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Cleavage Creek wine labels feature breast cancer survivors

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By MICHELLE LOCKE

Associated Press Writer

BERKELEY, Calif. (AP) A new line of wines saucily named Cleavage Creek and featuring models sporting discreet décolletage on the label has a surprising back story: the wines are part of fundraising campaign to fight breast cancer; the models are survivors of that disease.

“My goal was to honor their courage and inspire them,” said winery owner Budge Brown, who was moved to start the campaign after his wife of 48 years died of breast cancer.

Cleavage Creek wines, which cost from \$18 to \$50 a bottle, made their debut this month, with a first release of 2,000 cases.

“It’s a win-win,” said the 75-year-old Brown. “You make a contribution. You get a beautiful bottle of wine.”

Among the models featured is Pattie Daly Caruso, the face of the cabernet sauvignon label as well as a reserve chardonnay.

Caruso, a breast cancer survivor who is active in fundraising and awareness efforts, thinks the new campaign is a clever way to draw attention to the wine and the cause it supports.

"The truth is that this was just a natural," she said, noting that Brown's Napa Valley property has two hills with a creek running through, evocative of the name in a literal sense. "It's just been wonderful because he is giving 10 percent of the money right off the top to breast cancer research, and that to me is incredible."

At least some of the wine has been sold already. Caruso's daughter Quinn, an ad agency executive in Santa Monica, and son Carson, host of NBC TV's "Last Call with Carson Daly," have already put in orders.

The issue of wine and cancer has been in the news lately, with a recent study finding that all types of alcohol, including wine, add to the risk of developing breast cancer in women.

Caruso has seen those studies, but says "if we pick up a magazine or turn on TV there will be someone saying something about all the things that we drink except maybe water. I personally think that a couple of glasses of red wine are very good for you. I try to be very cautious and do the right thing, but red wine to me is, if not medicinal, pretty wonderful."

Cleavage Creek joins a number of wineries raising money for causes that strike close to home.

At Lookout Ridge Winery in Sonoma County, founder Gordon Holmes, whose wife has MS, donates wheelchairs to the Blackhawk-based Wheelchair Foundation. The program, which began with a chair donated for every case of Holmes' wine sold, has accelerated to a chair for every bottle, with several hundred donated so far, said spokesman Michael Coats.

Staglin Family Vineyard co-owners Shari and Garen Staglin, whose son has schizophrenia, are longtime fundraisers for research to fight that disease. They've raised more than \$35 million through annual music festivals at their Napa Valley winery and donate a portion of proceeds from their Salus wines.

Brown is promising to donate 10 percent of gross sales of Cleavage Creek wines, meaning wine donated to charity as well as sold.

One of his first donations was \$5,000 to the Breast Care Center of Sutter Medical Center of Santa Rosa. The money will go toward buying a MRI machine with superior detection technology for evaluating the size and extent of breast cancer.

“We are absolutely thrilled,” said Lisa Amador, center executive director.

The name Cleavage Creek isn't new. Wines were sold under that name by a different owner some years ago, although that campaign, which included marketing copy laced with double entendres, ran into criticism from some.

After the name went up for sale winery labels are routinely bought and sold Brown's daughter suggested buying.

“I looked at it and I thought about it for a while,” Brown said. “I liked the name and it fit the property I had in Napa. It just kind of came together.”

The new version of Cleavage Creek emphasizes the seven survivors featured on the labels and their stories,

Eventually, Brown hopes to be able to pinpoint “out-of-the-box people in need who are doing something that appears to be successful for a cure. That's my goal, to try and find a cure somewhere, I may not make it, but it won't be because I didn't try.”

On the Net:

<http://www.cleavagecreek.com>

<http://www.lookoutridge.com/>

<http://www.staglinfamily.com>

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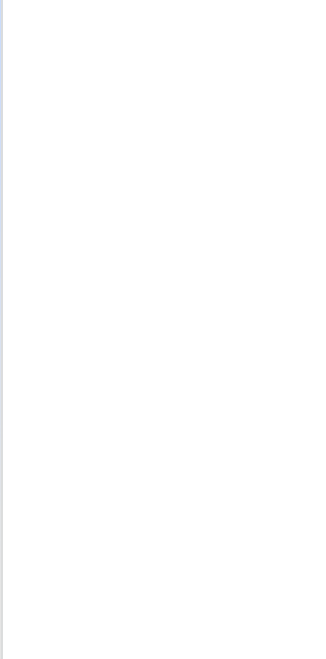
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