

The Standard

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Winemaker goes from defusing mines to making wine

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Colin Ferguson went from defusing landmines to tending vines.

Cattail Creek Estate Winery's new winemaker spent three years with the Canadian Armed Forces as a peacekeeper.

His time as a military engineer with the 1 Combat Engineer Regiment took him on a six-month tour of war-torn Kosovo in 1999. There, Ferguson spent his days checking streets, fields and bridges for landmines and other explosives.

Luckily, he never found any.

But it was the lure of the vines that really blasted their way into Ferguson's life, and prompted him to leave the military.

Today, he digs into the earth to care for grapevines.

"My mom's very happy," Ferguson said with a laugh about making the switch from dangerous war zones to winemaking.

Wine appreciation came naturally to Ferguson, who was born in Halifax and spent most of his childhood in Stratford.

His father, Brian, who worked for Ontario Hydro, taught his three children all about appreciating a fine vintage and good food.

Before enlisting in the army, Ferguson worked for a chef in Stratford and planned on spending his life making fine cuisine, but was talked out of it because of the long hours.

He went to Lakehead University in Thunder Bay to take engineering, but left school to join the army.

It was while serving abroad that Ferguson's parents, Brian and Kathy, recommended he work in Bordeaux, France, and give winemaking a try.

The couple happened upon Chateau Tifayne in Cote de Castillon Bordeaux while on vacation, and hooked up their eldest child with a job as a cellar hand.

Ferguson, 36, ended up spending two years in France, learning everything about winemaking from hand harvesting to working in the cellar.

After returning to Canada, he enrolled in Niagara College's winery and viticulture technician program.

While a student, Ferguson started making wine under Derek Barnett of Lailey Vineyard in Niagara-on-the-Lake and spent five years there before moving on to the job as assistant winemaker at Jordan's Flat

Rock Cellars under Marelize Beyers.

Ten days into the job at the family-owned Cattail Creek in Niagara-on-the-Lake, Ferguson said he hopes to put his personal stamp on the young winery on Concession 6.

Ferguson said he wants to make delicate, Old World style wines with complexity, such as the ones he made at Lailey.

"We'll slowly bring in my new vision," Ferguson said.

Roselyn Dyck-Cieszkowski, whose family owns Cattail, said Ferguson was a good-fit for her winery, and was impressed by his resume.

Dyck-Cieszkowski said she welcomes any changes to the wine Ferguson might bring.

Ferguson replaces Tatjana Cuk, who had a clean style of winemaking that focused on fruit.

The winery, which opened in 2007, produces 6,000 cases per year.

The Dyck family has been growing grapes in Niagara-on-the- Lake for more than 50 years and still sells much of the harvest from its 100 acres to local wineries.

In other Vines & Wine news: The Niagara College Teaching winery is offering wine seminars, tastings and demonstrations every weekend throughout the summer.

The half-hour classes are Saturdays at 1 p. m., 2 p. m., 3 p. m. and 4 p. m.

The cost is \$8 to \$10 per person each session. Reservations are not required.

For more information go to www.nctwinery.ca.

The teaching winery is located at 135 Taylor Rd. in Niagara-on-the-Lake.

Have news on the grape and wine industry to share? Contact Monique at mbeech@stcatharinesstandard.ca. Follow on twitter/[vinesandwine](https://twitter.com/vinesandwine)