

Bob Shallit: VinPerfect entrepreneur sells wine bottle sealers, with a twist

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One of the area's more promising startup companies has hit a key milestone, making the first sales of its "high-performance" screw caps for the wine industry.

VinPerfect Inc., which was founded in Davis, has struck a deal with Sacramento-based **Spoto Wines**, among others, and is gearing up for larger sales in November when the state's wineries start bottling pinot grigios, sauvignon blancs and other white wines.

Company founder **Tim Keller** expects many of the bigger firms bottling this year to at least try his product, which uses perforated screw caps and a gasket-like liner to precisely control the amount of oxygen entering wine bottles while eliminating the spoilage caused by defective bark corks.

"Nobody will risk their business for us" by switching their entire production to the VinPerfect system, Keller says. But he thinks enough will use the modified screw caps on at least a portion of their bottles "to keep the lights on" for the new business.

A sales breakthrough could happen next year if customers embrace the product.

The company's ambitious goals: Win 1 percent to 2 percent of the domestic market for wine bottle sealers within two years and 10 percent in six years.

Stuart Spoto, owner of the Sacramento winery that recently used VinPerfect screw caps on about 25 cases of pinot noir, says he was drawn to the idea of bringing more predictability to the way wine ages once it's in a bottle.

Keller, a winemaker as well as entrepreneur, recently used his new sealers on 600 cases of syrah, merlot and pinot noir that *he* produced under a contract with **Alta Ridge Vineyards** of Sonoma County.

"If you're not willing to be your own guinea pig," he jokes, "what kind of mad scientist are you?"

Read all about it

Execs at the **Old Soul** coffee chain have found some unexpected volunteers for the reading-assistance program they're launching next week at a south Sacramento elementary school.

High school students.

In addition to the 120 or so adults who have signed up to provide one-on-one reading help at Peter Burnett Elementary, about 70 students from McClatchy High's humanities and international studies program have volunteered to be tutors.

Old Soul co-founder **Tim Jordan** signed them up after speaking at the high school last week. He's now planning to recruit tutors from Jesuit, Christian Brothers and Sacramento High.

Jordan figures high school kids are bound to have more impact than adults. The younger kids, he says, "see them as rock stars."

The program, dubbed "Sacramento Has Soul" and overseen by the nonprofit **Reading Partners** organization, starts up at the elementary school on Sept. 26.

Capture the flags

Phoebe and **Patrick Celestin** are planning to go out with an artistic bang.

The Sacramentans are closing their longtime midtown eatery, **Celestin's Island Eats**, on Sept. 28 – and using the occasion to auction off some of the colorful Haitian vodou "flags" they've collected and displayed over the years.

"I don't have anywhere to keep them," Phoebe says of her decision to part with about 10 of the bead- and sequin-covered pieces that honor the pantheon of vodou gods.

Collector interest in the art form has increased since last year's devastating earthquake in Haiti, and Celestin estimates the mostly 3-by-4-foot flags will generate bids of close to \$1,000 each.

A portion of the proceeds will go to charities aiding Haiti.

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