

Wineries Across the Country That Support People With Disabilities

BY [SAMANTHA FACCIOLO](#)



THE THROWER FAMILY IN THEIR ONEHOPE WINE PHOTO SHOOT / PHOTO BY TAYLOR HOTTER

Wineries, by nature, have always been places of connection, places where people gather to share a bottle of wine or a wine-centered experience. It's only natural that many wineries have become partners in supporting positive community change. From offering wine baskets at nonprofit silent auctions to holding tasting events with proceeds going to [charity](#), many wineries have demonstrated their willingness to give back to their local communities.

But these three wineries have committed to supporting individuals with disabilities through full-time employment, donations and more.

Rosewood Winery

Great Bend, Kansas



ROSEWOOD WINERY MANAGER ALEX HAMMOND (LEFT) WORKS WITH ROSEWOOD WINERY EMPLOYEES CAITLYN GALLOWAY AND DARREN BROWN TO BOTTLE WINE / PHOTO BY MICHAEL DAWES

In 1998, Tammy Hammond and her husband started Rosewood Services, an agency that provides access to education, housing, recreational and social outings, vocational training and more to people with developmental disabilities. Today, Rosewood serves over 200 clients in Central Kansas.

Hammond believes that process-oriented work helps people learn. And so, to create meaningful employment opportunities for people with developmental difficulties, she founded Rosewood Winery in 2012.

Winery client employees set goals and make decisions together with their case manager, who is also employed at Rosewood. They also have regular performance evaluations that allow them to reflect on their growth and set new benchmarks. All winery client employees go through a training and onboarding program, and they earn a paycheck for their work.

In 2021, Rosewood bottled 3,000 gallons of wine.



CRYSTAL ALKIRE, CLIENT-EMPLOYEE OF ROSEWOOD WINERY, BOXING BOTTLES OF ZINFANDEL / PHOTO BY MICHAEL DAWES

“It has been my dream to make wine,” says Crystal Alkire, who has been a Rosewood client employee for four years. “I’m really thankful I have people who care about me, love me and take me in.”

Alongside 24 fellow client employees, Alkire takes part in the entire process—from wine filtration and bottle sanitation to bottling, labeling and shipping—for over 33 wines.

Alkire’s favorite day is bottling day, when she can see the literal fruits of her labor. For Alkire, the most important part of her job is making people happy and creating wines that customers enjoy.

Each wine is named after a horse in the Rosewood equine therapy program, another service provided to clients and workplace.

Alkire, a horse lover who knows the ins and outs of each horse’s personality, also works on the ranch.



JAMES "JIM" WONSETLER IN FRONT OF ROSEWOOD WINERY, HOLDING A BOTTLE OF COOSA CABERNET SAUVIGNON. WONSETLER IS AN ORIGINAL CLIENT-EMPLOYEE OF THE WINERY, STARTING WORK THERE IN OCTOBER OF 2012, WHILE ALSO WORKING A COMMUNITY JOB THROUGH MUCH OF THE DECADE / PHOTO BY STEPHEN MCANULLA

The wines bear names such as Rosita Rooster, a Sangria Zinfandel named after “a flirty brown filly”; Invite the Fox, a Pinot Grigio named for a frisky horse who looks like a Thoroughbred but has “the spirit of a quarter horse”; and Daisy Duke, a Green Apple Riesling whose namesake is a paint pony who is the “apple of the ranch’s eye.”

Alkire’s favorite wine is a Blueberry Pinot Noir called Rooster Jaguar, but she insists she likes the wine for its flavor, not for its namesake.

Now, when trainee employees feel overwhelmed by the challenges of learning a new job, it is Alkire who encourages them by saying, “It’s not your dream to give up. Otherwise, you wouldn’t have started working here.”

Those transferable skills are what allow, at any one time, 20–30% of Rosewood’s client employees to be working toward placement in community jobs. Many times, even those working in community-oriented positions continue working at Rosewood.



ROSEWOOD WINERY CLIENT EMPLOYEE JAMIE CRONE ON BOTTLING DAY / PHOTO BY STEPHEN MCANULLA

“So many times, people with developmental disabilities are put on a shelf, so to speak,” says Michael Dawes, director of public relations of Rosewood Services. “By having a program that inspires people to move on to the next rung, it gives them a sense of purpose.”

Rosewood emphasizes collaborative decision-making and structured independence for its client employees, who also create jams, jellies and honey to sell to their communities.

Dawes’ wish for the world is for people to prioritize providing meaningful opportunities for those with developmental disabilities. He says the key is inviting people with developmental disabilities to connect with the world rather than isolating these populations into “special spaces.”

Rosewood, through the winery and wine cellar, ranch and other ventures, currently serves 120 developmentally disabled individuals. If everyone would pursue the Rosewood mission, Dawes says, “the world would completely change.”

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Feature story in its entirety can be accessed at <https://www.winemag.com/2022/03/31/wineries-support-disabilities/>