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A vintage career

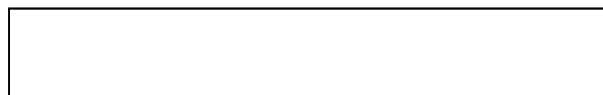
Pioneer winery owner Terri Lee Pebley built a business ... and rebuilt her own business persona in the process

02:45 PM PDT on Saturday, October 28, 2006

By **RANDYL DRUMMER**
Special to The Press-Enterprise

Terri Lee Pebley never intended to get into the wine business.

As she explored buying the Keyways Vineyard & Winery in 2004, she found that the wine





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business seemed to run counter to her best practices as an entrepreneur, real estate broker and attorney.

"The overwhelming advice I got from people in the wine business was, 'If you want to make a small fortune in wine, start out with a large fortune,' " she said. "That was a little scary."



Frank Bellino / The Press-Enterprise

But as a real estate investor, Pebley could not bear to see potential go to waste, and the winery had plenty of potential.

In September 2004, Pebley, 53, became the only female sole owner of a winery in the Temecula Valley and one of the few in California. She bought the 13-acre winery on DePortola Road from Carl Key, who opened it in 1989.

Pebley formally reopened the renovated winery and vineyard in April. With the motto "Share the romance," she's marketing the winery to women, even launching a line of wine featuring lower alcohol and sugar content.

Pebley had heard Key was interested in selling the winery and visited him to see if he would let her list the property. Instead, Key convinced her to buy it.

"I thought, naively as I realize now, 'this is a great investment, and there's a beautiful home I can live in, and I can lease out the winery,' " she said. "It wasn't anything I had to do, and it wasn't a lifelong passion, but I have always loved and been intrigued by wineries."

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In the summer of last year, the winemaker who was leasing the property told Pebley he was leaving within a few weeks.

She realized she was either going to have to hire a vintner or become one. For six months, Pebley searched fruitlessly for someone to lease Keyways, while continuing to run her commercial real estate brokerage and legal mediation service. The to-do lists seemed long and expensive.

"I went into denial for a couple of months. I was just frozen," recalls Pebley. "I felt I didn't have the time to do this, I don't have the knowledge to do this, I don't have the money to do this."

In January of this year, Pebley put aside her frustration and went to work.





Within three months, she hired veteran winemaker Michael Tingley to produce an initial batch of wine and hired local farm management expert Ben Drake to replant the vineyards with disease-resistant vines better suited to the area's climate. She hired designer Deborah Daniel and began a renovation that's now approaching \$2 million. She assembled a senior management team and winery staff of 30 employees.

Crews gutted the entire tasting room and added new flooring, walls, ceiling, cabinets and lighting. Pebley added an illuminated tasting bar made of Brazilian onyx, and renovated the bathrooms with Brazilian onyx as well.

She estimates her total investment in the winery so far at between \$4 million and \$5 million.

"I'm learning about the winery business and the vineyard business the hard way, out of the pocketbook," acknowledged Pebley, who is divorced and has a 5-year-old daughter.

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With help from business associate Jim Delhamer, Pebley and her managers decided to market the winery and its products to women, who purchase 57 percent of the wine consumed in the United States, according to the 2006 Adams Wine Handbook, which compiles beverage industry statistics.

"I'm a woman, so I have some insight that some of the male winery owners may not necessary have," she said. "From a business standpoint, women go the grocery store and buy wine; they drag their husbands and boyfriends to wine country to taste wine."

Pebley plans to launch Embrace, a line of wines reformulated to appeal to women. The first release, called "Sweet Surrender," will be a rosè of syrah. The wine, scheduled for release later this fall, will feature a lower alcohol and sugar content.

Pebley said to her knowledge, no local vintners have changed the composition of their wines to appeal to women.

She conducted no formal market studies, relying on her own instincts and the palates of friends and acquaintances for guidance.

"I enjoy the taste of wine, and if it has a lower alcohol content, I can drink it longer and enjoy it more, rather than stopping at two glasses," she said. "And everyone is calorie conscious."

Pebley is excited and enthusiastic about being a winery owner and brings a "unique energy" to the DePortola Road wineries, said Linda Kissam, executive director of the Temecula Valley Winegrower's Association.

"She's exploring how to reach the female market," Kissam said. "A lot of people think about doing what she's doing, but Terri is unique in that she has actually thought about it and done it."

Being immersed in a male-dominated industry isn't new to Pebley. She started as a certified public accountant in 1976, and branched into real estate in the 1980s. In the '90s when the California real estate recession hit, Pebley earned a law degree and opened a legal mediation service.

In this decade, she has added the titles of real estate investor and winery owner. In addition to the winery, Pebley owns self-storage facilities in Homeland and Temecula and an office condo in Murrieta. She continues to run her company, Golden Real Estate and Investments, while working a nearly 40-hour week at the winery.

"I seem to change careers about once per decade," she said.

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