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# Virginia WINE GAZETTE

VOL. 15 NO. 1

WINTER  
2010

## INSIDE

2010 Gov Cup  
White Winner  
Paradise Springs '09  
Chardonnay  
Page 3

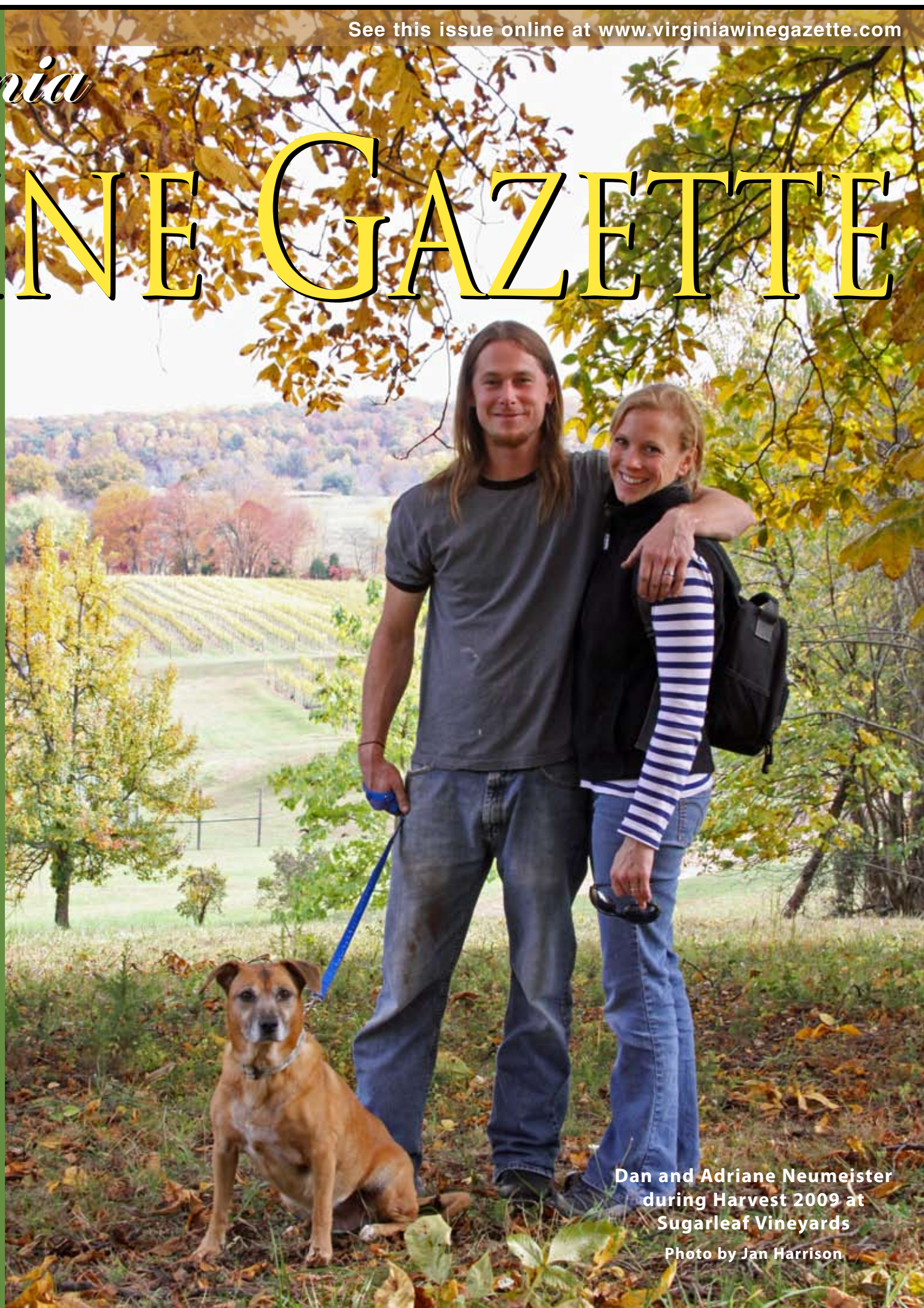
Days 1 & 2: First Lady  
Maureen McDonnell's  
NOVA Wineries Tour  
Pages 4 & 5

35th Annual  
Wineries Unlimited  
Set to Arrive in VA  
in 2011  
Page 7

Circle of Wine Writers  
Tour VA  
Page 10

A New Wineries  
Welcome:  
Dry Mill Vineyards  
& 8 Chains  
Pages 12 & 13

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<http://studioecs.com/vwg/>



Dan and Adriane Neumeister  
during Harvest 2009 at  
Sugarleaf Vineyards

Photo by Jan Harrison

In Memory of Sugarleaf Vineyards winemaker Daniel Neumeister - Nov. 17, 1978 -- Oct. 4, 2010

## Editorial

By LAURA A. RYDIN

In July 2008 I tasted a wine that changed my outlook on what is possible with Virginia cabernet sauvignon as a stand-alone varietal. Named for its winemaker and the owners of Sugarleaf Vineyards, the 2006 Cuvee Neubia, made from 100% estate-grown cabernet sauvignon, tasted very much like a Bordeaux blend – an impossibility that made the wine dinner companion seated to my right that evening smile quietly with pride as I mentioned this out loud.

We discussed that wine again, as we had on several occasions over the ensuing two years, at the Governor's Cup 2010 white wine event at Monticello the evening of Wednesday, Sept. 29. Daniel Neumeister, better known as Dan to his wine industry colleagues, told me that night, with that same quiet mixture of unassuming manner and honest pride in his efforts, that the latest version of that Cuvee Neubia was "even better" than the one I loved so much. I went away that evening thinking about the wine and looking forward to tasting the newest Neubia.

Sadly, I will get to taste it, but I won't be able to tell Dan.

It is with a heavy heart that I am writing this editorial column as a tribute to what already was and could have been an ever more promising career of a gifted and dedicated winemaker – earlier this year his 2008 Petit Manseng was served at the White House for the 2010 Governors Ball.

Not even a week after I said good night to Dan, along with Pascal and Deborah, at the Governor's Cup 2010 White Wine Awards, I was shocked beyond belief to hear the news that he had been killed, at the too young age of 31, by a drunk driver who swerved into Dan's path while he was riding his motorcycle on a clear afternoon on Monday, Oct. 4. Dan had just finished having lunch with his beloved wife, Adriane, who I had also met for the first time that magical summer's evening in 2008.

Sugarleaf Vineyards co-owner Lauren Maillan Bias said, in a statement to the Virginia wine industry on Oct. 6, "As the Chief Winemaker for Sugarleaf Vineyards since its inception and a well known and respected winemaker in the Virginia Wine Industry, Daniel Neumeister leaves behind passion for the industry and life that's simply unparalleled. His professional excellence and zeal for wine has been a driving force behind the success of Sugarleaf Vineyards and this loss will be felt by all who knew him.

"He was a humble, dedicated, passionate soul who exuded his intense passion for wine. Without formal enology training, he constantly aspired to perfect his craft and was always curious to learn more and share that knowledge through each bottle he produced. His perseverance towards making fine wine was unparalleled. He continuously sought out opportunities to excel and shine.

"The acclaim that Sugarleaf Vineyards wines received in national and international competitions was a testament to his tireless work and dedication to the art of winemaking. The loss of Daniel is a tremendous one. His spirit as a person was effervescent and he always had an encouraging word. Daniel made an indelible imprint on everyone he came in contact with; he simply made us all better. He was a good friend and partner and led Sugarleaf Vineyards' winemaking reputation to heights beyond our dreams.

"The Sugarleaf Vineyards family, along with owners, Jerry Bias and Lauren Maillan Bias, wish to extend our deepest condolences to the Neumeister family, his friends and all those he touched."

Dan is survived by his wife Adriane; parents, Steve Neumeister and Jan Harrison; sisters, Amy Marino and Anna Neumeister; brother, Aaron Davidsson;

stepfather, Tom Harrison; nephew and niece, Matthew and Kylie Marino; and numerous friends and family.

### A celebration of a life

A service to celebrate Dan's life was held at Sugarleaf Vineyards at 2 p.m. on Friday, Oct. 8. It was yet another perfect clear day where at least 400, if not more, came to Sugarleaf to show their respect and honor Dan's spirit. They walked through the vineyard to get to and fill 200 chairs that were placed in a shaded semi-circle around Dan's favorite oak tree, standing solidly and quite stately in the middle of the five-acre vineyard. The rest

installed in an unusual place in his home (the bathroom) and how Dan was an amazing chef, friend, winemaker, lacrosse player, long boarder, brother and son.

The pastor Ken Ironside (Baltimore, MD), who delivered the homily at the service, said: "The fabric of life has been torn and we cannot mend it. A beautiful thread has been torn from the cloth, the Daniel thread, and the fabric will never be the same." To those there that day, this did not mean the end of everything Dan had worked so hard for, rather it was a reminder to live life to the fullest and with the same grace of Dan's example.

Dan's mother, Jan, also spoke of her son's love of and talent in visual art, film, music and design. Inspirational, dedicated, honorable and loyal describe his very being. His stepfather, Tom, recalled Dan welcoming him into the newly combined family with a "Happy Birthday, Old Man" and his realizing that they had just then traveled from a "blended family to a bonded one."

Dan's father-in-law remembered finally meeting Dan for the first time, two years after he had met his daughter, Adriane Allen, in Charlottesville in 1998 while working at the former Sloan's restaurant, and after they had already lived and returned from

California. The two ultimately settled in Crozet, where Dan became passionately involved in the Virginia wine industry, working for Afton Mountain Vineyards, King Family, White Hall and then Sugarleaf.

Dan loved what he did; it was not his job, it was his way of life. Dan and Adriane were married at White Hall on August 8, 2009, with White Hall winemaker Mike Panczak as their best man, and had just celebrated their honeymoon a year later. At the memorial service, Mike jokingly said that he was the only other person to spend more time with Dan than Adriane as he had worked with him for over eight years. Mike will see the 2010 Sugarleaf vintage through to completion.

Lauren has plans to host a dinner to premiere these wines when they are ready as further tribute. Although, as his father noted, Dan had wanted to have a grape named after him – something along the lines of a Neumeistraminer, owing to his German heritage – he does have a very special wine that still bears his name.

The 2006 Cuvee Neubia will long stand in my mind as one of the best wines Virginia has ever produced, and I look forward to tasting the latest version Dan spoke so proudly about, and will raise my glass to him then in a respectful toast, as I hope all of our readers will as well. 🍷



Photo by Laila Zekiros Getachew

**The Oct. 8 memorial service at Sugarleaf Vineyards for Dan Neumeister drew more than 400.**

of the people stood five to 10 deep behind the chairs and in between the rows of the vineyard.

A classical string group played, as well as a lone guitarist, Clint Orebaugh, a close high school friend of Dan's, as everyone waited for more people to arrive – a steady stream that included local wine industry people, family members, friends, fellow motorcycle riders or just those that had met Dan and wanted to pay their respects.

After a brief memorial service, a friend of the family read aloud a poem that Dan's sister, Anna, wrote for the occasion: "Sitting under this big great oak/My tears are for sorrow/Not long enough ago/Sitting under a big great oak/My tears were for joy/Surrounded by the fruit of his hands/His creation/His passion/And his true love vows, /I embrace him today/In remembrance of/His Strength/His Devotion/His Loyalty/And his Honor/For his family and friends,/He cradled us all/Like the big great oak/Watching over us today/My memories will lie in his trunk/My respect will cling to his branches/But my love/Will remain in his roots./Brother, You are my hero and I kiss your spirit."

Dan's father, Steve, spoke eloquently about the "unexpected gift" of having Dan as his son. He mentioned Dan's favorite poem, "If" by Rudyard Kipling, being

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The Virginia Wine Gazette is published quarterly at 17-19 Morristown Rd., Bernardsville, NJ 07924 by The Recorder Publishing Co., a New Jersey Corporation. Permission to reprint editorial matter must be obtained from Recorder Publishing Co. Application to Mail at Second-Class Postage Rates is Pending at Bernardsville, NJ 07924. Any article in this publication may not be reprinted wholly or in part without the express permission of the publisher.

POSTMASTER: Send all address changes to: Virginia Wine Gazette, P.O. Box 687, Bernardsville, NJ 07924.

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