

The First Leg of a Marketing Journey ~ BTT in Santa Fe, Dallas, and Houston

Jo Diaz

HISTORICAL Santa Fe:

Santa Fe - The Blue Tooth Tour has to thank Walter Gallegos, formerly of Southern Wines & Spirits, who's based in Albuquerque, but intimately knows Santa Fe. Walter was Southern's wine educator, so this event was a natural for him. Without his help, this event would never have been so successful. Walter's wine club group was invited to attend, where other events had only been for wine trade and media. We knew that Walter's group would add a dimension of class. Walter booked us into the St. Francis Hotel, which gave us access to their lobby. Manager Steve Caalin was delighted to have us; and, as it turned out, we were equally delighted to be there. Walter had arranged for four restaurants and the hotel's catering department to present the most delicious foods to be paired with the wine. Santa Fe restaurants are known for exceptional cuisine, and no one was disappointed. The restaurants who provided their guest chefs serving their cuisine were the following: the Saint Francis Hotel, Santacafe, The Canyon, Rio Charma, and O'Keefe Cafe. Each delectable item was perfectly matched to Petite Sirah. As the lobby filled with our guests, excitement filled the air, and it became apparent to everyone involved that you can take Petite Sirah on the road and create great excitement about this variety. Wine writer Shirley Jones took time from her schedule to drive 173 miles from Sapello, Arizona to join us. My longtime friend Shirley flitted from one table to the next in her signature chapeau, amazed that she was able to have so many principals actually pouring their own wine... This seemed to be the theme throughout the tour: winery namesakes completely supported the Blue Tooth Tour, and they were present to talk about their wine and their life stories.

HYSTERICAL Santa Fe:

Santa Fe - As the event unfolded, it became clear that it was a great idea to have 2,000 Blue Tooth tooth brushes made, when I handed them out to our guests. What seemed like a silly trinket was now becoming a practical item. We were truly the Blue Tooth Tour, and everyone had the teeth to prove it! Santa Fe, a city sitting at a 7,000-foot elevation (known as high desert), proved a bit of a challenge for Lulu (Lyla's handle). The altitude literally swept her off her feet, and onto a massage table at La Posada Resort & Spa. She became so dizzy that she needed to have her circulation stimulated, and missed the Santa Fe event. This was the one spot where I knew I should take the time to have a room at the inn, having been there before. We deserved the treat. Parking the RV was another issue. When Santa Fe was created, nowhere in the plans were motor homes a consideration. I called the police chief to explain that I had brought many important vintners to their town, and we needed consideration for the RV for on the street overnight parking. "Not in this lifetime, lady. Find someone who will be willing to support the big monster." The hotel contacted a neighboring church that kindly said we could use their parking lot, but we had to be out by 9 a.m., or we'd be infringing upon a Saturday wedding. An early morning call from the irate hotel manager told me that Cowboy had lost his mind, and was combing the streets of Santa Fe taking in the culture, forgetting to move the RV first thing in the morning. You could hardly blame him. I had told him again and again that Santa Fe was a town to-die-for; and, alas, he was gone. When Cowboy returned, he did penance, and gave the church a case of wine. The pastor was appeased, and off we went to Dallas, fighting our way through the snow that was now falling



heavily.

HISTORICAL Dallas:

Dallas - The Gypsy Tea Room, located at 2548 Elm Street, Deep Ellum, Texas, was where this leg of our journey brought us. A nightclub setting, manager Norma Dickey had arranged for the room to house all the Blue Tooth vintners. Appetizers were strategically placed for our guests. Just as the event began, the sky opened up and rain fell heavily, but it didn't dampen the spirits of the guests who arrived or the soul of the event. Wine writer Darryl Beeson arrived and explained that he would have gone to Houston, if we hadn't had a Dallas leg scheduled in his town. Darryl commented that it would have taken him a couple of days to visit with each principal if he were to travel to wine country... and that would be if each principal were actually at the wineries. In Dallas, it took him all of the three hours to visit with each one, and have plenty of time to enjoy the company of both the vintners and their Petite Sirahs. The Gypsy Tea Room is one of the operations owned and operated by the owners of The Green Room and Trees. The Green Room opened in July 1994 as a restaurant, bar and rooftop deck with the purpose of complementing Trees, Dallas's best live music club. Jeraboam is another location affiliated with owner Whit Evans. Originally, we were looking to have the event at the downtown Jeraboam location, just based on the name. Whit encouraged us to use The Gypsy Tea Room, so we would have the space and convenience of valet parking, could spread out with eight foot tables, etc. After the Dallas Blue Tooth tour tasting, we all went off to his neighboring Green Room. Gracious host Whit shared the rock n' roll history and memorabilia of this restaurant, while we enjoyed the acclaimed culinary skills of his chef, Marc Cassel. Dallas's hospitality was warm, friendly, and a wise choice as one of the Blue Tooth Tour stops. Meanwhile, back on the bus....

HYSTERICAL Dallas:

Big City, Big Lights, Big RV... Cowboy seemed to have found his groove as we pulled into the "Target" parking lot. We slid into a far-flung corner, parked for the night, took an extended walk to downtown, and had a scrumptious

dinner at Green Room. Cowboy had a friend who came to dinner, then drove us back to our home-away-from-home. We went through the rigors, I fixed the table whose leg would now not stay on for more than a half hour of driving time, and we pulled the shades for a night under the stars. The second night in Dallas proved to be the one that pushed the envelope of the entire trip for overnight parking. By now, Cowboy, Lulu, and Chickie had seen some interesting overnight accommodations, but nothing yet had rivaled the inner city streets of Dallas. As we returned the Concannons and Lynn Kirimli to their hotel, Cowboy decided that we'd have to leave early the next morning, so traveling to the Target lot was not an option. Plus, we needed access to off-site showers. Our reservoir had very little reserves. With very little aplomb, we parked the RV right outside the hotel for the night. This was downtown Dallas on the fringe of the financial district. This was three-piece suit territory. Imagine my horror as Lulu and Cowboy collaborated to extend the living space, being cognizant of parking meters (we always took up two spaces, feeding two meters). We were good until 7 a.m. before feeding the meters, but I couldn't imagine that now, as I drifted off to sleep on a main thoroughfare. The night whizzed by, morning broke, Cowboy fed the meters, and one-by-one we dressed in our best duds, made our way through the busy hotel lobby, up to Lynn's room on the seventh floor. Each of us acted like we were on important business. We showered, made up our appearance, and returned to the Chalet, so we could boogie outta Dodge, headed to Houston. The sky broke and rain came pouring down.

HISTORICAL Houston:

At our final destination, we were in the hands of Dick Dace, The Epicurean Publicist of Houston. Dick and I had met at the Aspen Food & Wine Festival, and we've worked well together ever since. Nobody can make Houston come alive like Dick Dace. He knows everyone, and everyone knows Dick...

Houston is his town. The venue was Rouge Restaurant. We were given the second floor of the restaurant, where we enjoyed true southern hospitality. Large tables were set in-the-round. Vintners created drama with their brands. The tooth brushes were ready as our guests arrived. The event was stellar. Two Houston media mainstays



made their way into the room and were greeted by each vintner: Michael Lonsford of the Houston Chronicle, and Robyn Tinsley of WineSkinny.com. Luscious hors d'oeuvres were passed, adding an extra touch of elegance to the event. Many wine professionals attended the last southern venue. At this event, we were all able to drink in what a spectacular tour had just happened, and Houston seemed to put a dazzling jewel into the crown. When the final pour was done, Dick had arranged for a photo shoot... icing on the cake. We had all been so busy throughout the tour that none of us had very much time to focus on still photography. I brought along a new video camera. Since I do still photography, I was totally out of my natural element as I explored this brand new medium. I completely left behind all that I knew about my Minolta and Cannon cameras, and learned all that I could about this new video equipment. It was a great adventure with many new photo opportunities, as we traveled down roads none of us had ever seen before. After the Houston tasting, many of us adjourned to the restaurant downstairs to enjoy each others (final) company, shared stories with new friends who joined us (Dick, Robyn, Vic Strader - sales manager for Concannon, and Derek Holstein - winemaker for Guenoc Winery - aka Langrty Estate Winery). We all experienced a scrumptious dinner at Rouge. Cowboy had already hit the road with our stagecoach, and Dick Dace escorted the Concannons, Lyla, and me to our hotel adjacent to the Houston Airport, while Vic Strader took Derek to his hotel. Our part of the tour was now complete. All that was left was the return flight (with some extra tooth brushes in our bags).

HYSTERICAL Houston:

We arrived in Houston as drenched road warriors. Earlier, I had asked Helen permission to call her "Helen Wheels," not realizing that this would come to pass in the very near future. I must digress... The Chalet had a separate chair situated right behind the front passenger seat. It was secured to the floor, but could come free and transform into a comfortable rocking chair. During travel, this was D.T.'s (aka. Dan Teldeschi) most common position. Jim's seat was at co-pilot, Helen enjoyed the luxury couch, and Lyla and I had found our groove at the dining table. Each of us had plenty of space, and yet we were all intimately

connected to each other. We were now only four, as Dan had returned to California and his bottling duties. This was the very last leg of our journey. And, at this point, this was a good thing. Russ had been a great driver during the entire trip. As he drove into Rouge's parking lot, something snapped. Could it be that we had been a bit lost trying to find Rouge? Could it be that we were running late? Could it be that when this venue was done, we were all flying back to California, while Russ drove to Fort Lauderdale to return the RV? He was going to be passing through New Orleans and Mardi Gras. How much of a distraction could that be? I'm sure it was all of those things, combined with living in close proximity to six other people for the last 13 days under completely different conditions than the average day in one's life. Whatever it was, it was over the top, and as the huge RV pulled into the parking lot, Helen and her rocking chair (which was now in the middle of the floor) were on the move - Helen Wheels! The chair made it's way to the far right wall, and stopped with a jolt as the motor home came to a stop in front of an aghast team of valet parkers, who all seemed to be on wheels, too. Obviously, never in their valet careers had they had the pleasure of parking a motor home, and not one of them saw it as another notch on their valet belts. Cowboy, driver extraordinaire, was ushered to a nearby side street, where he parked the RV under dripping trees. As soon as the event was over, it was "Sayonara, Baby," and Cowboy took off for parts unknown. Arriving at the Houston Airport was a very sobering experience. The Southern leg of our journey was over. In a couple of days, we're all going to be "On The Road Again." (I was quietly hoping that Russ could find the Willie Nelson CD that mysteriously disappeared on the Southern Tour.

