

Oregon wineries celebrate season, throw open gates to public tours

Long weekend a great chance to sample, shop

By DAN DUFF

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The long Thanksgiving weekend is the perfect time to tour Oregon's wine country and, over the years, it has become a tradition for many families.

The wine tours are designed to be family-oriented, a chance to travel through the colorful fall countryside, maybe check out a Christmas tree farm or two and do a little Christmas shopping while you're at it. Winery visits are also an opportunity to taste, and maybe buy, some hard-to-find wines; taste new '93 and '94 releases and barrel taste some '95s.

Besides wines, the tasting rooms sell wine gift packs, wine glasses, cork pullers, monogrammed T-shirts and sweatshirts, decorated food gifts and baskets, wine posters, hazelnuts, wreaths and much more.

The wineries are open Friday, Saturday and Sunday, unless otherwise noted. Admission is generally free, but some wineries charge a small tasting fee. Each winery entertains in its own way. Most tasting rooms offer free snacks and many sell hot foods. Stalwart picnickers are welcome at most wineries.

Remember to always choose a designated driver before setting out on a wine tour. Most wineries offer free coffee and other nonalcoholic drinks to drivers. Those little half-ounce tastes do add up.

Tasting fees, hours and entertainment vary at each winery. When in doubt call ahead.

Here's a list of wineries scheduled to be open this weekend:

Washington County

Holiday Wine Tour & Open House presented by the Washington County Winery Association; 11 a.m.-5 p.m. Pick up a passport at one of the six wineries and visit four of the six to receive an ornament and be entered in a drawing for a set of monogrammed glasses.

Raffle offers 12-case wine cellars

Still debating if you're going to take in the Washington County Winery Association's Thanksgiving weekend festivities? Here's something that might make up your mind: Oregon's first-ever wine raffle.

Imagine that! You could win a wine cellar. Better yet, you can sample what you just might be lucky enough to win.

Volunteers will be on hand Nov. 24-26 at Ponzi, Oak Knoll, Tualatin, Cooper Mountain, Laurel Ridge and Montinore vineyards to sell raffle tickets.

All proceeds of the association-sponsored raffle will go to Community Action Organization, a nonprofit, community-based agency that helps the economically disadvantaged in Washington County by providing for basic needs while promoting long-term self-sufficiency.

Tickets are \$5 each and are also available by calling Community Action at 648-6646.

Three cellars of premium wine have been donated by the Washington County Winery Association. That means three winners each will receive a cellar of 12 cases of a variety of wines.

The drawing takes place during Community Action's 10th Annual Mardi Gras Feb. 17 at 11 p.m. in Montgomery Park.

