

Mile Square the newest 'wine country?'

BY ASHLEY BRAY
Correspondent

HOBOKEN – Zita Keeley's business may be called "All I Do is Wine," but she certainly isn't whining. With a schedule full of dinners, private wine tastings, a TV show in the works, and her wine classes starting in March, this Hoboken resident is doing everything but whining.

Keeley has always loved wine, but she really started to cultivate her passion while she lived in London.

"The wine availability there is so massive," she says. "So I was exposed to a lot."

A friend suggested that she learn a bit more, and together they enrolled at the Le Cordon Bleu School's London campus.

After finishing her studies there, Keeley sat down with a wine steward, known as a sommelier, at one of her favorite French restaurants. She was surprised to find that the sommelier was happy to talk with her about his career and the wine industry.

"That's what led me to decide, I want to do something like this," Keeley says. "At first I did think I would be a sommelier, but then I was talked out of it by a lot of sommeliers because I have a child and their hours are crazy."

Upon returning to the States, Keeley took more courses, joined clubs, attended tastings, and became a Certified Specialist of Wine (CSW).

"Through all that it became apparent that I just love talking about wine and sharing that passion, and so that's how I started my classes and became a consultant," she says.

Keeley's Wine School classes will begin again on Mondays from March 1-April 12, and this will be her third time teaching the classes. While she will accept up to 25 students in the class, registration has been lower than that, with six students in her first wine school class, and eight in the second. As word spreads, she is hoping that more people are drawn to the classes, and that enrollment goes up.

No prior knowledge of wine is needed to take the classes; all Keeley asks is that her students have an interest in the subject.

"For me, it's all about people who just enjoy wine and want to know a little bit more. My course, again, is really more for beginners because I don't delve into specific

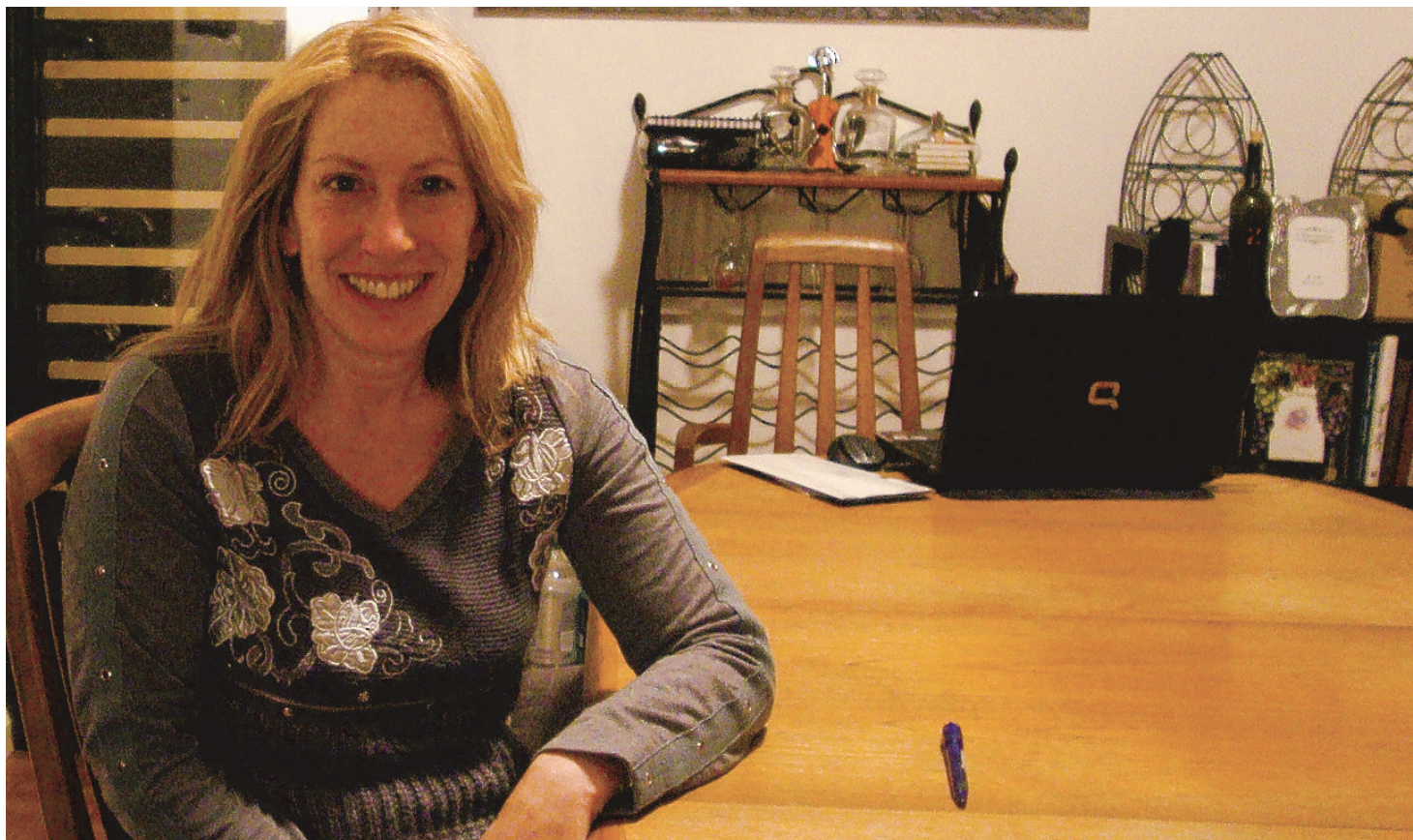


PHOTO BY ASHLEY BRAY

Zita Keeley, Certified Specialist of Wine (CSW), at home in her Hoboken residence. Keeley has a business called All I Do is Wine, is the president of the NJ Chapter of Women for Winesense and is in the process of filming a pilot for a TV show.

regions," Keeley says.

Her hope is to offer more advanced classes in the future, and perhaps even an accredited course at a college, after she establishes a base of students who have taken her beginner classes and are interested in delving deeper.

One of her students has already made the decision to become more involved in the wine industry because of her classes.

"It's not often in life that someone helps you find your passion, and that's what she said I did. So that to me is huge, that's what it's all about. I feel like a real teacher in that sense," says Keeley, who keeps in contact with many of her previous students. "It shows when you're doing something that you're passion about. People sense that," she says.

The Wine School classes will be held at The Melting Pot at 100 Sinatra Drive in Hoboken.

"Hoboken is a great area where people really are needing the education. There's a lot going on in Manhattan," she says. "It hasn't been easy finding a location. You need a proper location with a separate area so it's quiet and you can set it up properly," she says.

Keeley has previously held

classes at the Hyatt hotel in Jersey City as well as the Hudson Tavern in Hoboken. Neither of the two spaces was ideal, and Keeley sees The Melting Pot as a step up because of its private room, which can be closed off. The restaurant is also known for its wine selection, which Keeley sees as a good tie-in for her classes.

All I Do is Wine offers more than classes, and Keeley is available for private wine tastings, as well. She has been hired to hold tastings for events as varied as fundraisers and birthday parties, and each tasting can be tailored to a client's specific wishes. Her company also hosts wine dinners. Her most recent was in mid-January at The Melting Pot, and it was also the subject of a recent *New York Times* article.

Keeley is also the president and founder of the New Jersey chapter of Women for Winesense, a national organization for wine professionals and enthusiasts that was started in Napa Valley over 20 years ago. Keeley founded the NJ chapter at the end of 2005, and it currently has 24 members.

The organization offers various levels of membership and costs for

the year, and it is working on getting more discounts for members. Currently, the organization offers member discounts on wine glasses, shipping costs, and events run by wine shops. The organization also holds a series of wine events throughout the year, and these events are open to anyone interested; non-members simply have to pay the non-member price. And contrary to the organization's name, men are welcome, as well. The next event for the NJ chapter will be Presidential Wines on Feb. 20 at the home of one of the members in Hoboken.

Keeley has brought her wine knowledge to the television platform, as well, after noticing that there was little to no programming dedicated to wine appreciation. "I thought there isn't really much about wine, and whenever you do see anything about wine, it's not very exciting."

Keeley teamed up with a local cable access channel that is a part of the Jersey Access Group, and with the help of a producer and a small budget, she filmed three, half-hour episodes of "Time to Wine With Zita Keeley."

"Our intention was we would

do those shows, and work with PR, and try to figure out the next step," she says.

The next step turned out to be a bigger TV venture. Keeley is in the process of working with Hoboken-based Coalition Films to create a pilot for a new show that will be marketed to one of the big cable networks.

"It's based around her and her brand of teaching, and it's about bringing wine culture, love, and appreciation, but also knowledge, to the everyday person," says Michael Pollard, Partner and Producer at Coalition Films.

Pollard says not many details can be given away about the show yet, but the pilot will be filmed in Hoboken in March. Coalition Films also cast seven local people for spots in the pilot.

"It has to do with teaching this group of people some things about wine and tricks of the trade, and then putting them to the test. It has a very unique device that we're using to accomplish that," says Pollard.

For more information on All I Do is Wine, visit www.allidoiswine.com, and to learn more about Women for Winesense, visit www.womenforwinesense.org.