

## From The Great One to The Grape One

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CALGARY HERALD

**W**hen Wayne Gretzky was a child, his grandfather — a Russian immigrant — used to make wine at home in Ontario.

“He grew his own grapes, everything,” said Gretzky, who remembers trying it when he was younger.

Flash-forward almost 30 years.

Gretzky has no plans to become a winemaker, he said, or even move to one of Canada’s wine regions.

But since 2007, he has been the part-owner of No. 99 Wayne Gretzky Estates, a winery in Vineland, Ont., in the heart of the world-renowned Niagara region.

The Great One — one of the world’s most famous hockey players and past coach of the Phoenix Coyotes — spoke to about 60 fans and wine-lovers at the Fairmont Palliser Hotel Sunday evening.

He was in town to help publicize the winery, No. 99 Wayne Gretzky Estates, and his charity, the Wayne Gretzky Foundation.

He admitted he isn’t much of a wine drinker, although he enjoys the occasional glass of red. (His favourite No. 99? The Cabernet-Merlot blend.)

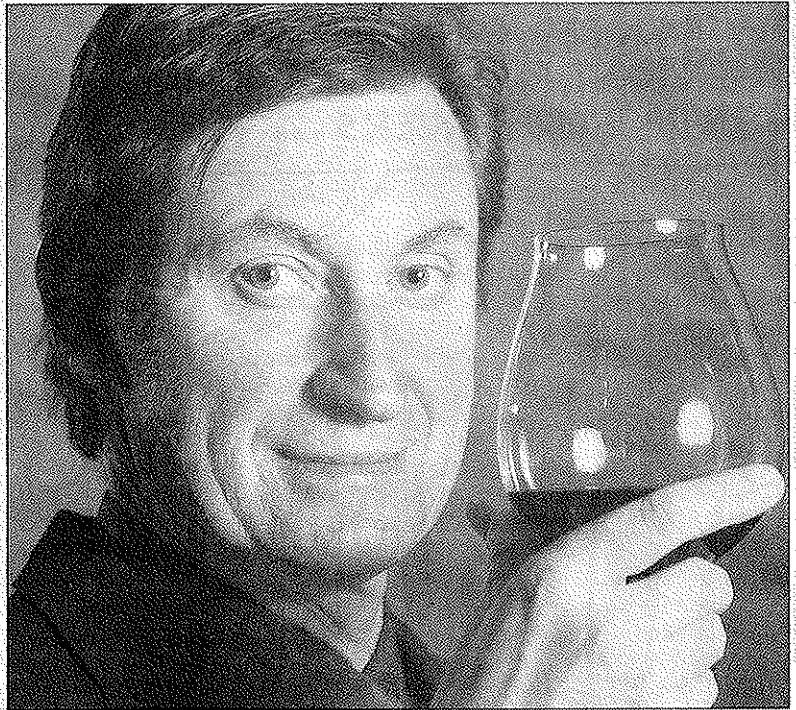
“It’s not about the most expensive bottle. It’s about sitting down to dinner and enjoying a bottle that’s not going to be crazy expensive,” he said.

And a bottle that helps to make the world a better place. A portion of the proceeds of No. 99 wine sales go to Gretzky’s foundation, which helps underprivileged children across Canada play sports.

“My dad was a big believer in that if you were a good or average player, it didn’t matter,” he said. “If kids just participate, it keeps them

It’s not about the most expensive bottle

WAYNE GRETZKY



Ted Rhodes, Calgary Herald

Wayne Gretzky holds a glass of his Wayne Gretzky Estates wine from the Niagara Peninsula during a wine-tasting event he hosted at the Fairmont Palliser Hotel on Sunday.

out of trouble.”

So far, the foundation — which started in 2002 — has raised more than \$1 million (close to \$50,000 of that from wine sales), which it has distributed to charitable groups, sports teams and sports centres across Canada.

“We’re just one small part of the equation,” he said.

Money raised has gone toward National Hockey League game tickets, hockey sticks and equipment for kids in need.

And it has bought defibrillators for amateur sports centres throughout Canada.

Although the group hasn’t been active yet in Calgary, it is looking to establish itself in the community here, said Gretzky’s brother, Glen Gretzky, the foundation’s executive director and a past manager of Calgary’s Max Bell Centre.

“It’s not about winning or losing,”

Glen Gretzky said. “It’s about keeping kids in sports.”

Interested teams and charities can find more information on how to apply for funding at [gretzky.com](http://gretzky.com).

As for the award-winning wines, all of the No. 99 products are 100 per cent Vintners Quality Alliance (VQA), meaning that they’re made from 100 per cent Canadian-grown grapes.

And they’re for sale at wine shops and a handful of restaurants across North America, including Calgary. (A couple are on the wine list at the Fairmont Palliser, and all the Fairmont properties across Canada.)

Gretzky is one of a long list of renowned sports figures — including Kim Crawford, Mario Andretti and Mike Weir — who have lent their names (and their money) to wineries around the world.

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