

## FRUIT OF THE VINE Londonderry man enjoys success as amateur winemaker

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It began with an inspiration.

Jason Phelps, 36, had just won a battle with testicular cancer in 2003, when his wife Margot, 35, pushed him to do something he always wanted to do.

His choice was to brew his own beer. Margot gave her consent under her one condition: that he also create for her, as Jason put it, a "fruity, girly wine." The result was a raspberry white zinfandel.

After exposing family and friends to his wines, he had a very positive response. It was then that he realized that maybe brewing beer wasn't his calling, and that his winemaking was a calling that chose him.

With so much positive feedback, he decided to enter the 2008 WineMaker Magazine Amateur Winemaking Contest. He entered seven wines and came out with four medals: one bronze, two silver and one gold.

Almost in disbelief, Jason decided to enter another contest in 2008, this time the Indiana State Fair Competition. He won four more medals, this time one bronze, one silver and two gold.

This year, Jason focused again on the WineMaker Magazine competition and entered four wines. Out of the 4,400 entries, he won three medals: two silver and one gold.

He says the trick is to let his wife pick which wines get entered into the contests. So far she has proved to have a winning touch.

She admits this hobby has changed her husband. Before overcoming cancer and discovering his newfound love for winemaking, Jason was always focused on work. But since then he has been able to refocus on what he "truly enjoys."

Although to the average person something like winemaking may seem like a long tedious process, Jason argues otherwise. Although the aging process can sometimes take up to a year, he admits that's the hardest part: having patience. There are kits that one can buy to make wine, with step-by-step instructions and everything a person could need.

"It's almost painfully easy," Jason said, laughing. "You can make anything you want."

He explains that if someone wanted to try it, it wouldn't be difficult for them to pick it right up.

"There is an art to it," he admitted, and tasting is a big part of that art. "It's how you learn how to make it better for the next time."

Instead of using just the kit, Jason also uses fresh fruit from local farms in Londonderry, such as Elwood Orchards and Sunnycrest Farms. He hopes to do this more frequently in the future. He also recycles bottles and reuses them. "It's awesome economically," Jason says. Not only is he helping out local farms but he's helping himself too.

Jason can make two or three bottles of wine for what it would cost to buy just one from a store.

"It's a hobby you can share," said Margot.

Jason and Margot personalize their wine and give it as gifts.

"I'm hooked on sharing it now," Jason said.

"My husband is obsessed with making wine," Margot added, with a smile. And it's this obsession that could lead them into a new career. Jason admits that they have been thinking seriously about starting up some kind of commercial wine business in the future. If the Phelps pursued the commercial venture, theirs would be the 13th licensed winery in New Hampshire. For more information on Jason Phelps and his wines, log onto [www.ancientfirewines.com](http://www.ancientfirewines.com)