

Wine Alley celebrating 3rd anniversary

Would you like to visit a place of business where you are always greeted by name? That they keep track of all of your favorite items that you've purchased? That delivers to your home when you can't get there? Who has fun parties — and you are invited? Where you can get great discounts if you sign up for their program? That sends cool e-marketing and great newsletters with recipes?

If you'd like that type of business, then you need to head no farther than Fairwood and to the Wine Alley. When you hear the sobering statistics about the failure rate of start-up businesses, you have to send a hearty round of applause to the Wine Alley which is celebrating its third anniversary on today (Saturday).

Scott and Allison Helfen, the owners, say their interest in opening a wine store was sparked when they travelled to Italy and visited the enotecas (or upscale wine shops) that had a homey, friendly atmosphere. When they started the business, located near the Pet Center and QFC in Fairwood, they worked six days a week. This year,

AROUND TOWN



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they afforded themselves the luxury of four days of vacation — spurred on by their customers urging them to take a break.

Their hard work has paid off. What makes their shop unique is that the Helfens run the shop themselves, providing them the opportunity to truly get to know their customers. They DO greet most customers by name, offer weekly wine tastings, wine club discounts and they have a neat selection of gifts — such as gourmet cheeses and quick appetizers, and wine-related gifts suitable for any hostess or house warming or holiday gift giving. Last year, they expanded their service to include delivery and online purchasing.

With more than 625 bottles in their collection, you can be assured that their inventory is not something you would find at the local grocery. They specialize in wines from Oregon, Washington and California, but also carry a wide selection of ports, champagnes and import wines. They have ambitious plans. They hope to expand by 132 more labels over the next several months. Memberships in the club are growing and they currently stand at more than 200 memberships.

The perks are great — 15 percent discounts on purchases of six or more bottles of wine, among other things, and there is an annual club appreciation party at their home! Always eager to please, their philosophy is simply put by Scott: "If we don't have it, we'll get it for you."

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