

## Making wine, but pining for Mr. Beef Chicagoans changed course and headed to California

By Monica Eng, Tribune staff reporter

### From pre-med to pinot noir



**KATHY JOSEPH** Grew up in: Evanston. Major in college: Pre-med, biochemistry. Chicago food she misses most: Mr. Beef's Italian beef sandwiches with both spicy and sweet peppers. Wine pairing with Mr. Beef: Fiddlehead's cuvee Seven Twenty Eight from Fiddlestix Vineyard, which she says "is big enough to take those spicy peppers." Recommended wine she makes: "Well, the most exciting would have to be Doyle, named after my husband [Tom Doyle], who also happens to be from Chicago. Hands-down, Doyle is the single best barrel in my cellar." Recommended wine by someone else: "Haut Brion Blanc. The most luscious white wine I can think of, and the model for my Honeysuckle Sauvignon Blanc."

Sideways was really good for pinot noir. It was even better for pinot noir from the Santa Barbara area where it was filmed. And best for pinot noir producers from the Santa Barbara vintner whose produce was mentioned and sipped in the movie.

Evanston Township High School graduate Kathy Joseph was just such a "Sideways" beneficiary.

Long respected for her fine Fiddlehead wines (she makes pinot noir and sauvignon blanc), Joseph gained a whole new bunch of fans after the Academy Award-winning picture came out.

But she's not letting it go to her head.

As we zipped around the vineyard on her all-terrain vehicle (she insisted "because it's fun!"), Joseph told me her story. As an undergrad at the University of Wisconsin at Madison, her plan was to become a physician. But when she returned to Chicago and lived with her attorney husband in a tiny Lincoln Park apartment, she started thinking about different ways to use her pre-med/chemistry background. One day, her father, prominent Chicago lawyer Burton Joseph, read a piece about the recently opened graduate program in oenology – the study of winemaking – at the University of California at Davis, and suggested it as a possible path. His 25-year-old daughter decided to work a winery for a few months to check out the possibility, and when she returned she asked her husband if they could move there. He said yes.

Starting in a Sonoma tasting room, Joseph would eventually apprentice with Napa Valley vintners. But she differs from her fellow Chicago winemakers in that she also formally studied the craft for four years at U.C. Davis. "I think if you don't take classes you're missing out, and if you're only in school you don't have a feel for the artistry," she says with a warm, wide grin. "For me it was a great combo of the two."

After many years working for others, in the late 80's Joseph organized a group of investors to start her own vineyard in Santa Barbara County. Today Joseph reigns over 100 acres of pure pinot noir grapes, some of which she uses for her own wines, and some of which she sells to others.

Spending part of the year commuting between her office in Davis and home base in Sacramento, and the harvest months in Santa Barbara County, Joseph loves the variety this lifestyle offers. "I'm a farmer and a winemaker and a scientist," she explained. "I have to know the accounting and legal and trademark and marketing issues. I have to manage people and know about the glue on the back of my labels and the bird netting over my vines. Some people like to be focuses on one or two things, but I like 100 things. It's thrilling to me."