

Meet Your Columbia REA Board of Directors



Jay DeWitt
Owner, Dumas Station Wines
Columbia REA Board of Directors
District 3

“My first wine experiences were leaning against tractor tires with farmers, so that’s just what feels right to me. That’s the experience I want to create for people.”

– Jay DeWitt

Jay DeWitt is all about the cooperative spirit...

That’s with a lower-case c.

He learned about hard work as a farm kid growing up in the Waitsburg area, and he learned how to make great wine from local grape growers and winemakers all around the Valley. Jay has spent a lifetime working with and learning from others, and that’s just the way he likes it.

“I grew up hoeing asparagus and cleaning out grain elevators...that sort of thing. A proper old-fashioned upbringing,” shares Jay with a smile. “There was no wine drinking in my house growing up. I never had any intention of becoming a winemaker.”

But one glass of wine can indeed change a life.

“I graduated from WSU and my first job was in Northern California advising farmers. One night in a café in Napa somebody poured me some Cabernet Sauvignon and I just loved it. That was probably the first real glass of wine I’d ever had.

“Since then...1982, I suppose, I’ve

enjoyed wine almost everyday. It has become a lifelong hobby and pursuit.”

In 1987, Jay and his wife, Debbie, decided to move back to the Walla Walla area so their two children could grow up around extended family. But there was also another reason.

“If you’ve lived out of the area, you realize that most of the world doesn’t operate with any sort of collective values of the kind that exist around here. And so, my life has been really good because of that.”

With the agrarian lifestyle in his bones, and an Agronomy degree in his pocket, Jay went back to work on the farm with his father...right about the time a new crop was starting to make inroads into wheat country.

“When more people started growing grapes in the area, I was naturally drawn to it and I started helping some people out,” recalls Jay. “One thing led to another and pretty soon I was growing grapes with other winemakers in the area, and part of that is you go and taste barrels with the customer. I got a good education on how to handle

the harvest, when to pick the grapes, what barrels taste good. You kind of get an idea of what you like.”

It didn’t take long for Jay to reach a personal tipping point, and pour himself entirely into wine-making.

“At some point, I just decided that I had to make some of my own, because for one thing, I couldn’t spend 30 dollars a day on wine. Once you’ve had good wine it’s hard to go back,” he laughs.

“That first year, Debbie and I took 120 pounds of grapes and moved our dining room table out, and de-stemmed them all by hand and smashed them up in a big garbage pail, and let them ferment, and it was actually pretty good!”

“The second year, we bought a few more...had two friends that were in the project with me. The third year we made 10 barrels. I had a dozen friends in on that project and we all split that wine. By then I pretty much decided I was going to give it a shot.”

That’s when Dumas Station was born.



“In 2003, we decided to do it professionally. I recruited a friend, Doug Harvey, to be a partner, and we started Dumas Station Wines. I already owned this property. It was an unused building, so we cleaned it up and mostly used materials from the property, which was an old Apple Orchard with a train stop running right through the middle of it. Our tasting room bar is made from planks taken from the old loading dock. “It’s really been fun to take all these old abandoned, derelict buildings and make them into something nice to look at from the highway,” Jay adds with his finely honed understated delivery, deflecting all credit for creating something out of nothing.

“We have a very loyal wine club following, and we sell as much wine as we need to. We always thought we would have a tasting room in Walla Walla, but when the time came, there were already like 75 of them so we decided to just go ahead and market from this location. And it has worked out fine.”

This will be Jay’s 21st year making wine.

“We’re doing about 4,000 cases a year now.”

Jay, who is coming up on 6 years as a Director for Columbia REA, brings the same unassuming, unflappable approach to his work on the Board.

“The Board has not been exactly

what I expected, he admits. “The knowledge that you have to acquire to do a proper job can be a little bit intimidating. It really takes a couple years before you’re familiar with the terms, and understand how the grid works.

“I’ve really enjoyed learning about all of that. Politics are extremely important to us. Regulation is extremely important to us. Financial management, of course, and worker safety and personnel issues. It’s a surprisingly complicated business.”

Jay admits that a greater understanding has only confirmed for him that there will never be any shortage of complexity from the Board perspective.

“We are a small part of a world situation that is very concerned with the future of energy. There is a lot of pressure to decrease fossil fuel consumption, and electric cars will be part of our future. There will be programs to subsidize electric cars, and that will be a huge load increase for us to manage. If even 20 percent of homes are plugging in their cars when they get home...many of our neighborhoods do not have the infrastructure to manage that kind of increase right now. So we’ve got to be successful in balancing the load.

“One way we can hold down costs is to incentivize the spreading out of power use over a 24-hour period. You

just can’t go in and upsize everything. It costs too much money.

“These are the kinds of conversations...about infrastructure and load-balancing, that we need to be having now. And we are doing that.”

With all of that in mind, Jay is thankful to be part of a community that also understands the cooperative spirit...Capital C, and lower-case c.

“I love the concept of cooperative ventures. We are so fortunate in this community to have a couple of really good ones. A lot of times co-ops are not well run. I spent nine years on the Northwest Grain Growers Board. I enjoyed being on that board as well.”

These are great communities around here because there are so many people that are willing to invest a small part of themselves in whatever project they want to take interest in. We are so happy that we get to live here and got the chance to raise our kids here,” Jay adds proudly.

“Our wine reaches out to the whole area now...kind of like the REA does, so being on the Board is another way for me to give back to the community in a way that I feel I can be helpful.

“I’m just happy to be here,” says Jay, as he looks out at the beautiful hills and green grass surrounding Dumas Station Wines. “I had to move away for a while but I got back as fast as I could.”