(L-R) Phil Davies, Glenn Allen, Lou Damiani
Many successful businesses rarely have time to get involved in their communities. Who can blame them? Time is money, and most time is spent on improving the product. Lou Damiani views his wines and his community as inextricably linked, and he has become a leading voice in the effort to prevent gas industries from laying down a huge Finger Lakes footprint. This, in addition to the excellent wine they serve, is what makes Damiani an ideal choice in this category.

Ten years ago, the Damiani winery emerged as part of the vanguard of a new movement in quality. Today, Damiani’s wines are part of a growing stable that regularly see strong critical scores and earn glowing reviews from the mainstream and online media. It has been a rapid rise for Damiani, perhaps faster than Lou envisioned.

“One of the most difficult challenges is improving quality as you grow,” Lou says.

Damiani and his partners constantly talk about getting better. “It can be challenging, and we know it,” Lou says. “But you know, we have a great team. I work with some of the best fruit in the region. We all have high standards. How can you not be excited about that?”

The standards at Damiani are not held by Lou alone. Partners Phil Davis and Glenn Allen also strive keep the wines at Damiani considered amongst the best in the Finger Lakes and each brings his own skills to the mix. Phil Davis’ family has been growing grapes in the region for over 40 years and he’s considered to have one of the keenest minds for producing high quality fruit and getting it to press. Glenn Allen brings in significant business experience and has helped the Damiani enterprise move into a gorgeous new tasting room while also creating new events and outreach to get that desirable media attention.

When it comes to the wines, an ‘07 Cab Franc reveals the heights this region can achieve with reds, while an ‘09 Riesling is 20 pounds of Riesling in a 10-pound bag, simply bursting with rich fruit and zinging acidity. Lou laughs a bit and admits he’s almost addicted to a wine he hasn’t even released yet: the Damiani 2010 Pinot Noir Reserve. “It’s phenomenal,” he says, marveling as if he’s an outsider looking in, as opposed to the man who actually made the wine. “One of the best wines from Damiani, ever.”

And that says a lot. But before Lou falls too deeply into this reverie, his mind pulls him back to the immediate battle at hand. He is sober and clear-eyed in his opposition to gas expansion. “We are at a crossroads, right now,” Damiani says. “The Finger Lakes has been striving for decades to get on the map as a wine region and a tourist attraction. That’s finally happened, with wine as the centerpiece. But you just can’t have it both ways. You can choose to industrialize the Finger Lakes, but you’ll lose your tourism business. It won’t happen overnight, but it will absolutely happen. Add the wells, lose the tourism.”

“I know that people want jobs,” he continues. “We just must be careful not to be too shortsighted. Our wine legacy can last generations—as long as we want it to last. But it can all be gone, too, if we’re not careful.”

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