic that relies on doctors who are about to retire and want to volunteer their time without a full-time commitment.

Funding from the Vital project will enable the clinic to continue to pay for doctors’ medical licenses, increase its hours of operation and perhaps add more specialty clinics such as chronic care, women’s clinics and diabetes education.

Wine is an estimated \$5 billion industry in Washington State. Since 2009, the WA wine industry has increased the total state economic impact of \$1.3 billion annually. By 2020, wine and wine industry related jobs in the Walla Walla Valley are projected to grow by nearly 48 percent to more than 8,900 jobs from the current 6,000.

The wine industry has grown through the help of thousands of seasonal employees, but many of whom do not have health care. In the valley, the average annual salary of each of these jobs is roughly \$17,000 per year, which makes monthly healthcare costs virtually out of reach even under the Affordable Care Act, Trout said.

About Vital Winery

Vital Winery is a community-driven, non-profit winery dedicated to providing better healthcare for vineyard and winery workers in the Walla Walla Valley. All proceeds from the sale of Vital Wines goes to SOS Health Services of Walla Walla.

Vital Winery has received donations from some of the best vineyards, bottling companies, distributors and service providers in the Pacific Northwest. The winery will launch in 2016 with one rose and one red wine. For information on Vital Winery and how to get involved in the project, and to see a list of donors, please visit www.vitalwinery.com and like the winery’s page of Facebook.

About SOS Health Services

SOS Health Services of Walla Walla is an urgent care facility that provides quality walk-in healthcare services to individuals without health insurance (or underinsured) in the Walla Walla Valley. SOS Health Services does not deny people access to services regardless of citizenship status or geographic location. For information, please see www.soshealthservices.com.

Media contact:

Bob Silver
Silver Strategic Communications for Vital Winery
bob@bobsilverpr.com
206-355-2993