

Ron and Teri Kuhn

Road-Paving, Wine-Making and Caring are What it Means to be Kuhn

"I'm a realistic, hard-working guy," said Ron Kuhn after the 2001 Napa Valley Wine Auction when he, as the charity event's top bidder, laid-out \$955,000 on a variety of fine and cult wines. "I've given back to my high school (class of '65) and college, and I am thrilled to be giving back to this community." Just because the guy drives a sexy car (a Maserati), flies around in a fast plane (a Citation X) and calls two places home (St. Charles, Illinois and the Napa Valley, California where he and his wife Teri own the Pillar Rock Vineyard), it doesn't mean that Kuhn is a man whose success has gone to his head.

On the contrary, Ron Kuhn is a man who cares. Deeply.

Consider: On September 11 when his cherished friend Barbara Olson was aboard the plane that crashed into the Pentagon, right away he knew he would honor her memory by dedicating his Pillar Rock 2000 Cabernet Sauvignon to her, "as a poignant reminder of the goodness of friendship, life and survivorship." When in 2002 he lost his father Harry, founder of Harry W. Kuhn, Inc. the West Chicago company the local *Kane County Chronicle* describes as "one of Illinois' major road building empires" – the company of which Kuhn today is chairman – right away he knew how, among other ways, he would honor his memory: he and Teri donated a new wing to the Marianjoy Rehabilitation Hospital in Wheaton, IL, dedicated, of course, to Kuhn senior.

Kuhn indeed likes to give. "It's just a real good feeling to help people who need help," he says of his and Teri's vigorous philanthropy. Which is not

to say the soft-spoken, road-paving titan doesn't delight in life's finer pleasures. Oh, how he does. His 22-acre Pillar Rock Vineyard, in the heart of Napa's Stags Leap district, produces wines considered "cult" that go for up to \$340 a bottle and are uncorked at



some of the world's most worldly world-class restaurants, those of the Peninsula Beverly Hills, Chicago's Four Seasons Hotel and Napa's Auberge du Soleil among them.

"It's more or less a hobby for us," if that's the term for it," he says of the wines that he and Teri – and winemaker Cary Gott, a USC college buddy – bottle to the awe and admiration of connoisseurs who thrill to what Gott calls the "racy, spicy, fruity" character of the Pillar Rock vintages, wines that also are "noteworthy for the silky texture" that characterize Stags Leap district. If proof of their popularity be needed there is always the prestigious Napa Valley Wine Auction as witness. The vineyard's first vintage, the 1999 Pillar Rock Estate Grown Cabernet Sauvignon (which quickly sold out) hit

#1 at the 2002 auction's highly discriminating barrel tasting. The wine dedicated to Barbara Olson, who Kuhn says was "instrumental in the success of our first vintage," the 2000 Pillar Rock Stags Leap Cabernet Sauvignon (still available), was among the main auction's top lots in 2003.

But to think any of this success keeps Kuhn full of himself is far from the truth. Oh sure, the *Kane County Chronicle* may say he and Teri "shine on the Napa Valley social circuit," but it also admits the couple are "significant contributors to charities." And anyway, Kuhn is otherwise too occupied with another of his passions to leave any time for personal puffing up: private aviation. On September 14, three days after Barbara Olson's death, he hied himself over to Flexjet and said, Here I am.

Never again a sight for the commercial airline terminal, Kuhn became a Citation X convert and uses it exclusively for, among other business and personal forays, his frequent trips between Napa and Dupage, IL (KDPA) – a trip of two- and-three-quarters hours that he used to do in double that. One can only guess how every lift-off and touch-down at Dupage plays on Kuhn's mind: once upon a time the airport runway was paved by Harry W. Kuhn, Inc. and long before Kuhn junior ever flew himself, he tested its flawless finish by racing his Porsche along it.

For all his giving, Kuhn is allowed his jollies.

These days the vineyard owner, whose wines are so fine that any left over in the bottling goes to the Robert Mondavi reserve program, is focused



as ever. "While the winemaking business is [his] love," notes the *Chronicle*, "Ron acknowledges that he must pay attention to the road business." Alas, the unassuming, deeply-caring, Maserati-driving Kuhn would like nothing more than to get in a little golf; that is, if it weren't for The Problem.

"I used to play but now I work all the time," he says. "I'm not so good anymore."

Good, however, is a relative term. If you were to ask the many who benefit from his and Teri's caring, in Kuhn's case he'd no doubt be considered good indeed. *God bless America*, it says on his vineyard website, www.pillarrockvineyard.com. Of course it does. Kuhn is a man who remembers. ✕

Philanthropists and their Pleasures. Teri and Ron Kuhn with their transportation staples (top); the 2000 Stags Leap Cabernet dedicated to friend Barbara Olson (below left); Teri and Barbara on Labor Day weekend 2001, mere days before 9-11

