

TOP STORY EDITOR'S PICK

# Orums pledge to support charity with wine from historic St. Helena vineyard

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Caren and Nick Orum, founders of the Arborum wine brand, walk in their historic Hidden Key vineyard.

Submitted photo

ST. HELENA — The story of the Weinberger family is the stuff of a Hollywood movie: Wine, murder, and a resilient widow who became California's first female vintner.

Now Caren and Nick Orum are writing a new chapter in that saga, replanting part of the Weinberger vineyards that had long lain fallow, restoring an olive tree orchard, and making a major charitable pledge.

The Orums, who have a background in investment banking, pledged to donate \$1 million and all net earnings from their wine sales to charities that support local vineyard workers and the environment. They announced Tuesday that they've already met their \$1 million goal.

"We're growing here and we live here, so we want to give here and support the environment where we are," Caren Orum said.

## The mighty Hannah Weinberger

The Orums were inspired by the unusual history of their property on the eastern slope of Spring Mountain.

John and Hannah Weinberger operated successful vineyards and a winery north of St. Helena. In 1882, John was shot and killed in a murder-suicide by a former employee who'd been making unwelcome advances toward the Weinbergers' daughter, Minnie.

Undaunted, the 42-year-old Hannah Weinberger took over the business and ran it for 38 years, multiplying production by a factor of five and producing a Cabernet Sauvignon that won a silver medal at the 1889 Paris Exposition. She also took over her husband's role as director of the Bank of St. Helena, another virtually unheard-of role for a woman of the time.

Weinberger's success ended only when Prohibition took effect in 1920. She died in 1931 at age 90, having never remarried.



Hannah Weinberger took over the family vineyards and winery after her husband, John, was murdered in 1882.

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A map shows the Weinbergers' extensive vineyard holdings as of 1881, one year before John Weinberger was murdered and his wife Hannah took over the business.

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## Restoring the property

The Weinberger properties have since been carved up among various owners, including William Cole Vineyards, which operates the Weinbergers' original stone winery. But a 20-acre property where the Weinbergers had planted grapes and olive trees in the 1870s had been neglected until the Orums bought it in 2013.

"We didn't know it had been vineyard before because it was so overgrown," Caren Orum said. "When we started clearing out the underbrush, we found the terracing and we realized the olive trees were all in a row."

They've cleared dense brush, revived the olive grove, planted three blocks of Cabernet Sauvignon, moved into a 1930s-era hunting cabin on the property, and hired vineyard manager Oscar Renteria and winemaker Andy Erickson.

The average slope is 26%, so the vines are hand-farmed. The Orums named the 2.5-acre, organic-certified estate vineyard Hidden Key after one of their children found an old key in a large tree. One of the kids pulled out the key and, in an eerie coincidence, the tree split in half two days later.

On Aug. 20 they're introducing a 2021 Proprietary Red with Cabernet Sauvignon from Hidden Key and Cabernet Franc from Pritchard Hill, plus a 2021 Proprietary White with Sauvignon Musque, Sauvignon Blanc and Semillon from Coombsville. They eventually plan to produce an estate Cabernet Sauvignon.

## Pledging to give



Caren and Nick Orum have pledged to donate 100% of the net proceeds from their wine sales to charity.

Submitted photo

The Orums named their brand Arborum, which evokes their last name and their passion for nature. They've committed to donate \$1 million to charities that support local vineyard workers and the environment. All net earnings from wine sales will go to charity.

They've donated to 10,000 Degrees (helping low-income students go to college), the Napa Valley Farmworkers Foundation, Puertas Abiertas, Collective Napa Valley's reforestation efforts, Shine Napa Valley (supporting youth mental health), Point Reyes National Seashore Association, Kiss the Ground (supporting regeneration and healthy soil) and Save the Redwoods League.

They also donate their time. Caren serves on several nonprofit boards and Nick spends every Thursday volunteering for a restorative justice program at San Quentin Rehabilitation Center.

"It feels good to give," Caren Orum said.

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