



November 2017



Dear Friends of Democracy

With sadness, we are sending you our farewell newsletter. Democracy Vineyards will close at the end of Thanksgiving weekend and will not re-open in 2018. We have been struggling with this decision for the better part of the past year. The reasons behind this decision are many and we feel we owe our loyal patrons an explanation for this outcome.

There is an old saying in the real estate biz that the three most important factors affecting any property are location, location and location. When we bought the property, we thought that its location just off Rt. 29 near the village of Lovingson was an ideal spot to site a winery and tasting room, assuming it would attract a sufficient customer base to support the business. Unfortunately, most of the wine tasting traffic has developed on the western side of the county along the Rt. 151 corridor where it is more convenient for customers to visit several wineries, breweries and cideries in rapid succession.

Over the years, we tried an array of ways to spread the word about Democracy Vineyards and its wines – from an aggressive wholesaling and festival schedule, to advertising via print media as well as Facebook, Groupon, YELP, Constant Contact and various wine pass programs, to promotions of music and events at the tasting room. We paid the state of Virginia \$900 a year for the two small signs on Rt. 29 pointing to the winery that were often overlooked by travelers. We tried placing additional banners at the intersection of Rt. 29 and the turnoff to our winery on Rt. 718 [which were repeatedly confiscated by VDOT.] Despite all these efforts to publicize Democracy Vineyards, tasting room visits and wine sales remained insufficient to sustain, let alone grow, the business.

Was the wine bad? We don't believe so. For years, we received many compliments about our wines and our fair share of wine competition awards. But friendly reviews and shiny medals mean little if they don't result in increased sales.

While some things were beyond our control, there were plenty of missteps and misjudgments of our own making. We have come to realize that most successful winery owners make their own wines or have extended family and/or partners on which they can rely to spread the work of a complex enterprise. We did not attempt to make our own wine [which might have been a frightening experience anyway]. After we lost our in-house winemaker in 2016, we tried contract winemaking which, other than our limited

edition apple wine, proved disappointingly unsuccessful. Without any children, siblings or investors to impose upon, it was perhaps foolish to think that two people could manage all the moving pieces that a winemaking and selling business entails. It is particularly challenging when one of those two people is tied to a full time job 150 miles away because it provides necessary health insurance for the family.

We've also come to suspect that we may be the Chevy Nova of the Virginia wine industry. Some of you may recall the classic example of a poorly named product in Chevrolet's Nova which confounded the company with abysmal sales in Mexico – until it was pointed out that “No va” means “it doesn't go” in Spanish. History buffs that we are, we thought it would be fun to decorate the tasting room with our collection of historic and international campaign stuff and play off that theme in our name, Democracy. It didn't occur to us that some folks would have a negative reaction to that name until we encountered that repeatedly at wine festivals and from comments by some customers. By then, it was too late and too costly to re-brand.

None of the foregoing diminishes the many blessings we have received from our association with Democracy Vineyards. It has been a joy to work with some wonderful staff over the years and we want to give special recognition to Ed Martin, our first vineyard manager, who built us a great vineyard and Ben Margulies, our former winemaker, who made some great wines. We want to extend a particular shout out to Susan Lineberry who, in addition to her regular tasting room duties, took on responsibilities to manage schedules, organize and publicize events, and undertake the proverbial “such other duties as assigned” willingly and with an amazing can-do attitude.

We will always be grateful to the volunteers who came out to help us at festivals year in and year out. Wine festivals are often hot, cold, or rainy and sometimes even snowy. The people willing to spend hours pouring wine for us with smiles on their faces and a friendly attitude toward all – no matter how “overserved” they may be - meant the world to us.



In hosting many musicians, we discovered that there is an extraordinary amount of superb musical talent in Virginia. It was especially discouraging when we were unable to provide these artists with the kind of audience they deserved. While we may not get to enjoy their music at the tasting room, we look forward to being their fans “on the road” in the future.

Our involvement in the Virginia wine industry introduced us to countless creative, hard-working, always gracious and helpful Virginia vintners, retailers and associated professionals. We learned a lot from them, shared many good laughs and frustrations and have a very deep appreciation for the value that they add to Virginia's economy.

Perhaps in letting go of Democracy Vineyards we will be freed to enjoy much more of what Virginia viticulture has to offer!

Finally, we offer our sincerest gratitude to our customers for their interest in our wines and for sharing a part of their lives with us. It was always our desire to offer a comfortable, pleasant environment in which people could enjoy some good Virginia wine. We hope we provided a few good memories to those who took us up on that offer.

We've got some entertaining events in our final month – a painting party and one more Democracy After Hours on November 4, a party with the Kiwanis of Arlington on November 18, our Arlington open house on November 19 and a Thanksgiving weekend featuring songmeister Pete Farnham on November 25 and Ray VanWagner with his easy listening tunes on November 26. We hope we'll have a chance to thank many of you for your patronage in person!



And we aren't totally severing our association with Virginia wine. Jim has happily returned to his roots as a representative for the Virginia Wine Council before the General Assembly – demonstrating that you may take the boy out of lobbying but you can't take the lobbyist out of the boy.

As people of faith, we take seriously the saying that when God closes one door, He opens another. We'll see what doors He may invite us through in the future.

We'll keep our Facebook page up for the next several months as our license runs through next June and we may host some small events in the spring. Until then, remember – Democracy is about choices – in our case, red, white or apple wine!

Cheers! Susan and Jim