

A word with Moya Shatz Dolsby: ‘Before you can take on the world, you have to conquer your own town and state’

By: [Brad Iverson-Long](#) June 10, 2013



Photo by Patrick Sweeney.

The Idaho Wine Commission supports 50 wineries across the state through local and national marketing, as well as education for grape growers and wineries. Idaho’s wineries employ 625 workers and produce more than 2 million bottles of wine a year. The commission is funded by a share of the state’s tax on wine as well as assessments from wineries.

The wine commission’s largest event, Savor Idaho, is on June 9 this year. It features 29 wineries and 18 restaurants offering samples of food.

Moya Shatz Dolsby has been the executive director of the commission since 2008. She travels to Washington and other states to promote Idaho’s wine, but says most of the commission’s marketing funds are spent in-state. *Idaho Business Review* spoke with her about promoting Idaho wines. The conversation has been edited for length and clarity.

Why is there an emphasis on the Idaho wine buying market?

Before you can take on the world, you have to conquer your own town and state, because those people will spread the word for you. That’s your best advertising, if you can get local support.

Of all the wine that’s sold in Idaho, only 4 percent is Idaho wine. That’s not very much, but it’s exciting in the sense that there’s a lot of potential. It can only go up.

How do you market Idaho wines to Idahoans?

We do events. We get involved in the community and go talk with people. I joined the Junior League, a group of women who volunteer. They drink a lot of wine, and I want them to buy Idaho wine. June is Idaho Wine Month; you'll see the banners downtown, which we partnered with the Downtown Boise Association on. We work very closely with tourism organizations.

We bring in (national) journalists a lot, and that helps. You start to get buzz – it took buzz from outside the state for the local media to start paying attention. But, it's primarily talking to people, using Facebook and social media, having a good website and maps, and being nice to people. Being nice to people goes a long ways, which really surprises me.

How do you try to get national (or international) attention for Idaho wine?

There are a couple events in Seattle that I participate in every year. A lot of wineries are really small and selling the majority of the wine at their tasting room. That's good for them, because they don't have to have a distributor and can make the most money that way. Wineries like Cinder Wines and Coiled Wines, they're selling out, so why would they have a distributor in Seattle?

It depends on whether they want to travel. I went to Taiwan in December with the Idaho Department of Agriculture. One winery, Koenig Winery, they're doing really well over there. Their model is to sell a lot of wine to Taiwan and sell the rest of it here in their tasting room. They have to go to Taiwan a couple times a year. Well, they love Taiwan and they love to travel, so it works well for them. It depends on what each winery wants to do.

What's the thinking behind Savor Idaho, your biggest event?

It's to bring the wineries to the people in an inviting environment. I like to plan events that I like to go to, and I hate being nicked and dimed. Let me go in and be free. You pay the \$45 ticket price and here's your glass, here's your plate and your bag, and you can go. I hate wine events where you pay by the glass – it's one of my pet peeves.

How is this year looking for Idaho grape growers?

It was really cold in January. There was some damage, and we're just now starting to find out how much. I think we're going to be OK, but we'll know more in a month or two.

Are growers looking to increase Idaho's grape crop?

People are scouting around looking to plant grapes, but it's really expensive. Skyline Vineyards, which is owned by Precept Brands, which owns St. Chapelle and Sawtooth, they're actively looking for land to plant more, a couple hundred acres.

What I think is going to happen is we're going to get big-time growers from Washington, California and Oregon come over here, because it's so much more affordable. Land is cheap; we have water and a great climate for growing.

How expensive is it to get started planting?

After you buy the land, it's about \$15,000 an acre to put in the infrastructure – the plants and the trellising. Then you have to wait three years for your first vintage when you can pull off decent fruit. By year five, you're getting good fruit. You have to have a lot of upfront cash outlay, and you need to have a good site. You don't get into this industry to get a lot of money. You get into it because you like it. It's a glamorous lifestyle, but it's hard work.

Are there enough grapes for in-state wineries?

We don't have enough grapes in the ground. Almost all of the grapes are being used, so some wineries are going to have to go to Oregon or Washington to get fruit.

We have 50 wineries, and every year we get a couple more. The wineries that are here, they want to grow. It's a good thing for Idaho, because it drives prices of fruit up.

What new trends are you seeing at wineries?

Right now, refillable wine containers are huge. There are only two wineries that do them right now that I know of: Pend d'Oreille Winery up north and Colter's Creek (Winery near Lewiston). I want it down here. What I would love, and we're trying to figure out if it's legal, is if you could go to the Co-op with your refillable bottle. Cinder Wines is selling kegs. It works great for the bars because it's sustainable and saves a lot of money on glass. I hope other wineries down here do that.