

in your

Prime

Bucks County's Only 55+ Publication



*Turning a Dream
into Reality
- page 9*

Turning A Dream Into Reality *Tom and Christine Carroll's story*

Picture this. A bright-eyed, 10-year-old boy who, like most kids, spends his time playing in the yard, living fancy free, and drinking milk to grow strong and healthy. Seems normal. Now add to the scenario that the boy tells his parents just three days after settling into their Bucks County farm, "Wouldn't this make a great vineyard?" You'd think he'd grown up on wine, not milk.

Throughout the years, the boy kept his dream in his back pocket. He talked about it occasionally to his parents, who dismissed his words as childhood antics. But as the boy grew, he studied the craft of wine-making and his dream flourished. It wasn't until his parents received a late-night telephone call from their son in California – by then a 20-year-old rising actor – saying he was "coming home to plant vines, establish roots for the vineyard, and establish my roots" that they realized that this dream was really a destiny, and one they had to help fulfill.

It sounds like a script from a Hollywood movie: the child playing the leading role, the parents supporting actors. Rather, the Carrolls – Tom, Sr., Christine, and Tom, Jr. – have turned this almost surreal dream into a reality, and a prosperous one at that. The Carrolls are the proud owners of Crossing Vineyards and Winery, located on their Washington Crossing homestead.

"Some people thought we were crazy putting faith in our son's dream," said Tom, Sr. "and some said we were the greatest parents in the world. We just knew that we had a son with a very special dream and if we could do this together, well, then it would be something great we could share together. Our only son is what we call "our limited edition"! We'd do anything for him."

The same day they received the unforgettable call, Chris and Tom headed down to the barn from their 200-year-old home, both located

“ We're just regular people that have been blessed, have worked really hard, and have taken some leaps of faith. This is our best crazy thing yet! ”

on a 20-acre estate, and started making plans. Upon their son's arrival from the west coast, the trio brought in top-notch consultants in the craft of winemaking, and a variety of builders to begin the artful conversion of the run-in shed and barn into what is now a state of the art winery, barrel room, special event room, and retail store.

And then they began digging. Literally. It took 3½ months, but in 2001, Sr. and Tom, Jr. dug – on hands and knees – 8,500 holes and planted 5,000 vines. A second vineyard was planted two years later on an adjacent parcel of the pristine estate, this time with a laser planter that worked via satellite. "It's been a labor of love since day one. The hardest thing I've ever done too, but the most rewarding, aside from marrying Chris and the birth of our son," Tom, Sr. said.

They haven't stopped working. Since 2003, Crossing Vineyards and Winery has been open 7 days a week and the owners are continually striving to meet – and exceed – their quality standard. "In one word, quality is who we are and what we stand for," Chris stated. Last year – only their third year in business – they produced 16,000 gallons of

wine and won numerous prestigious awards and accolades from wine experts nationwide including Jonathan Newman, PLCB Chairman and Wine Enthusiast's Man of the Year 2003, who commented, "Everything the Carroll family does is first class. If any Pennsylvania winery can 'break out,' it's Crossing Vineyards and Winery."

All this – and more – despite the fact that both Tom, Sr. and Chris had full-time professional careers until recently, and had their eyes on retiring in the near future.

"The fact that we started this business late in life has helped us," Tom commented. "It's all come together so well because of our life and business experiences." Tom worked as a banker in New York City and later owned a company that designed and built banks, and employed 150+. He sold the business last April. Chris' experience lies in teaching English, owning a retail shop, and working as a sales executive. Currently, she writes for several wine magazines, sits on numerous boards, is readying a romance novel heading for publication, and working on a coffee table book about the winery and vineyard. Combine Tom Sr.'s financial savvy, Chris' expertise in marketing, and Tom, Jr.'s strong educational and arts background and you have a fine recipe for success – wine-

making success.

"Yes, Tom (Sr.) and my experience helps, but Tom (Jr.) brings the dream, the passion, the youth. It wouldn't work without him. He's the future," Chris added with a smile.

The future of Crossing Vineyards and Winery, in fact, holds much more. Aside from continuing to increase the production of its grapes, build on their extensive Wine Institute classes and public events, and carefully expand their distribution, the Carrolls are currently adding an executive office and a bridal suite.

"There are Monday mornings when we ask ourselves if we're crazy, but we get out to the vineyard and we just love it," Tom said. "It's a lifestyle that is amazing, and it has brought so many interesting people into our lives. We're at a great point in our lives. As seniors ourselves, we love seniors. Seniors get it. What you see is what you get. Forget all the nonsense. We're that way too, Chris and I. We're just regular people that have been blessed, have worked really hard, and have taken some leaps of faith. This is our best crazy thing yet!"

As for that retirement that Tom Sr. and Chris were thinking about before this dream of a vineyard took root: "It's like learning to ride a bike. You put the training wheels on, practice a lot, and pretty soon you can take them off and 'go it' alone. We're almost there – we're about ready to take the training wheels off and let Tom enjoy the ride alone."

"He's ready," Tom, Sr. added, "But are we, I don't know. One thing I do know is that this whole journey has been a from-the-heart story. And if you tried, you couldn't craft it." Chris chimed in, "It's really a family story. A beautiful story about family."

