

Q&A

■ INTERVIEW
BY CINDY KIBBE

Autumn is a busy time for most winemakers, but it's an even busier time of year for LaBelle Winery in Amherst as it begins production of not only grape wine, but wines made from apple, blueberry, raspberry and even jalapeno peppers.

This autumn is especially hectic as winemaker Amy LaBelle, 38, who still puts in hours as a corporate attorney at Fidelity Investments in Merrimack, along with her husband Cesar Arboleda, 37 — LaBelle Winery's business manager and a former IT professional — and son Jackson, 2, welcome newborn son Lucas into the winemaking business.

■ **Q.** How did you get your start in the winemaking business?

A. In 2001, after I graduated from law school, I was on vacation that summer in Nova Scotia and took a side-trip to a winery that was making blueberry wine. I looked around this tiny little place

Winemaker Amy LaBelle



Amy LaBelle, right, and her husband Cesar operate LaBelle Winery in Amherst, which currently offers 16 different kinds of wine. (Photo by Cindy Kibbe)

and said, "Oh my gosh! I think that I'm supposed to be doing this."

When I got home, I purchased many books about how to make wine and I read them all. By the end of August, I made my first batch of blueberry wine in my little brownstone in Boston.

During that year, I made many gallons of wine — I made apple, I made cranberry.

■ **Q.** When did you start commercial production?

A. 2005 was our first commercial season. For most of the first two seasons, we partnered with Alyson's Orchard in Walpole. We made tons of apple wine that year — 400 gallons.

2007 was the first year we made wine here [in Amherst]. Now we're up to just under 3,000 gallons. That's actually mid-size for a New Hampshire winery. It's very small on a world scale.

We currently have 16 flavors out. That's a lot to manage for a small winery.

■ **Q.** How does New Hampshire's state-run liquor operation affect your distribution plans?

A. The Liquor Commission here is kind of interesting. They carry us in 12 of their stores, but they make that decision. The winery association has been working with the commission trying to get a little more exposure in the stores and a little better shelf placement.

I think the one thing that will really make the difference is customer pull-through when they start requesting our wines at the liquor stores that don't carry some of our other kinds.

■ **Q.** How does a new winery get into a grocery store like Hannaford or Shaw's?

A. That's really hard. For us, it certainly involves decisions on how we want to be perceived, what stores we think match up with our marketing and our branding.

Thus far, we haven't wanted to be in grocery stores because we've been focusing on more of the boutique stores. That's not to say we won't expand out further as our customer base gets bigger.

It also is a factor of capacity and production. You cannot run out.

■ **Q.** What are your plans for the future?

A. We're going to spend some time this winter and revamp our business plan. We have to decide if we're going to stay here, or if we want to go down to a site on [Route] 101 or someplace a little more "retail-y." And whether or not we want to incorporate other aspects like weddings. That's a big decision that changes the flavor and the feel of the business.

We're honestly trying hard to do that all-American dream. We have such an opportunity to grow here in New Hampshire. We love it here. **NHBR**

Read tasting notes of some of LaBelle's New Hampshire-made wine at NHBRNetwork.com.

For more information and to register for an upcoming open house wine tasting at LaBelle Winery, visit labellewinerynh.com



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Employees may be pilfering a lot more than notepads and pens while at work. In an OfficeTeam survey, **29 percent of employees polled said that a co-worker has taken credit for their idea**, but 51 percent of them said they did nothing in response.

A Grant Thornton survey of U.S. chief financial officers and senior comptrollers found that **55 percent said their companies are reducing bonuses and 26 percent said their company is reducing its 401(k) match**. In terms of pricing pressure, 77 percent are most concerned about the price of employee benefits, while 31 percent are concerned about insurance, and another 30 percent about raw material costs. Although 30 percent are concerned about rising energy costs, that's less than the 35 percent who were expecting rising energy prices just six months ago.

Workers who want to update their Facebook friends and Twitter followers during business hours may want to think twice if they want to stay in good standing with their employers. Some 54 percent of chief information officers interviewed in a recent Robert Half Technology survey said **their firms completely prohibit employees from visiting social networking sites while at work**.

A Citibank survey of 500 small businesses with 100 or fewer employees found that **86 percent said they have not found social networking sites such as Twitter, LinkedIn and Facebook useful for developing leads**. However, 42 percent said they have made greater use of company Web sites to generate leads and sales, and 10 percent said they do turn to expert blogs for advice and information.

More than 80 percent of top economists believe that the recession that started almost two years ago is finally over, but **most don't expect meaningful improvement in jobs, credit or housing for months to come**, according to a survey by the National Association for Business Economics.



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