

Friday Feb. 7, 2014

Dear Editor:

On Friday morning at 11:30, February 7, 556 signatures on the Referendum Petition against the amendments to the Small Winery Ordinance were filed with the City of St. Helena. Although it is only to put the issue on the ballot, we encountered many people who were sympathetic with the Petition but did not feel comfortable signing due to family and business affiliations. That is completely understandable. We estimate that group of sympathizers to be between 10 – 20%, suggesting a realistic total of support to be 600 people or more, 18.5% of all registered voters in St. Helena. It's a stunning statement.

Unfortunately, we are not the only community that is being confronted with this small winery marketing push -- it's happening up and down the state with similarly problematic results. Nearby, it has reached a crisis in Healdsburg.

What statements are being made by this Petition?

It says that a significant number of people place a high value on their home life, in neighborhoods, and don't want it threatened.

It says that women, the majority of signers, will be there to defend the quality of their families' daily life.

It says that just because small wineries find themselves in a marketing squeeze by distributors, poaching the resources of other people isn't the solution.

It says that this community wants better government, people in office who think it through, protect the long term and represent ordinary residents in a fair balance with business.

It says that assembling a pact of self-interested players is not doing the hard work to gain community-wide consensus and today consensus is not optional.

And it says that St.Helena can move right through all the social categories and pull together in one direction when the need is there.

It will be 30 days before we know if all signatures and processes are valid and if the Ordinance is suspended or not. Or, by the time you read this, the City Council may have repealed it. If that happens, we could be presented with a new version of the Ordinance before long -- so vigilance is important.

So, for all of us who worked on this effort, please know that we are profoundly grateful to each of you and wish to thank every signer for standing tall for voting itself and for St. Helena.

Thank you!!

Sandra Ericson