

Minority winemakers emerge in Calif.

Entrepreneurs making big strides in traditionally white industry

NAPA, Calif. (AP) - Rolando Herrera washed dishes, broke rocks and sometimes slept in his car in his struggle to become a winemaker.

Naming his wine was easy: Mi Sueno, my dream.

Herrera, whose chardonnay was poured at President Bush's first state dinner with Mexican President Vicente Fox, is unusual. The harsh reality is that at many vineyards, minorities are still more likely to be running tractors than wineries. But, slowly, change is coming as Hispanics, Blacks and Asians stake their claim to wine country.

"We're seeing more doors open," said Sandra Gonzalez, president of Vino con Vida, a wine public relations firm specializing in the Hispanic market.

Earlier this year a handful of Black wine producers formed a trade group, with the goal of raising their profile in the predominantly white industry.

"They're curious that there is an African-American vintners' association; they never believed that there was an African-American market," said Ernest Bates, co-owner of Bates Creek Winery and a member of the newly formed Association of African-American Vintners.

"Once we tell them that there is a market, there is tremendous interest."

Herrera got interested in

the wine business as a teenager.

A dishwashing job at a high-end restaurant introduced him to the complex relationship between wine and food. The summer before his senior year in high school, he got work making a rock wall for vintner Warren Winiarski's new house.

It turned out to be a lucky break. At summer's end, he was offered a \$6-an-hour job at Winiarski's Stag's Leap winery as a "cellar rat."

"That's where our dream began," Herrera recalled. "Who would have thought that someday we'd be able to afford a tank or a barrel or even grapes?"

Indeed, getting into the wine business is expensive - a key deterrent to minority entrepreneurs with less access to capital. And, as newcomers, minorities are also less likely to have family or other networking connections.

Still, some believe minority winemakers may be in the best position to reach a so far mostly untapped potential market of wine drinkers. Surveys show few minorities are drinking wine and the industry has done little to reach out to ethnic consumers.

"The wine guys really have not done that much marketing to the Asian-American population," said Greg Chew, co-founder of DAE Advertising in San Francisco.

Chew is developing a national association of Asian-American wine consumers. "The whole idea is to welcome the diverse nature of wineries and viticulture and really to validate the purchasing power of the Asian-American and the Asian segments," he said.

With surveys showing only a fraction of the U.S. population as a whole drinks wine - annual per capita consumption is about 2 gallons compared to about 15 gallons for France and Italy - there is a push to reach out to new audiences.

"We've kind of run out of the wine drinkers," said black winemaker Mac McDonald, owner of Vision Cellars in Sonoma County. "If we are to increase sales and market shares, then we need to market to the whole big world."

That doesn't mean that minority winemakers want to make "Black," "Hispanic" or "Asian" wine. While they would like to sell to their own communities, they don't want to limit sales to any one group. The idea is to use what they know to help get a message across.

"Not to say, you got to buy my wine because I'm an African-American," said McDonald, "but to buy my wine because it's a high quality."

Creating high quality wines and running a successful business isn't easy, though.

McDonald only began working full-time as a winemaker a few years ago. For years, he had made wine in his garage and paid the bills with a day job at Pacific Gas and Electric.

Herrera's story is similar. Money was so tight when he started out that sometimes he and his brothers, who help with Mi Sueno, would sleep in the car to save money.

Although Mi Sueno hopes to sell 1,800 cases this year, the business is still challenging. In addition to his Mi Sueno responsibilities, Herrera works as a winemaker at another vineyard, as well as a private consultant and as director of winemaking for Paul Hobbs Consulting.

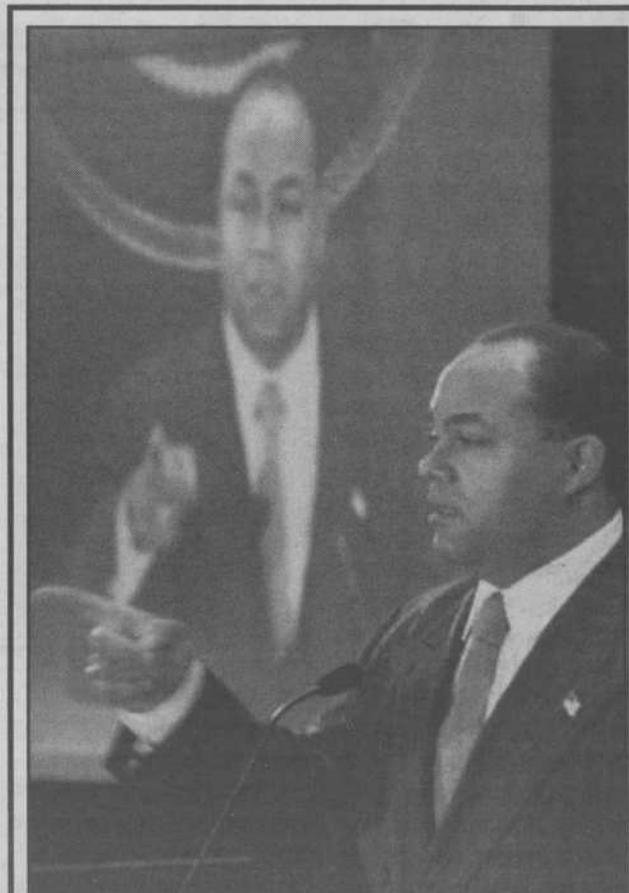
Herrera doesn't have a lot of land or equipment; he buys his grapes and has them crushed at other wineries. But he does have a small warehouse stacked floor to ceiling with barrels of hand-crafted wines.

Some belong to his clients and some are his own pinot noir, chardonnay and cabernet sauvignon, priced at \$35 to \$60 a bottle.

Another man might spend time looking around the warehouse and reflecting on the long, hard journey it took to get there.

Not Herrera.

"No," he said, laughing at the idea. "I look around and think about all the work we have to do!"



POINTED RESPONSE

Federal Communications Commission Chairman Michael Powell fields a question during a news conference at the FCC in Washington on Wednesday. Powell said he wants to promote local radio and television content in response to criticism that his agency's newly relaxed media ownership limits will hurt diversity and help large media conglomerates.

Dems move money into Boston banks

Special to Sentinel-Voice

The Democratic Party has deposited \$7 million in five Boston banks, including two owned by minorities, as part of its effort to ensure that the city's businesses and diverse communities benefit from the 2004 presidential convention.

The Democratic National Convention Committee recently announced the deposit of \$2 million each in the two minority-owned institutions - OneUnited Bank and the Asian-American Bank - and \$1 million each in Fleet Boston Financial, Citizens Bank and Sovereign Bank.

"When we chose Boston to host the convention in 2004, we made a commitment to be partners with the communities and the businesses of Boston and what we are doing today is a step in that direction," said the committee's chief executive officer, Rod O'Connor.

The two minority banks are based in Boston, as is Fleet. Sovereign is based in Philadelphia and Citizens in Providence, R.I.

Many black leaders have expressed concern that the convention would only benefit Boston's white business establishment.

Boston City Councilor Chuck Turner, who is black, said the committee's announcement was "a good symbolic step forward."

But, he said, "it should not be interpreted as a sign that the concerns that were raised about racism in Boston and the inclusion of business people of color in the convention are not still legitimate and appropriate."

The convention will take place from July 26-29.

Survey: Minority presence in TV newsrooms falls

DALLAS (AP) - In just two years, the percentage of minorities in television newsrooms nationwide has dropped from 25 percent to 18 percent, according to an annual survey.

Leaders of three groups of journalists, speaking recently at the National Association of Black Journalists' national convention in Dallas, called the decline highly alarming and pledged to work together to increase minority participation in television and radio newsrooms.

"We do view this as a serious problem," said Barbara Cochran, president of the Radio-Television News Directors Association. "We've always worked to promote diversity ... but we think this calls for a redoubled effort."

Cochran cited an annual survey conducted by the radio-television news directors association and Ball State

University, in Muncie, Ind.

The 2003 survey found that the minority work force in television news dropped to 18 percent, down from 21 percent last year and 25 percent the year before. That compares with minorities' roughly 30 percent share of the U.S. population.

Ernest Sotomayor, president of Unity: Journalists of Color, a consortium of four minority journalist associations, could not explain the reason for the declining numbers. "We don't have enough information," he said. "That really is placing us in a crisis and it's got to be dealt with in that way."

"Part of our effort is to get better information from the industry as a whole. We can't understand what kind of progress we're making if we don't really know where we're at right now."

To that end, the radio-tele-

vision news directors and Unity - which includes Black, Hispanic, Asian-American and American Indian journalists - plan a diversity summit to develop goals and explore research needs, officials said. A timetable for the summit has not been set.

The Black journalists association will also work with broadcast news directors to help advertise and fill internships.

Condace Pressley, president of the Black journalists' association, said both groups will benefit from the effort.

The survey also found that minority television news directors fell to 6.6 percent from 9.2 percent a year ago. The number of minorities in television news actually increased, but not as quickly as overall staff rose.

It was conducted in the fourth quarter of 2002 among all 1,421 operating,

nonsatellite television stations and a random sample of 1,490 radio stations.

In radio, the minority work force represented 6.5 percent in 2003, down from 8 percent in 2002. The proportion of minority radio news directors inched down to 5 percent from 5.1 percent.

The proportion of Blacks in television news has fallen steadily over the last decade, from 10.1 percent in 1994 to 8.4 percent in 2003. In radio, blacks represent 4.8 percent of the work force, up from 4.1 percent last year but down from 5.7 percent in 1994.

Blacks fare even worse in broadcast news management, representing only 0.9 percent of TV news directors and 2.5 percent of radio news directors. In 1994, 1.6 percent of TV news directors and 5.4 percent of radio news directors were Black, according to the annual survey.

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