

TOP STORY EDITOR'S PICK

The Wine Exchange

# The Napa Valley Wine Exchange: Neo-Prohibitionists and Come Over October

From the The Wine Exchange: Allen Balik shares wine industry news and insights series

ALLEN BALIK Aug 26, 2024 Updated Sep 13, 2024 0

# Napa Valley Register

Harvest season in Napa County's wine country began at Peju Winery in Rutherford on Tuesday morning.



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The wine industry in Napa and beyond, along with wine lovers across the globe, are facing a serious and confusing message between groups advocating abstinence vs. our ability to experience the joy of sharing a bottle together with friends and family. The time has come to bring the



wine loving community together and demand a fair playing field for all.

Allen Balik



We are currently in the midst of an international anti-alcohol (aka temperance) movement that is attempting to upend the scientific and medical communities' science based and study proven findings. For several decades, scientific research has framed the moderate consumption of alcohol (and especially red wine) as a natural part of a healthy diet.

Unfortunately, this message has not been shared fairly with consumers by the press on a regular, factual and non-opiniated basis. Yet, some positive programs, research and opinions are coming to light in recent months, but again not necessarily well communicated through the general press.

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Before looking at the positive programs and arguments for moderate wine consumption, let's take a look at the darker side of the anti-alcohol movement and how it is being portrayed worldwide. However, we must also keep in mind that under U.S. law, the wine industry is barred from issuing any positive information or statements directly related to the health benefits of alcohol.

Most consumers relate the health aspects of moderate wine consumption to the "French Paradox" study that aired on "60 Minutes" in 1991. Here, it was shown that despite France's fat rich/high calorie diet its people demonstrated a lower risk of heart related disease.

Those who studied this anomaly became convinced this was mainly due to moderate consumption of wine (principally red wine and its antioxidant properties) as a major factor in serving as a health enhancement. Domestic red wine sales soared and the idea of moderate alcohol consumption to fight heart disease became a common rallying cry across the globe.

Felicity Carter, in an April 2024 Wine Business Monthly article regarding the relationship of wine and health, traced the findings back even further. In her article, Carter explained, "When Raymond Pearl, a biologist at Johns Hopkins University first noted that light drinkers had a greater life expectancy than abstainers, he caused a sensation. The year was 1926 and Prohibition was in full swing." Carter continued, "Since then, numerous studies have found that people who drink low-to-moderate

amounts of alcohol have lower death rates than either heavy drinkers or non-drinkers.”




The advertisement features the Napa Valley Register logo on the left, with the text "LOCAL LIKE A PRO" below it. On the right, it promotes "UNLIMITED DIGITAL ACCESS WITH NO ADS" for \$10 more per month, with an "UPGRADE" button. A small disclaimer at the bottom right reads: "OFFER APPLIES TO OUR WEBSITE AND APP. DOES NOT EXTEND TO THIRD-PARTY WEBSITES." The background is a scenic view of a vineyard.

It has been reported that an anti-alcohol prohibition-style movement occurs every generation. The story of our own “experiment” with Prohibition from 1920 (the 18th amendment) to its dissolution in 1933 (the 21st amendment) is well known for its failure to curb alcohol consumption. But it was unparalleled in its success in feeding organized crime with deleterious effects on our peaceful and orderly lifestyle including murder, gang wars, political corruption, smuggling, tax evasion and a plethora of other negative societal effects.

Recently the World Health Organization (WHO) declared there is “no safe level” of alcohol consumption and this has been followed by movements in Europe (through the EU), England, Canada, Japan and elsewhere to drop any messages regarding health enhancements in conjunction with alcohol consumption while relying heavily on the always present international temperance groups.

Next year, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and Health and Human Services (HHS) are set to re-establish the government’s suggested dietary guidelines severely limiting and defining moderate consumption from the current two drinks a day for men and one for women to something far closer to the WHO “recommendation” that, “There is no safe level of alcohol consumption.”



This is an identical copy of the advertisement above, featuring the Napa Valley Register logo, "LOCAL LIKE A PRO" text, and a promotion for "UNLIMITED DIGITAL ACCESS WITH NO ADS" for \$10 more per month with an "UPGRADE" button. The background is a scenic view of a vineyard.

The WHO guidelines, temperance groups and a realignment of our recognized review and oversight committees are all playing into the anti-alcohol voices in the determination of the U.S. 2025 – 2030 dietary guidelines. In the past alcohol was always considered part of the dietary guidelines along with salt, sugar, fat, etc. But now, alcohol has been separated with members of established anti-alcohol and temperance groups sitting in positions of judgement while members of the medical and scientific communities have either resigned in protest or been dismissed from the dietary bodies.

The International Organization of Good Templars (IOGT) is a fraternal organization that promotes abstinence from alcohol and other drugs. The IOGT was founded in New York in 1851 and is still active today across the globe as Movendi International (from the Latin phrase *modus vivendi*, which translates to "mode or way of living") with its motto, "Temperance, Peace and Brotherhood," and the aim of "creating a world free from the harm of alcohol and other drugs."

Today, Movendi and its followers have established themselves as vocal members of WHO and other governmental and non-governmental agencies to promote temperance programs and silence the scientific community's input on potential health benefits from moderate alcohol consumption. But should this group and others be the ultimate arbiters of our dietary guidelines without the participation of the medical and scientific communities? This seems the direction WHO and other national regulatory agencies have taken, including our own USDA and HHS.

On the brighter side, a recent study was just discussed by wine columnist and authority W. Blake Gray in his Aug. 16 Wine-Searcher News and Features article "Don't Believe the Hype – Wine Can Be Healthy." Grey refers to a recent study analyzed by three prominent researchers in Madrid.

The study included 135,103 British senior citizens over a 12-year period and was published in the American Medical Association's JAMA Network Open website. The study reinforced previous research in finding significant health benefits from moderate alcohol consumption with "significantly lower risk of cardiovascular disease and [reduced] mortality rate more than 10 percent...[and a small protective association especially with cancer]."

Regrettably, and according to Grey, this study was incorrectly reported in the New York Times where the headline read, "Older Adults Do Not Benefit From Moderate Drinking, Large Study Finds." The Times then went on to misquote the findings and ignore the study's basic message. A similar article also appeared in the New York Post.

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So, even the continuing research and reporting by respected studies is being misrepresented by those linking themselves to today's temperance advocates.

One day this past spring, wine communicator and author Karen MacNeil was walking her dog here in Napa Valley when the idea of "Come Over October" suddenly came to her. MacNeil has long been a staunch advocate of moderate wine consumption while seeing wine as a vehicle in bringing people together.

To combat the current anti-alcohol sentiment voiced through WHO, Movendi and other governing bodies in the promotion of "Dry January" and the newer "Sober October" she decided to blaze a path and construct an opposing campaign "to promote and encourage people to gather together over a glass of wine during October."



Co-founders of Come Over October Kimberly Charles (left) and Karen MacNeil (right).

Alexander Rubin Photography

In June, with the able help of Gino Colangelo (president of PR firm Colangelo and Partners) and Kimberly Charles (founder and president of Charles Communications Associates), Come Over October (COO) was launched. MacNeil now says, "Come Over October is like a runaway train... the support is overwhelming."



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COO honors wine's 9,000-year history as a communal beverage that brings people together and 2024's celebration will be the inaugural edition of an annual campaign. To date more than \$100,000 has been raised with at least half going toward a media blitz across the country and in wine producing areas around the world.

More than 70 wine related businesses (wineries, distributors, restaurants, trade organizations and retailers) have joined the program reaching several hundred related entities. International partners such as Wines of Chile, Wines of Sicilia DOC, Champagne Bureau U.S.A., Wine Australia, New Zealand Winegrowers and Wines of South Africa have also joined the effort to carry the message and celebration in their local markets.

On Sept. 25 our Napa Valley Congressman Mike Thompson, along with his Congressional Wine Caucus co-chairman Dan Newhouse of Oregon, will host an introductory COO tasting and celebration for the bi-partisan committee in Washington D.C. Hats off to them for getting involved in a meaningful way to promote this influential program.



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To find events near you, go to [localwineevents.com](http://localwineevents.com) and click on the “Learn More” tab below the Come Over October “COO” logo on the home page.

In July, Napa Valley Vintners launched their “Why Wine?” project that is not limited to the Valley’s wines. Rather, it is a project that encourages people to share their stories about why they love wine on social media. Other groups and trade organizations have also joined in with their campaigns to share the message of wine being a long held focal point on the dinner table and an important part of celebrations, holidays and those occasions that bring people together.

While we are in the midst of another temperance movement supported by well financed and influential anti-alcohol groups, it is important for us to stay focused on scientific evidence that wine in moderation may be good for our health and fight back with its 9,000-year history where it has proven itself a part of mealtime enjoyment and a pillar of celebrations linking family and friends.

I will be hosting a Come Over October celebration for my neighbors as a meaningful “thank you” for all they have done for me and my family. Perhaps you would consider doing the same during the month of October and sharing a bottle with your friends to celebrate wine’s history and its place in our lives.