

FOOD & DRINK

A Vintage Love Story

Story & Photo by Rob Lane

The newest winery opening soon in the Finger Lakes has certainly created quite a stir with its name, Pompous Ass Winery. But when you look beyond the name and learn about the story and the people behind the name, it reveals a tale of love and desire and adversity and perseverance and, ultimately, the fulfillment of a shared dream—all a far cry from pomposity.

For a full understanding, let's start at the beginning. Pompous Ass Winery owners Michael and Donna Lucent met and dated as teenagers in the early seventies. Michael was a keyboard player in a band called Resurrection (a name which would prove to have special meaning many decades later), and Donna was sixteen years old and used to sneak into the clubs where he was playing. But, after a year, Donna decided that she was ready to go off and "see the world," and the relationship ended. Donna pursued psychology and art degrees, while Michael went on to become an electrical engineer, get married and have children, and make wine with his father, Del, in his spare time. They would not see each other again for twenty-five years.

A series of fateful events set them both on a course to meet again. After twenty-two years, Michael's marriage had come to an end, and he saw Donna's sister by chance one day. Donna's sister mentioned that Donna was still in the area. Michael called Donna and they met and chatted about old times with some of Michael's homemade wine. Donna was impressed with the wine and also with Michael. As Donna recounts, "It was re-love at first sight." As the band name foretold, the resurrection came to be and, within a year, they were married.

As chance would have it, they honeymooned in 1999 at one of Michael's favorite places, the Finger Lakes. In Donna's first ever visit to a winery on that trip, she told Michael that his wines were just as good as any there and that they should start a winery someday. To that end, they bought land on Seneca Lake the next year.

Then, encouraged by their shared dream, they made a bold move. They decided to quit their jobs, sell their house, and move to the Finger Lakes to learn how to run a winery. Michael went to work as a cellar rat at Glenora and Knapp wineries, and Donna went to work in the tasting room at Logan Ridge Winery. They lived off the proceeds from the sale of the house, while toiling for minimum wage to learn all aspects of running a winery.

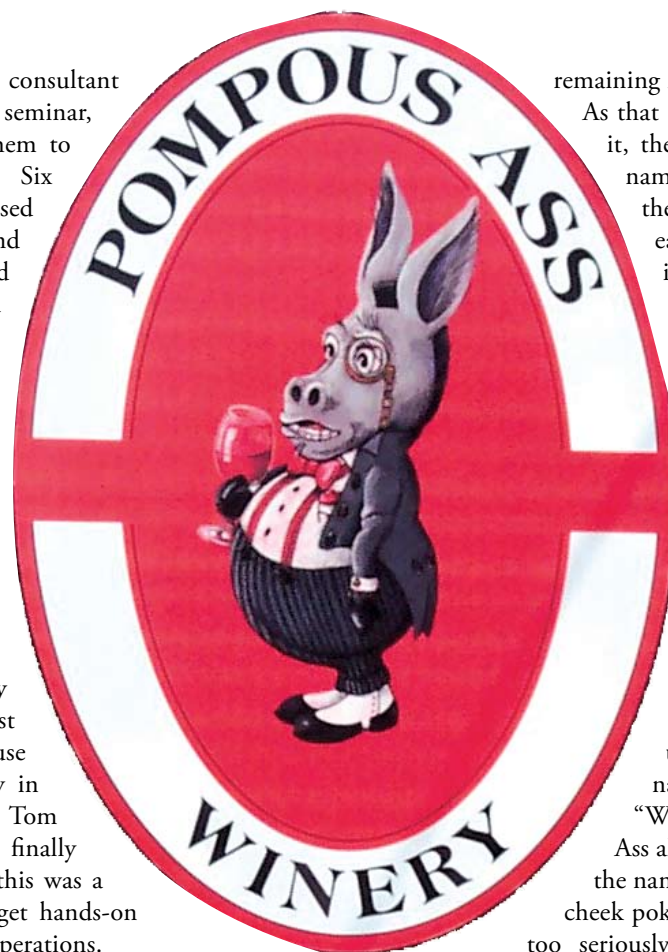
Fate would intervene again when, only a few months

later, they met winery consultant Tom Cottrell at a wine seminar, and he encouraged them to pursue their dream. Six months later, impressed with Michael and Donna's grit and determination, Tom called with a proposal for Michael and Donna to move to New Jersey and manage Kings Run Vineyard, a winery owned by the inventor of the plastic spray valve for aerosol products, Robert H. Abplanalp and his company Precision Valve. At first they declined because their goal was to stay in the Finger Lakes, but Tom was persistent and finally convinced them that this was a great opportunity to get hands-on experience in winery operations.

They were successful in turning the struggling New Jersey winery around, but pesky fate would intervene again. Mr. Abplanalp died suddenly and, only two years after they had started, the winery was closed. The company offered to sell the winery equipment to the Lucent's at a discount, so they purchased the equipment and moved it to the Finger Lakes to be stored until this increasingly fleeting dream of opening their own winery could be achieved.

It was now 2005, and money was getting tight. Michael had to go back to working swing shift doing machine maintenance at a glass factory; Donna found a job as a tasting room manager. The dream was so close, but it was quickly slipping away. They had the land, the equipment, and the experience, but no bank would provide financing to build a winery. Enter fate once again.

Two years had gone by and, after all the other banks had turned them down, they reluctantly and without much hope for approval, made their way to their final



remaining loan application meeting. As that rascal chance would have it, the loan officer was a man named Jeff Franklin, whom they had met four years earlier. Franklin believed in them and found a way to get them financing with the bank as their partner.

Now thirty-six years after they first met and after many trials and tribulations, the Lucent's will finally be opening Pompous Ass Winery. When asked what kept them going through all of it, Donna answers "Our faith in each other kept us going." About the name, Michael explains, "We trademarked Pompous Ass almost 10 years ago. To us, the name represents a tongue-in-cheek poke at those who take wine too seriously." Donna, who created the "Sir Jackson Donkey" logo relates,

"It's not meant to offend anyone. We just felt that it was a fun and whimsical name that reflected our philosophy that wine should be fun and not snobbish. We want everyone from beginner to experienced wine tasting levels to feel comfortable at our winery." They are crafting a variety of offerings including a barrel-fermented Chardonnay, off-dry Riesling, an off-dry fun red named "High Falutin," and several other white and blush wines.

WHAT: Pompous Ass Winery
WHEN: Open every day 10 a.m.–6 p.m.
WHERE: 4499 Rt. 14, Rock Stream, NY 14878
INFORMATION: 607-535-4277;
www.pompousasswinery.com

Rob Lane writes a Finger Lakes wine blog, www.fingerlakesweekendwino.blogspot.com. Contact him at robl@mountainhomemag.com.