

my ohio wine experience



PICTURED: Kathy Johnson, Joanne Holbert and Holbert's daughter Maryanne Arnold at Paper Moon Vineyards. They are past the halfway point of their goal — visiting all of Ohio's 350-plus wineries.

In 2017, three women from Northeast Ohio — Kathy Johnson of Rittman, Joanne Holbert of Doylestown and Holbert's daughter, Maryanne Arnold of Wadsworth — made a long-term goal to visit all the wineries in Ohio.

And with nearly 170 wineries visited in just four short years, they've already made substantial progress. The three women make a combination of day trips and weekend getaways, sometimes visiting as many as 25 wineries in a single weekend, a venture that requires arduous planning — figuring out opening and closing times, verifying geographic proximity of the wineries, and so on. Johnson uses the list of wineries in *Sip* as well as information gleaned from winery websites to formulate a plan of attack. "I make a master plan, and then off we go," Johnson says. The three stay at each winery long enough for them to taste a very small sample of each wine on the menu and frequently purchase bottles of their favorites to take home.

Along the way, they've enjoyed many unique experiences — dressing up in speakeasy garb at the former Sand Hollow Speakeasy in Newark and getting a lesson in the chemistry of winemaking from the late Jim Brandeberry at Brandeberry Winery in Eton. They delight in wineries with special themes like Good Vibes Winery in Westerville, where the wines are named for songs like "Mama Mia" and "Pretty Woman," which are also playing on the winery's sound system.

Unusual wine names like Teacher's Pet at the School House Winery in Dover or the Rusty Nail at the Lumberyard Winery in Napoleon always tickle their fancy. They carry home lots of souvenirs like brochures, magnets and even charms and Christmas ornaments. Holbert's husband is making a dart board using their leftover corks.

The three women have tasted wines with unusual flavors like coffee and mint and also have found their tastes are evolving the more they sample Ohio's many wines. They've discussed taking up winemaking in their homes and are even thinking of pursuing an associate's degree in enology from a program at Kent State University. Among other trips planned this year, they're hoping to make a trip to Southeast Ohio this summer or fall.

Everywhere they go, they record their memories in a special journal they started after their very first visit, recording the wines they've tasted, the date they visited, any special experiences they had and their general impressions of the winery. And of course, each visit is documented with a photograph.

With more than 350 wineries in Ohio and up to two dozen or more wineries opening each year, are the women worried they may never reach their goal of visiting all of them? "No, not at all," Johnson says. "That just gives us motivation to keep going!"

— Rich Warren

170 of 350+ wineries visited in Ohio*



Wine tasting at Valley Vineyards in Morrow.

*at time of print

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