

# Local woman uses wine jelly business to help mentally ill

BY PAGE H. GIFFORD  
CORRESPONDENT



Courtesy photo of Carolyn Herbert

Carolyn Herbert's 92-year-old mother inspired her wine jelly business. Herbert wanted to do something nice for her mother and went online to look up wine jelly recipes. Her mother, who enjoys half a glass of wine, became the tester for Herbert's wine jelly. Then her son suggested a jelly made from beer and her friends encouraged her to go further with her products. Herbert built a business.

However, the business soon became less about the product itself, which she enjoys creating, and became more a crusade for mental illness awareness when her son had mental health issues as a result of injuries suffered in an accident. Herbert saw an opportunity to combine a growing business with helping those who are in need of jobs and who experience ongoing mental health issues.

"Did I ever think I would have a business – heavens no – I was a school administrator in special education for years," Herbert said. What started with an idea to please her mother turned into something Herbert never dreamed of when she made her first batch of wine jelly.

The jelly-making process is tedious and has to meet certain standards before being allowed on the market.

"There are recipes out there for making wine jelly but you cannot sell them because of the alcohol content," Herbert said. She began research and development a year ago and now is in the process of expanding her business. She has 10 flavors thus far and as ideas flow, more will come. Each has a subtle fruity flavor with a hint of wine taste. The Pear Pinot Grigio can be used in cooking

or to enhance the taste of something as simple as an English muffin or cream cheese and crackers. Among the flavors are Apple Merlot, Blackberry Sauvignon, Orange Pineapple Chardonnay, and even Lager. For the winter holidays, she features specialty jellies such as Pineberry Julep and for summer Orange Mojito.

In order to meet state standards, the jelly's alcohol content must be reduced so that it contains less than 0.5 percent alcohol. It must pass alcohol testing at Virginia Tech and the Virginia Department of Agriculture. Herbert said the two-day rigorous and costly procedure to remove the alcohol has to be done with every flavor. It is more of a challenge reducing the content in stout.

In a six-hour day Herbert produces 20 cases of 12 jars each. "I could do 40 cases in a day but then I would be no good for the rest of the week," she laughed.

Herbert believes all the hoops she needs to jump through are worth it. "These kids with mental health issues get into trouble and are often incarcerated. It makes their lives more difficult and it is harder to secure a job," she said. Herbert has become a saving grace for them and mothers like herself. She gives them support and hope and a "shot at life," she said, by hiring those with hidden disabilities like her own son. She has promised jobs to five young men but will hire others to help in the business.

"I am not the most creative person so I let the young men who work for me, like my son, come up with ideas and run with them," she said. The young men take an idea from concept to actual product. They learn to work as part of a team, to help build a growing business and to take pride in their work and the products they make. Herbert savors the moments in which she sees personal accomplishments and their contributions to the business. For her, these are milestones.

"It is the right thing to do," she said. "It is all about my boys. They now have a purpose."

The business is not about profits but giving a hand to those in need and understanding how to help in different ways. Herbert eventually wants to apply for non-profit status. She is currently a part of Virginia's Finest and has her products in local area gift shops. She buys and sells locally and believes supporting Fluvanna County is an added benefit.

For more information, visit <https://herbertswinejelly.com/> or contact Herbert at 757-870-8085.