



Starry, Starry Summer Nights

By Tara Lynne Brown

Floating in a kayak at night with stars peppering the night sky, the moon reflecting on the water's surface, and an astronomy expert pointing out "The Seven Sisters" and "Orion's Belt." It may even be the evening of a meteor shower. This is Paddling Under the Stars, a summer night on Jordan Lake organized by the Morehead Planetarium in Chapel Hill in conjunction with Frog Hollow Outdoors, a paddling and adventure company in Durham.

Morehead Planetarium is the site where almost all astronauts from the Apollo and Gemini missions trained, learning the intricacies of star navigation required prior to launching into space. Today, over 60 years since its construction, Morehead offers visitors seasonal Carolina Skies shows and themed holiday events that explore constellations and the mythology behind their stories. The Paddling Under the Stars program began five years ago and offers the unique al fresco experience of observing constellations while floating on Jordan Lake, free from intense light pollution that inhibits stargazing in densely populated areas like Chapel Hill, Durham, Cary and Raleigh.

"I really like Jordan Lake because you're not right next to any big city and there are really good horizons. We saw Mercury and Venus -- anywhere else and they would have probably been blocked by a house or a tree," said Amy Sayles.

Sayles is a former epidemiologist who migrated toward astronomy while working part-time at Morehead Planetarium. She is now their Current Science Program Manager.

Why does one sign up for a Pad-

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State's Mountain Vineyards Offer Great Wines, Hospitality and Scenery

by Debbie Selinsky

While many of us weren't looking, North Carolina's 89 wineries have made the state seventh in the nation when it comes to wine production.

It's a good thing, too, since Wine Business Monthly has designated the RTP area (greater Raleigh, Cary, Durham and Chapel Hill) the 12th fastest growing wine consumption area in the country.

And if North Carolina isn't on the radar of every wine expert yet, a steady stream of awards and recognitions indicate the wine business in the Tar Heel State is gaining ground one bottle at a time.

Not only are the wineries producing great products, but they're also

providing interesting tourism opportunities, especially in or near the Blue Ridge mountains. Visitors from all over are discovering the appeal of an outing to this scenic region's vineyards and wineries, where hospitality and samples are the order of the day.

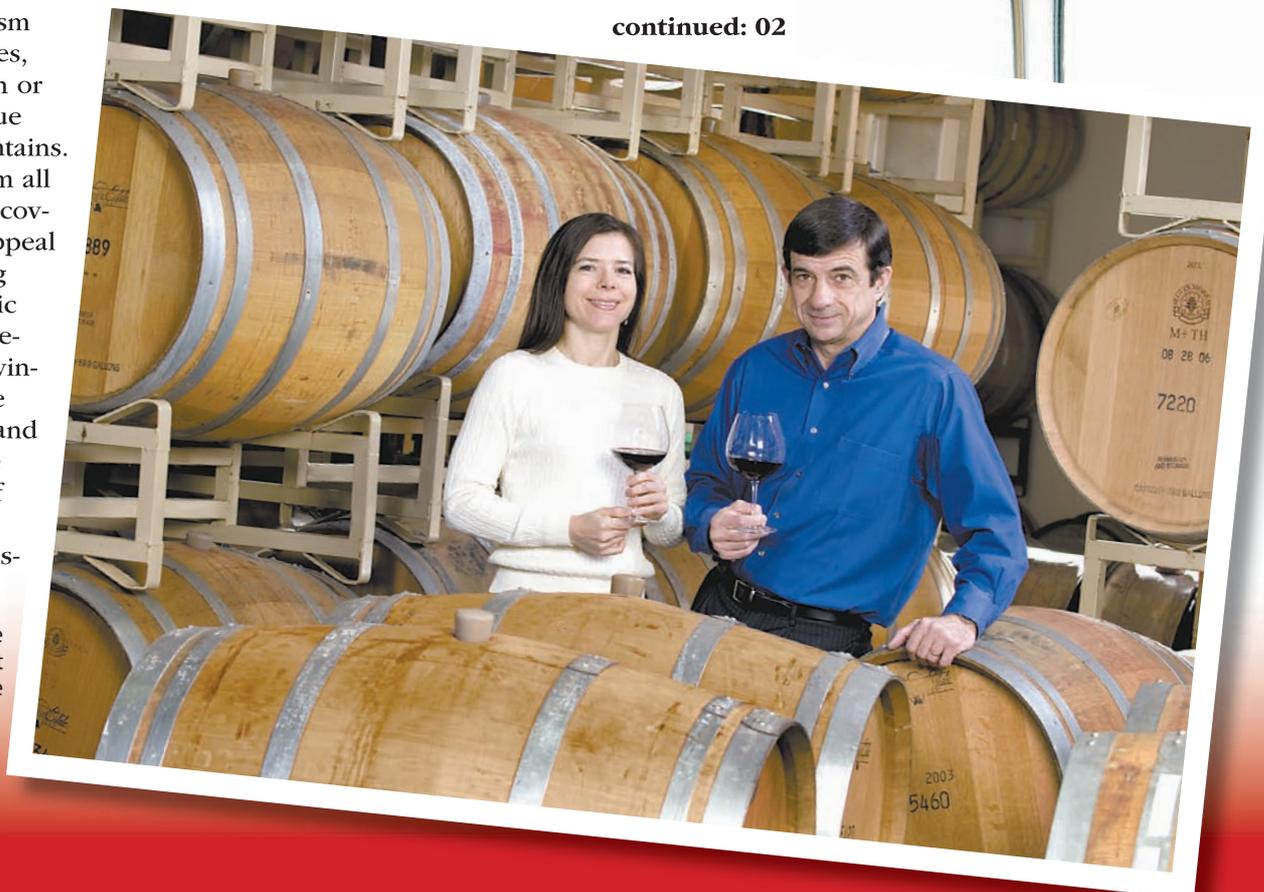
Not surpris-

ingly, the winery at the Biltmore Estate in Asheville is the most visited winery in the country, drawing more than a million visitors each year. The winery, which opened in Antler Hill Village in 1985, is located in a converted dairy barn originally designed by Biltmore House architect Richard Morris Hunt.

People are urged to tour the 90,000-square-foot facility to learn about how the wine is made and, of course, to sample and purchase Biltmore wines in the gourmet shop or have them with dinner at one of the property's four restaurants. Biltmore's 94-acre vineyard lies in a valley near the French Broad River, where its varieties include Merlot, Cabernet Sauvignon, Cabernet Franc, Riesling and Viognier.

The brand, celebrating the win-

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Starry Night
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dling Under the Stars evening? Sayles shared the results of paddlers' questionnaires. Most commonly participants feel the evening is "something different than dinner and a movie." Others had an interest in canoeing, and some in astronomy, and some liked the idea of marrying up the two. Seeing the sky and nature, being in a peaceful, relaxing setting and connecting to the natural world were also reasons paddlers gave. Plus, if one manages to plan in advance, this is a fun way to entertain out-of-town guests. For an even more extraordinary evening, those who grab an oar in August and October will have the potential to view meteor showers.

Approximately thirty paddlers make the journey at each event. Paddlers meet at Jordan Lake where a few Frog Hollow Outdoors Representatives provide a briefing on kayak safety.

As everyone dons life preservers, a Frog Hollow Representative introduces himself to each person while tying a glow-in-the-dark tube to paddlers' shoulders, explaining, "The law requires all aquatic vessels to have lights. This is your light."

The simple solution to this law creates a glowing scene later in the evening. From afar the floating group resembles a swarm of giant fireflies, as the canoes and kayaks row over the water unseen with only the illuminations from everyone's vests visible.

Pushing off from shore at twilight, paddlers follow the "pilot" canoe, paddled by Frog Hollow Outdoors and holding Sayles. Rowing to a cove about a twenty to thirty minute paddle along Jordan Lake's shore, paddlers may have the opportunity to view "Venus' skirt" – the pink-to-blue shadow of the earth on the eastern horizon. Paddlers are not alone on the water's surface, and though they may have not made reservations for the event, mosquitoes are a certain nuisance early on in the paddle and a repellent is helpful.

At the first site, everyone floats up beside each other and holds on to the edge of their neighbor's kayak or canoe, forming a floating "mothership." This is the time to sit back, literally, to

get a view of the sky straight above. Sayles begins to point out planets and satellites, and then launches into stories about stars, constellations and the mythology behind them. Her energy is contagious, often excitedly distracted by another star as the night gets darker and more and more of the sky reveals itself. Sayles teaches basic navigation using the constellations. Paddlers learn how to locate Polaris (the North Star), to count degrees of latitude with their hands and how to determine which hemisphere they're in. The mythology of Aphrodite is shared along with the stories of "The Seven Sisters," also known as Pleiades. This is a time when

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the ruffling of Zip-loc bags followed by crunching may be heard in the darkness. In the dim starlight one paddler offers another some trail mix—or perhaps it should be renamed paddle mix? This may be a sign that a concessions canoe would earn Morehead Planetarium and Frog Hollow Outdoors some extra income!

2010 Paddling Under the Stars Schedule:

- Friday, July 2nd
- Thursday, August 12th (meteor shower)
- Saturday, September 4th
- Sunday, October 10th

According to the American Meteor

Society's most recent calendar, the meteor showers that will be viewable in 2010 are:

- July 13th through August 26th - Perseids Meteor Shower
- October 4th through November 14th - Orionids Meteor Shower
- November 7th through November 28th - Leonids Meteor Shower
- December 4th through December 16th - Geminids Meteor Shower
- December 17th through December 23rd - Ursids Meteor Shower

“Even though there is a paddle during the Perseids Meteor Shower, it is best viewed after midnight and our paddle is much earlier than that,” Sayles said. “Actually, the most optimal time to stargaze is in the last dark



hour—before 4AM and 5AM.”

If one's calendar doesn't sync up with the Paddling Under the Stars schedule, there are very few places in the Triangle area to enjoy unobstructed views of the night sky.

“Stargazing from downtown isn't a good idea. You do have to get away a little bit...if you've been to more pristine places you can notice the difference,” Sayles said.

Outside of the planetarium's schedule, Frog Hollow Outdoors offers moonlight and starlight paddles on Falls Lake. These events coincide with Friday evenings that fall closest to the full or new moon.

For those interested in paddling during the day, Frog Hollow offers day trips and classes. There are several packages available that explore rivers in the Triangle. “Taste of Home Trips” combine paddling on the Eno River or Three Rivers Area with dinner, a brew tasting, ice cream treat or soda fountain visit.

Landlubbers have the opportunity to view the constellations on dry land, under the dome of the Morehead Planetarium. The planetarium's “Carolina Skies” show changes seasonally to match the current sky. Around the holiday season and special holidays like Valentine's Day, Morehead Planetarium offers customized events that explore more details about the night sky than at a standard show, but delivered with a holiday twist. For families with young children, the mythology behind the stars is a fun way for kids to learn about history. There are also skywatching sessions on land for all ages and nights will vary.

“We got an angry phone call once from a parent who was upset we scheduled a meteor shower on a school night. Unfortunately, that's a little out of our control!” Sayles laughed.

Paddling Under the Stars is suitable for all ages. Some of the mythology surrounding the constellations holds “adult content” according to Sayles, and she checks in with all parents of younger paddlers to seek their approval or to amend her discussion for the evening to a “PG” explanation. The cost per person is \$36, and \$28 for Morehead Planetarium members. www.moreheadplanetarium.org - 919.962.1236 and www.froghollowoutdoors.com - 919.416.1200

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