



George Augustus Vare, Jr.

December 29, 1936 - April 12, 2013

George A. Vare, Jr., 76, died on April 12, 2013, surrounded by loving family in Napa, CA. He was born on December 29, 1936 in Philadelphia, PA, the son of George Augustus Vare, Sr. and Lucille Townsend Vare. He was a graduate of the Episcopal Academy in Overbrook, PA, and received his BA from Williams College in Williamstown, MA. After college, he served as a Lieutenant in the U.S. Coast Guard before earning a degree in electrical engineering from Drexel Institute of Technology in Philadelphia, PA. He worked in the family electrical construction business, Vare Brothers, for five years prior to entering Harvard Business School where he earned an MBA in 1966. George entered the California wine business in 1972 when he purchased Geyser Peak Winery as part of the mergers and acquisitions team for Schlitz Brewing Company. He served as president of Geyser Peak Winery and grew it into a 700, 000 case brand before leaving in 1979 to embark on a series of winery start-ups. For many years he was the principal of George Vare & Associates in San Francisco, CA, a consulting firm to the wine industry. During this time he implemented the start up of Gloria Ferrer winery on behalf of Freixenet. He also founded and published Winedata, a monthly newsletter on trends and statistics in the wine business; served as Executive Director of the American Vineyard Foundation; and established North Bay Cellars and Shadow Creek Champagne Cellars, where he developed and patented a methode champenoise process for sparkling wines. In 1991, George became President of the Henry Wine Group, a major importer and distributor. In 1994, together

with three other industry leaders, he formed Silverado Partners, which led the buyout of Beringer Vineyards from Nestle with Texas Pacific Group. He served as Director of Beringer Wine Estates Holdings Inc. through its acquisition by Foster's Brewing Group in 2000. In 1996, he co-founded and built Luna Vineyards, pioneering the introduction of Italian grape varieties to the Napa Valley. He served as President and Chairman, building the brand and organization until his retirement in 2001, and continued on the Board until 2011. Following his retirement, he served as Interim CEO at Zaca Mesa Winery in Los Olivos, CA, as well as the Chairman of the Board and Director of Inertia Beverage Group LLC. His last great project arose as a result of his work at Luna and the many friendships and visits he made to vintners in the Collio region of Friuli, Italy and Slovenia. George loved small family winemakers, and became interested in the ancient Friulian grape variety Ribolla Gialla. An idiosyncratic grape, tough to grow, different to make wine from, and hard to pronounce, it is also fascinating to taste, great with food, and represents a long tradition in Italy of toiling out of love, rather than following the latest trend. George loved this about the variety, and decided that it would be his retirement project. He and his wife Elsa Vare created Vare Vineyards, making small productions of wines from Ribolla Gialla and Pinot Grigio grapes grown on their own vineyard in Napa. They introduced Ribolla Gialla to the United States, cultivating the first and largest planting of this unusual varietal. As much as George loved Ribolla Gialla, he was equally passionate about the help he could give to young winemakers with a vision, whether his help was advice, encouragement, or access to his precious Ribolla Gialla grapes, which he shared with a group of young iconoclastic winemakers. From his time at Luna, where he provided an incubator for young winemakers, to his Ribolla Gialla vineyard, George was a sort of Godfather for the current "new wave" of California winemakers. Ribolla Gialla to him was more than just a grape variety...it represented everything impractical but meaningful about the wine business, the business he loved and help lead for 40 years. George was an avid yachtsman, having grown up sailing in Beach

Haven, NJ and continuing his passion for sailboat racing in the San Francisco Bay and off the coast of California. He was an active member of the San Francisco Yacht Club, where he served as Commodore in 1981. His spirit of adventure extended to dry land as well, with an appetite for travel and challenging hiking. He and Elsa hiked the Milford Track in New Zealand, explored Africa, India, Japan, and scaled the boulders of Patagonia's mountains. In the last year of his life, he developed a plan and organized community support to implement the Village Concept -- a network of social connections, events, information and support services for elder residents in Napa. George is survived by his wife, Elsa Madsen Norris Vare of Napa, CA, his brothers Henry Vare (Gretchen) of Wayne, PA; and Alexander deHaven Vare (Evie) of Birmingham, AL. He leaves behind his children and step-children Catherine Vare Schembre (Drew) of Seattle, WA; Andrew Townsend Vare of Berkeley CA; Michael Kennedy Vare (Abigail) of Tiburon, CA; Nellie Norris Bloom (Steve) of Rancho Murieta, CA; Kathleen Norris Frank (Randy) of San Anselmo, CA; Teresa Norris Barrows (Dan) of Martinez, CA; grandchildren: Lucia Schembre, Josephine Schembre, Abigail Vare, Kate Vare, Henry Vare; Asher Bloom, Jason Frank, Owen Frank; and many nieces, nephews, and devoted friends. He was pre-deceased by his sister, Lucille Vare Smith (Chapman) of Memphis, TN. A memorial service will be held at 10:00 am on Saturday, May 18, 2013 at the Napa Valley Opera House, with a reception to follow. In lieu of flowers, the family requests that memorials be sent to Community Action of Napa Valley (CANV) or the Napa Valley Opera House.

Tribute Wall



“ 1 file added to the album *Obituary Wall*



Treadway & Wigger Funeral Chapel & Crematory - February 05, 2020 at 09:26 AM



“ *George Augustus Vare, Jr.*

November 19, 2019 at 12:00 AM



“ *Elsa-*

I just happened upon a mention of George's passing. Somehow, I had not heard the news & was so sad to learn of it. George was the perfect combination of savvy businessman & consummate gentleman. I was always touched by his warmth & kindness & greatly admired his success in business as well as his devotion to you & the rest of the family. I can only imagine how difficult it must be for you to be parted from him, but I hope the memories of all your wonderful years together will help you cope. My deepest sympathy to you.

August 04, 2013 at 12:00 AM



“ Hello Elsa, I wanted to reach out to you to say that I am sorry that I missed George's Memorial Service. I had plans that I had made in advance and I seriously thought about canceling them. After much deliberation I realized that George would want me out there having some fun and viewing the splendid falls of Yosemite National Park in the spring time. I thought about you both that day. I understand from many that it was a beautiful Memorial Service and it was attended by hundreds of people who George had touched. I hear that George was still looking out for you and loving you even at the very end. Jim Elder asked your friends to sing a song that George requested for you. How amazing! What a beautiful tribute to your relationship. Elsa, I know how much you will miss George. He was an amazing man. When I think of George I always think of you as well. Such a lovely couple sharing your life and your joy. The Napa Valley is full of people who have achieved a certain status in life. Sometimes that means that these individuals don't remember what it's like to struggle (maybe they never have). Sometimes it means that no matter what you have achieved you never forget that everyone is important regardless of their circumstances. I always felt that from both you and George. You always treated me with respect and kindness. When I would bump into you at the Oxbow or Trader Joe's you always listened with sincere interest when I answered your questions about how things were going. What a beautiful difference you have made in this world. Compassion and kindness are the traits I would like to pass on to my Son. I know you have both succeeded in passing these important lessons onto your own family and too so many others as well. With much love and sympathy, Joyce

May 29, 2013 at 12:00 AM



“ *Elsa:*
My deep condolences on your loss. I was fortunate to spend some time with George, and you, in a group years ago in Marin. I remember his kindness and gentleness and most of all, how happy you were with him. May you find the strength to mourn and have comfort in his memory. Mike Smith

May 03, 2013 at 12:00 AM



“ *Dear Elsa and family, Sending you our heartfelt sympathy. George will be missed by everyone who had the pleasure of knowing him. Most sincerely, Joanie and Don Bekins*

April 27, 2013 at 12:00 AM



“ *Dear Elsa,*
I was so sorry to see the notice of George's passing. I remember him with great fondness, both for his love for you and his family and for his accomplishments. He was so much smarter than all of us. With love, Judi Iglehart

April 25, 2013 at 12:00 AM



“ *Dea Elsa and family,
Your husband and father was a remarkable man in so many ways. Your write up outlined so many amazing accomplishments in business and with the community. But, without a doubt, the visible and lasting legacy is his amazing family. What a blessed man he was--what a blessed family you have. I have the pleasure of knowing many of you --and though George and I met on occasion, its through you that I have gotten to know him--and I have no doubt that above and beyond all of his amazing accomplishments, he was proudest of you all. Love and hugs to all of you. My heart is with you all. CJ Spady*

April 24, 2013 at 12:00 AM



“ *Elsa,
So sorry for your loss. Our condolences. He was a great man.
Jo & Barry Berkowitz*

April 23, 2013 at 12:00 AM



“ *Dear Elsa, We send our deepest sympathy. We hope your wonderful memories of the great times together help to ease your grief. We remember you and George often, especially the sailing trip. With love, Angela and Joe Peatman*

April 23, 2013 at 12:00 AM



“ Dear Elsa and Family,
Although we had limited contact and only as fellow members of The San Francisco Yacht Club, George made an indelible impression on me. His persona will linger forever, I challenge you to grieve intenesly but rejoice in the memories of the wonderful time he was with us. Al Haussener

April 23, 2013 at 12:00 AM



“ It was my pleasure to meet George when he came to Napa to speak with me about his exciting ideas concerning a "Village" for seniors. He was definately a visionary and someone you naturally trusted and believed in immediately. He will be greatly missed.

April 22, 2013 at 12:00 AM



“ Elsa, so sorry to hear about George, read the Chronicle yesterday. My condolences to you and your respective families.
All best,
Toni Porter-Torrey

April 22, 2013 at 12:00 AM



“ I met George while working at Luna Vineyards and found him to be one of the most generous and down to Earth people I ever met. I remember having a college project around obscure varietals. I immediately thought of George and Ribolla Gialla. I asked if I could have maybe 30 minutes of his time to learn about it. He invited me to his home where he spent 4 hours with me discussing and tasting Ribolla Gialla. Iâ€™m sure everyone has an example of his kindness and generosity. He will certainly be missed.

April 19, 2013 at 12:00 AM



“ George was my mentor when I began my wine industry financial career. He was patient and generous with his extensive knowledge. It was an honor to have worked with him. I will always remember his smile and gentleness. My thoughts and prayers go out to all the family as they deal with this tremendous loss.

April 19, 2013 at 12:00 AM



“ George had a way of bringing out the light in others by shining his own so brilliantly. With that twinkle in his eyes, his contagious smile and the grace within his words, he made everyone feel important in his presence. He was a gem, and it has been my honor to have known him! I will miss bumping into him in the Whole Foods parking lot :(Wishing you, George, a continued "graceful passage." Bless you, Elsa and family at this tender time. You are all in my prayers! With love & gratitude, Kathy O'Brien

April 18, 2013 at 12:00 AM



“ To Elsa and the family, Mike and I were so saddened by the news and remember George so fondly. He was a sweet dear man and we have many memories that make us smile daily. We look forward to sharing in George's life at the May 18th Memorial. With much love, Mike, Tracy, and Tallulah Drash

April 17, 2013 at 12:00 AM



“ I have been blessed with a king's ransom of great mentors and place George Vare among the most significant. His guidance over the years helped me to keep my vision for my professional life relevant and dynamic. My regard for who he was as a leader, friend and human being goes beyond anything to which words can do justice. My life will always bear witness to his kindness and influence.

April 17, 2013 at 12:00 AM