

# Anthony Gismondi: Tinhorn Creek's Sandra Oldfield a trailblazer

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More from Anthony Gismondi

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Tinhorn Creek's Sandra Oldfield.

When Sandra Oldfield, CEO of Tinhorn Creek Vineyards, speaks the rest of the Okanagan should listen.

The transplanted American, now proudly Canadian, has blazed a trail few others have in the Okanagan and as she closes in on 25 years at Tinhorn the valley should be thankful for her enormous contribution to the culture of British Columbia wine.

Oldfield has never sought the limelight but it is hard not to think she shouldn't be in it given her list of substantive accomplishments at Tinhorn, many of which have inspired others across the valley to reach for higher levels.

The environment has been a big focus for Oldfield over the last decade — or to be more precise, her focus is the impact the winery operation places on the delicate ecosystem of the south Okanagan desert.

Oldfield's team has worked closely with The Land Conservancy of BC to protect indigenous plants, animals, birds and reptiles that lived in the neighbourhood long before the winery came into play. All the property not under vines has been restored to native vegetation.

Oldfield has taken up the challenge of converting seasonal employees into full time assets by encouraging her best workers to acquire new skills and work efficiently inside and out of the winery year round. The winery recently added an employee mentorship and education program to its group of benefits to encourage employees to improve their education or access other staff members for mentoring.

The mantra at Tinhorn is safe people are happy people, and the winery is entering year three of its "serious plan for workplace health and safety." The winery team recently received an Occupational Safety Standard of Excellence certification, the first small business in B.C.'s food manufacturing industry to do so.

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There is a huge commitment to hiring and buying local at Tinhorn to help it stay rooted in the community. It's no wonder the average employee has been around over six years. In fact, if you stick around for a decade of employment you can take a two-month paid sabbatical to as they say "rest, recharge and come back rejuvenated."

Oldfield is also a social media maven, with more than 12,000 Twitter followers and her weekly #BCWineChat at 8 p.m. Wednesdays has engaged consumers on a wide range of topics. It's not a Tinhorn discussion group but rather an open forum for wine drinkers that is now an important link to the Okanagan Valley wine culture.

Tinhorn's wines have never been better. Oldfield hired viticulturalist Andrew Moon and winemaker Andrew Windsor to lead the charge and clearly things are turning the corner. And, with a little more time to tend to running the day-to-day operations of Tinhorn, Oldfield pulled off another first with some help from her neiSkedghbours — securing the Okanagan Valley's first approved sub-appellation, or GI, known as the The Golden Mile Bench.

Last weekend I tasted the Oldfield Series Chardonnay and Gewürztraminer, the first two Tinhorn labels to sport the Golden Mile Bench GI on the front label. I don't mind saying they taste as appealing as the screwcap that closes every bottle of Tinhorn wine looks, yet another first in the valley.

Oldfield and her team run a crack concert series and the winery's Crush Club is one of the best run in the country. To top it all off, Miradoro, the on-site winery restaurant, just won Vancouver Magazine's Best Winery Restaurant Award in B.C., for the fifth year in a row.