

# Long Island Business NEWS

Where Business Gets Down to Business

SMALLBIZ

10A LONG ISLAND BUSINESS NEWS APRIL 2-8, 2010 WWW.LIBN.COM

## Restaurateur pushing local wine, one keg at a time

By AMBROSE CLANCY

Somewhere outside the Italian city of Verona, Kurt Bohlsen and his brother Michael stopped for a meal at a country trattoria.

Co-owners of five Long Island restaurants, the Bohlsen brothers were touring Italy to test drive cuisines. They ordered wine, served from a pitcher.

Delicious, Kurt said, asking where it came from. The waiter pointed to a keg in the corner and then out the window at rows of grapevines stretching away.

Jump to New Years Eve 2009, when Verace, the brother's newest venture on Islip's Main Street, served revelers North Fork wine by the glass and carafe, all tap-pulled from their own kegs.

Verace is still the only restaurant on the Island that serves wine-by-the-tap from kegs, but Bohlsen is considering installing systems in his other eateries.

Although the 50 stainless steel reusable kegs and the tap system costs about \$10,000, Bohlsen is confident the method will soon pay for itself and slash wine costs drastically.

Serving wine-by-the-glass from bottles adds on cost, since opened bottles go bad and have to be discarded, said Paulo Villela, beverage manger for the Bohlsen group.

"You either throw it out or serve a bad glass of wine," Villela said.

Wine drawn from a keg, on the other hand, admits no oxygen, which kills wine over time.

Customers catch a break by paying about \$9 for a glass of quality North Fork, Italian or upstate tap wine at Verace, rather than the usual \$12 to \$15 for glasses poured from wine bottles, Bohlsen said.

And savings don't just come with wine-by-the-glass. Serving house wines by the liter and half liter from keg to



**TAP DANCE:** Verace hostess Melissa Corke and the Islip restaurant's wine taps. Bulk wine avoids spoilage and saves on corks and bottling, giving customers a price break on wine by the glass or carafe.

carafe eliminates bottle costs, which can add up to \$3 to the price of a bottle of wine, said Richard Olsen-Harbach, the winemaker for Peconic's Raphael Vineyards.

In addition to being poured at Verace, Raphael now uses

tap wine in its tasting rooms, after the winemaker told ownership it was silly to pay to bottle and label wine just to move it 20 feet upstairs for tastings.

But not everyone is jumping on the tap wine bandwagon. Charles Massoud, owner of Aquebogue's Paumanok Vineyards, said the cost of kegs and setting up systems can be prohibitive and many restaurants are steering clear of yet one more cost while navigating the current perils of the economy.

Massoud said if restaurants know what they're doing and are careful, serving wine by the glass doesn't necessarily result in bottles going bad. He also wondered about the cost of sanitizing kegs every time they've been emptied before refilling at the winery.

"The green aspect has merit," Massoud said, with restaurants most likely saving money by doing away with bottles, corks and cardboard cases.

"But I don't see a real advantage for us yet," he added. "There's been no significant demand."

Veteran restaurateur John Tunney, owner of Huntington's Honu Kitchen and other Island restaurants, said the concept can work, if restaurants act responsibly.

"You can't have short cuts with your systems, especially controlling the taps and the temperatures," Tunney said, adding that the front-end costs will give restaurants pause.

"One great advantage is getting rid of all those bottles. The next step is to see if the public adopts the concept of wine with no bottle or label."

Quality tap wine has made inroads in many spots across the country, particularly on the West Coast, Tunney said. For example, taps received a Manhattan seal of approval last spring when celebrity chef Daniel Boulud introduced keg wine at one of his high-end establishments.

"It's still a cutting-edge concept," Tunney said.

Ambrose Clancy can be reached at [ambrose.clancy@libn.com](mailto:ambrose.clancy@libn.com).