



Featured local story

DONNA LAILEY

LOCAL GRAPE AND WINE PIONEER CHAMPIONS WINE AND MUSIC PAIRING



Donna Lailey, Music Niagara board member, and Marcel Morgenstern, Pondview's Director of Sales and Marketing, check over the future site of Pondview's wedding and concert tent. The Music Niagara Festival will host two of this season's 30 concerts at Pondview. TIM TAYLOR

Tim Taylor
The Lake Report

After almost fifty years of growing grapes and making celebrated wine at Lailey Vineyards, Donna Lailey has a new passion — bringing wine and music together at the annual Music Niagara Festival.

As a member of Music Niagara's board of directors, Lailey has been quietly nurturing the relationship between local wineries and the Festival, now about to present its 21st season, beginning July 14.

"I am thrilled that we are able to bring wine and music together," says Lailey. "We'll have four concerts at local wineries this summer."

Lailey says her determination to bring wine and music together was born in a very personal experience, almost 10 years ago. A young grade-school-aged violinist was performing for a Music Niagara audience, at Lailey Vineyard. Her five granddaughters sat in the front row mesmerized. To this day her grandchildren remember the music, the setting and the special moment.

"To see their faces, they were just astounded."

From that moment on Lailey made it her mission to bring Music Niagara's world-class music to the special venues of the local wine industry.

Each year she calls on old wine industry friends, searching for ways her two passions can support each other.

She calls her reception at the wineries "amazing". She praises Pondview, Konzelmann and Chateau de Charmes, among the supporting wineries. This summer, the Festival will have concerts at Pondview, Hare and Ravine.

"We want to make sure we represent the quality of the music and the quality of the wines that come from this soil."

Lailey is anxious to ensure the relationship benefits both parties. "We get a unique and special place to present some of our concerts," she says. "They get a wonderful showcase for their wines—and believe me, our audience enjoys good wines."

Marcel Morgenstern, Pondview's Director of Sales and Marketing agrees: "This will be the first season for our new wedding and performance venue among the

vines, overlooking our pond. It is perfect for concerts.

"Music Niagara is a great partner for showcasing our wines. The audience happens to be a lot of our customer base."

Lailey also wants to make sure everyone knows that the Festival presents its 30-plus concerts in many interesting local venues other than wineries—St. Mark's Church is a mainstay. Oast House, Mount Carmel, Simcoe Park, Niagara Mennonite Church, Grace United and Royal Canadian Legion, complete this year's list of concert sites.

For the past eight years, Lailey has been one of 14 local board members who do everything from set up chairs to fundraising for the five-week festival. Each board member brings special career skills to the table.

"Our town is so special. So many wonderful people are coming to live here. They have a real contribution to make." The Music Niagara board includes current and former corporate executives, lawyers, accountants, marketers, writers, diplomats and, of course, a former wine maker.

Lailey has long been an advocate for the industry. As

a vinifera pioneer in the mid-70s, she helped the industry establish a world-class reputation for cold-climate wines.

A former phys-ed teacher, Lailey, and her husband David, moved to Niagara with their six-month old daughter in the early 70s. They started farming their new tender fruit acreage on the Niagara Parkway that first summer. It was just a few short years before they converted their farm to vinifera grapes, opening their well-known winery, Lailey Vineyards, 15 years ago. The couple sold their business in 2015.

Lailey shows evident pride as she describes the leadership role she played in the grape and wine industry and beyond. Over the years, she has been the vice-chair of the Greenbelt Committee, a board member of the Agriculture Institute of Technology, vice-chair of the Grape Growers Board and a member of the Niagara Parks Commission, to name a few.

Lailey enjoys all kinds of music but admits to being particularly partial to choral repertoire. "And the Toronto All Star Big Band, of course. Everyone loves the concert at Ravine."

The self-admitted music buff thinks the new Music Niagara catch-phrase is perfect: Where the world comes to play. "We attract musicians from all over the world. You could hear them elsewhere, but you'd have to go to eleven

countries to do it!"

"We in Niagara are so lucky, she says. "The quality of music is incredible. And we can just walk out our door and go to a concert.

"That reminds me, I better buy my tickets."

Music Niagara's 21st Season

In 2019, the Music Niagara Festival will present some 30 concerts, including more than 100 performers, over four weeks July 14 to August 10, 2019. In addition to Canada, the performers hail from the Ukraine, Belgium, Russia, Scotland, the Netherlands, Lithuania, France, the Czech Republic, the United States and Cuba.

The season kicks off on Sunday July 14th with Countermeasure, a next-level a capella group featuring some of Canada's top young vocal talent. In a very different ensemble concert, the twenty voices that make up the Elmer Iseler Singers will raise spirits on July 24th. More ensemble evenings will spread throughout the summer with the Niagara Proms Orchestra (July 22nd), a return performance of Syrene Saxophone Quartet (July 25) and the always sold-out Toronto All-Star Big Band (August 5th).

This year's line-up of soloists include, renowned concert pianist, Janina Fialkowska (July 21st), One of the youngest Concertmaster of the Montreal Symphony Orchestra, Andrew Wan and Quebec Pianist, Charles Richard Hamelin, will be showcased on July 30th. Julie Nesrallah, singer, actress and broadcaster, will captivate the audience with her engaging personality and her rich, expressive voice on August 3rd.

Find the entire season at www.musicniagara.org.

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