



Pontotoc Vineyard Picnic Table

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Destination with a difference

By Phil Houseal

In a region teeming with wine tasting venues, Carl Money wanted to create a destination with a difference. That is why he opened Pontotoc Vineyard Picnic Table.

“I believe wine should be about food and family,” the Army veteran, attorney, and owner of Pontotoc Vineyard said. “It bothers me to drive up to a winery and see signs saying, ‘no dogs, no children.’ Everyone is welcome at Pontotoc Vineyard. We want friends and families with children and pets to come and share a picnic of homemade and local food with our 100% Texas Hill Country wines in the atmosphere of roadside park.”

Creating a destination that embodied those ideas is the reason Money spent several years convincing the previous owners that he was the right person to purchase their historic gas station and rest stop on Highway 290 east of Hye, now the site of the Picnic Table.

Anyone who has made the drive along the 290 Wine Trail will know the former gas station/fruit stand that sits on Rocky Creek. It used to be the first place that travelers from Austin could stop where everyone spoke German. The original owners pumped gas, both Ethel and Regular, and sold vegetables and fruits from their gardens and orchards. Money has remodeled and restored the property, with the goal of recapturing that atmosphere, centered around wine and family.



“I didn’t drink wine until I went to college in Europe,” he said. “There, wine is about food and family, not about exclusivity.”

That attitude now drives his business model. A family man with four kids, Money was raised on a farm in East Texas.

“I grew up with an entrepreneurial spirit in my family,” he said. “My parents gave me a work ethic, and we are trying to instill that in our kids. We want them to have pride in the family business, and to build a legacy for them.”

That family approach spills over into every aspect of Pontotoc Vineyard. His children are active in the business, and will help with the raising and selling of fruits and vegetables at the new site.

His wife, Frances, is a classically trained pastry chef, and will continue offering her wildly popular Pontotoc Picnic Baskets brimming with local sourdough bread, homemade pimento cheese, local garlic sausage, homemade spiced pecans, olives, fruits, and homemade bittersweet brownies for taking home or enjoying at the Picnic Table. Additionally, she will have a Hye Picnic Basket and Fredericksburg Picnic Basket both full of homemade and local food offerings as well as multiple Picnic Snacks served in mason jars with saltine crackers and various Picnic Sweets.

“The idea is for people to enjoy a picnic,” Money said. “It will be a winery with multiple food options, like deviled egg salad & saltines, pesto chicken salad and saltines, savory and sweet hand pies, various homemade cookies and brownies, and homemade peach ice cream when in season. There will be a lot of choices.”

As for the site itself, he has repaired and upgraded it to a state befitting its Hill Country history.

He converted the family-built rock house into an Airbnb called Camp Wanderlust. An old garage will house a brandy distillery. Money has fenced the property to make it a safe place for families, kids, and pets, and wants families to come spend time together.

“I just want people to have a different atmosphere where you can go to a nice winery—where you can feel comfortable with your family. The kids can run around and hang out. Their parents can have a glass of wine and kids can have a soda pop and food. You can go outside and play horseshoes, washers, or cornhole, or stay inside and play dominoes.”

Money and his family are building on their strong history in Texas wines that started when he purchased property in tiny Pontotoc, Texas, in 2003. He eventually bought the entire town, acquiring the hardware store, grocery store, post office, saddle shop/barbershop, and old movie theater, and began redoing them. With help from his family, he tilled the fields and planted Tempranillo vines, among the first of that variety in Texas.

While establishing his vineyards, he opened the Pontotoc Vineyard Weingarten on Main Street in Fredericksburg in 2016. That property has one of the three oldest log cabins in town and is home to his Weingarten. That property also boasts a family feel, an ideal he has extended to the Picnic Table.

“You know, this is really like the old roadside parks,” he said. “That’s what I want this to be. It’s right there on Rocky Creek in a little valley. It’s got those 100-year-old live oaks and post oaks. When you were coming from Austin in the old days, you knew when you came around that corner at Rocky Creek, you were getting into a special place. I want to have the whole feel of that here.”

Pontotoc Vineyard

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