

"Never refuse to do a kindness unless the act would work great injury to yourself, and never refuse to take a drink — under any circumstances."

— Mark Twain

TIGER SPIRITS



In the world of adult beverages, Tigers are making their mark: saving happy hour, saving vineyards and saving lives. Story by Erik Potter * Photos by Nicholas Benner

Grape Expectations



MEETING SOMEONE in a specific field in rural Missouri is nearly impossible, so Dean Volenberg drove to a gas station in rural Gasconade County, south of Hermann, to meet the local grape grower who had a strange case of black rot that was ruining his grapes.

Volenberg is director of the MU Grape and Wine Institute. Supported by the Missouri Wine and Grape Board, the institute researches the best winemaking and grape-growing practices for Missouri's unique soil and climate, and disseminates those findings.

Volenberg, whose other title is assistant extension professor of viticulture and winery operations, is an expert on the "pest complex" that attacks vineyards — the insects, fungi and even birds that combine to rob vineyard owners of a peaceful night's sleep.

Black rot is a common fungal disease that afflicts grapes, but it's easily prevented if you take the right steps, and the man he was meeting said he'd taken all of them.

So Volenberg followed him to his vineyard, traversing miles-long, poorly marked gravel roads that wandered the rolling countryside. They walked out among his trellises of Norton grapes. Sure enough, they found the telltale symptoms of black rot: shriveled fruit and a few fruiting structures that contained fungal spores. Volenberg asked the man again. Which fungicide did you spray? When did you spray it? How often?

Volenberg gives one-on-one consultations all the time. He also has an email listserv of 700 people; every seven to 10 days he reports on the current pest complex and how to identify and manage it. His network of subscribers and informants grapevines through Missouri and into surrounding states as far as Minnesota.

While Volenberg tends to these MU Extension-related activities, his colleagues focus more on research. Misha Kwasniewski, assistant research professor, leads the enology (winemaking) research team, and they're hiring an assistant research professor to lead the viticulture (grape growing) team.

The teams evaluate new grape cultivars (varieties), experiment with pairing one cultivar's vines onto another's rootstock, test the benefits of cork versus screw-cap bottle closures, and consult with winemakers about troubles they're experiencing.

They also work closely with Patty Hosack, who directs the MU Plant Diagnostic Clinic, which is where

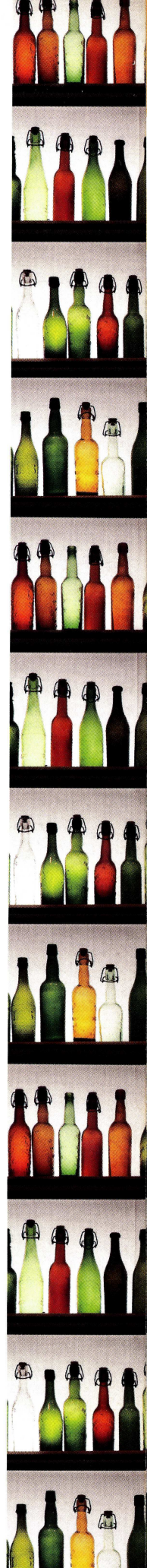
Volenberg sent the mysterious black rot. For \$15 a sample, the clinic tests and identifies diseases affecting plants.

It turned out the sample in question wasn't a case of black rot after all but, rather, a fruit rot called *Pestalotiopsis*, a much less common disease and easily confused with black rot. Volenberg alerted growers to it in his next email and told them how to treat it.

"They're easy to disrupt," Volenberg says. There are sprays that can knock it right out. "No worries."



† Pete Kouba thins grape clusters at Mizzou's Horticulture and Agroforestry Research Center in New Franklin, Missouri, for the Grape and Wine Institute.



Designated Driver



JOHNNY WANG is an accomplished attorney, a partner in a prestigious St. Louis law firm. His clients are companies you've heard of. He founded the city's Asian Chamber of Commerce. He has helped a lot of people in his career, which he's proud of. But if you ask him, he'll say he's most proud of the work he did as a student at Mizzou.

Fifteen years ago, the Yellow Cab Company's contract to provide students with safe rides home from bars was expiring. The Missouri Students Association (MSA) was contributing about \$13,500 a year toward Safe Ride, which was free to students. But those who used it complained about slow response times and feeling intimidated about getting in a car with a stranger. Few used the service.

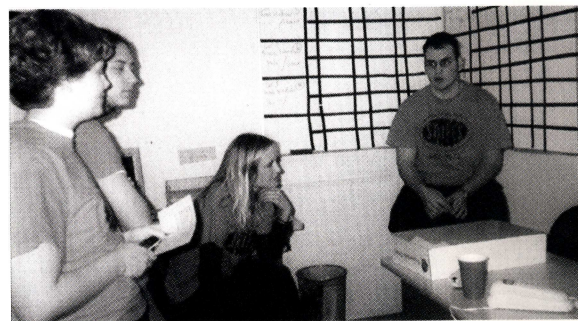
Wang, BA BA '02, then director of MSA's Department of Student Services, decided to find another way.

Research led Wang to a student-run program at Texas A&M, where volunteer drivers gave fellow students free rides home. And the students actually used it. Wang took four other MSA members with him to College Station to kick the tires. "It was just an amazing program," he says.

The students returned to Columbia and, over the summer, put together Student Tigers Riding In Pursuit of Ensuring Safety (STRIPES). To make it work they would need to raise money, negotiate a mountain of logistics, recruit a hundred student volunteers and spend nearly every weekend for the rest of their undergraduate careers operating and growing the program. They didn't blink.

"The way the five of us saw it, we had four incredible years at Mizzou, and it was our opportunity to give something back," says Wang, who directed STRIPES its first year.

The first night STRIPES opened, they hoped to



give at least 20 rides. They gave more than 100. In the 15 years since, STRIPES has provided 190,000 free rides home to students.

The secret to its longevity is the dedication of its volunteers, Wang says. "It was definitely the strong friendships that were formed," he says. "It was fun. People wanted to be here."

Ever since, that lesson has guided Dan Reiter, one of the five students who made the Texas A&M trip and who directed the program during its second year.

"STRIPES leadership has better prepared me for my job than probably anything else at Mizzou," he says.

Reiter, BS BA '03, is vice president of sales and marketing for the Springfield Cardinals, the AA-affiliate of the St. Louis Cardinals baseball team. He leads a staff of more than 60 full- and part-time workers, but the principles are the same as when he was leading 200 STRIPES volunteers.

"You have to look at what their motivation is, not what your motivation is," he says. "Most people are motivated to do things they enjoy. When you're in charge, you're focused on the operations, the things we *have* to do. I try to bring to the job, for my employees, the idea that, hey, this is fun."

After 15 years and nearly 200,000 rides, Reiter has "an overwhelming sense of pride" in what he helped create.

Ever the builder, he emphasizes how much the program depends on private contributions. "This is one program that helps prevent loss for students; the longer it can be sustained, the more students it can help," he says. "This program doesn't happen without financial support."

↑ Dan Reiter, right, goes over the phone procedures for the night's dispatchers.

← Johnny Wang, left, and Matt Thompson visit while waiting for the phones to ring and the night's driving to start.



Toast of Town



BEING ABLE TO MAKE high-quality whiskey, bourbon, vodka and rum was not a good enough reason for Lisa Driskel Hawxby, M Ed '14, and husband Van Hawxby to open their own distillery.

"We had to discover our 'whys.' Why are we doing this?" Lisa says.

Van caught the distilling bug when he and Lisa lived in Portland, Oregon. When they moved back to Columbia a few years ago, they found a plethora of student-friendly watering holes with loud music and cheap drinks, but they didn't see many places for grownups to enjoy a well-mixed cocktail.

That was their opening. "We wanted to create a place where people felt comfortable and could have a good time without the need to overindulge," Lisa says. They see it as a kind of moral obligation. Be fun, yes, but also be wholesome, corny as that might sound.

So you won't see any \$2 you-call-it specials. Closing time is 10 p.m. Van has been known to give regulars a ride after close rather than let them bike home in the dark.

"For us, our brand is about people, about relationships," says Lisa, whose MU degree is in counseling. "We love the idea of offering a part of ourselves to other people."

Regulars from as far as Jefferson City travel to the DogMaster tasting room in Columbia's North Village Arts District. They've come to know one another. They've created a community. Of course, building a new business with a spouse can be stressful. "My biggest surprise is that we haven't killed each other yet," Lisa laughs. Still, "when we are on the same page, we can make great things happen."

Two years in, with a growing business and loyal following, they've been rewarded.

"I get to make something, serve it to people, and they smile," Van says. "That's instant validation." **M**

✦ Lisa Driskel Hawxby, M Ed '14, serves community spirit with distilled spirits at DogMaster in Columbia's North Village Arts District.

